



Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
Presbyterian Mission

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Mission Crossroads

Spring 2022



Matthew 25: Lament to Hope:
Congregational Vitality Across the Globe

Welcoming the stranger: p4 | Building congregational vitality: p6 | Congregational vitality in the Taiwanese church: p12

Mission Crossroads is a Presbyterian Mission Agency publication about God's mission around the world through the PC(USA) and our church partners.

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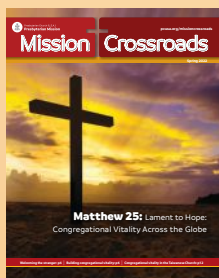
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On the cover:

Building congregational vitality by challenging congregations and their members to deepen and energize their faith is part of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)'s Matthew 25 vision.



Cover photo by Andrey Kuzmin

AT THE CROSSROADS

Rev. Philip Woods, Associate Director for Strategy, Program and Recruitment



'From Lament to Hope'

This year's General Assembly theme is "From Lament to Hope," which is especially striking as I prepare this piece. Lament is all around me as I write today, watching Russia's invasion of Ukraine unfold. How could this be happening? How will it end? Hope is in short supply. Yet hope is our business. We are called to be witnesses to God's good news.

Mission is all about how we live this witness out. Not by denying life's painful, unjust and cruel realities but by embracing them and bringing new life to them. Our faith calls us to be open to the pain of the world and to journey together through lament to hope, supporting each other along the way.

Many of us, though, struggle with this. After a week of what seems to be nothing but bad news, we want the soothing comfort of the familiar in our Sunday worship and in our local church life. This is a challenge, for if our congregational life and witness are not rooted in the realities of this world, they really have nothing to offer to the world other than a form of denialism.

This issue of *Mission Crossroads* focuses on how we build congregational vitality together and reflects the diversity of our approaches and attempts to bring the global and life's realities into local church life. This is no easy task because the support and nurture that we find in our congregations rests on the innate conservatism of familiarity. Breaking out of this is challenging, but possible. As you read on, be inspired and see how we can contribute to and build congregational vitality, by being more fully engaged with the world. The articles here are stories of mission work in progress. They offer insights into the small steps we can all take to widen our congregations' perspective and become more fully engaged in and enriched by the world around us.

Hopefully, by the time you are reading this, the concerns over Russia's invasion of Ukraine in the early spring will be no more. Unfortunately, it is quite possible there has been no satisfactory resolution, just like with so many other conflicted parts of the world such as Burma/Myanmar, Ethiopia and Haiti, to name just a few. How can our congregational life and witness be an expression of solidarity with the world and be enriched by letting the world in with all its diversity, joys, pains, hopes and fears? Answer this and you will be on the road to a life-affirming congregational vitality that through its engagement helps us all to cope with the bad news around us. And, if you are already on this journey, please share with us what you are doing so that we can learn from and be encouraged by your witness.

WORLD MISSION NAMES NEW ACTING DIRECTOR



The Rev. Mienda Uriarte has been named the new Acting Director for World Mission. She replaces Sara Lisherness, who was recently named Deputy Executive Director for Mission Program. Mienda has served with the Presbyterian Mission Agency since 2001, starting as a coordinator of Youth and Youth Adult Ministries and more recently as coordinator for the Office of Asia and the Pacific. Visit pcusa.info/wmactingdirector to learn more about Mienda's appointment.

Where is God calling your congregation?

Whether discerning new commitments or reflecting on existing mission work, it's important for mission activities to be grounded in solid values and identified collectively through careful consideration.

To begin, use the "PARTNERS" acrostic to measure if mission activities affirm these statements. What questions arise about activities, projects and partnerships as you reflect on each one?

Participation is broad, inviting people of all ages and backgrounds to engage meaningfully.
Activities are faith-rooted, determined through commitment to prayer, study and discernment.
Roles are mutual, where mission participants and recipients share equal footing.
Timing is long-range, aiming to address root causes of social issues.
Needs are researched and the most effective tools for addressing those needs are identified.
Effectiveness is evaluated, reflecting a mutually agreed-upon rubric of faithfulness and success.
Relationships are primary, focusing on personal relationships, partnership and transformation.
Sustainability is taken into consideration, together with mission partners.



Ellen Sherby



Stephanie Caudill

Next, discern how and with whom your congregation is called to engage in mission. Congregations that focus their mission work find it more meaningful, easier to communicate and better supported. Together as a mission committee, follow these steps:

THINK

- Where does your congregation already have connections (near and far)?
- What does your congregation bring to mission involvement (gifts and needs)?
- What concerns are on the hearts of people in your congregation?

LEARN

- Contact World Mission to learn which global communities are seeking a partnership.
- Reach out to local ecumenical partners to learn where other congregations in your community are engaged in mission.
- Design a survey or listening process to learn how members of your congregation feel called and how your community believes your congregation should be involved.

PRAY Commit to one or more of the following

- Gather monthly for prayer in community, using a process like Lectio Divina to hear God's Word.
- Encourage congregational leaders to integrate prayer for discernment into weekly worship services.
- Invite a small, trusted group to engage your mission committee by asking honest questions about your committee's sense of call and process of discernment.

PAY ATTENTION to these signs

- God's Peace: A sense of confidence at a deep level that you are moving in the right direction.
- Joy: A sense of energy that indicates the presence of the Spirit.
- Persistence: A message keeps coming to your group from different places and in various ways.
- Convergence: A sense that various questions or pieces of information suddenly come together and make sense.
- Fruitfulness: A sense of encouragement — be it ever so small — along the way.

More resources for discernment and evaluation are available at pcusa.org/toolkits/missioncommittees.

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‘Mission in reverse’

Immigrants from African countries are joining PC(USA) congregations and planting new ones

Around the world, international partners of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) often invite our mission personnel to share in the ministry of their local congregations. The Church of Central Africa Presbyterian Synod of Zambia, for example, expressed to Sherri Ellington, a mission co-worker who coordinates the Young Adult

Volunteer program in that country, how they appreciate the presence of YAVs in their communities, as it enriches their life of faith. The Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ghana has welcomed me to serve as an associate pastor of one of their church districts in Ghana’s capital, Accra, where I live.

To what extent, then, are we ready to

welcome our partners into the life of the PC(USA), to embrace and learn from the gifts that God has given them?

In years past, western churches sent missionaries around the world, and while these efforts were far from perfect, partner churches took the message that missionaries brought them and shaped it to speak to their local cultures and



The Ghana Mission Network at its last in-person meeting, June 2019.

histories. Today, vibrant and faithful churches have taken root, and these churches are now eager to share with us how they worship and live as disciples of Jesus Christ.

In what has been called “mission in reverse,” immigrants from African countries are coming to the United States, and they are joining existing PC(USA) congregations and planting new ones. Some of our African church partners have also expressed an interest in sending missionaries to us, to help our denomination grow and thrive.

The Ghana Mission Network (GMN) started 20 years ago, largely as a forum for PC(USA) congregations and presbyteries engaging in mission in Ghana to come together and share experiences. Over the past several years, as it has welcomed more and more people into its midst, the network has been greatly enriched by “mission in reverse.”

GMN members like the Rev. Philomena Ofori-Nipaah, who was born and raised in Ghana and studied for a Master of Divinity at the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary, now

Like cold water to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country. — Proverbs 25:25

serves as the interim pastor of Second Presbyterian Church in Saginaw, Michigan. When I visited a Presbytery of Lake Huron meeting several years ago to speak about PC(USA) partnerships in West Africa, many people shared with me how the presbytery was strengthened by Philomena’s presence. She is also a nurse and continues to support the Presbyterian Midwifery Training College in the Ghanaian town of Duayaw-Nkwanta.

In their new book, “Freeing Congregational Mission: A Practical

Staci Percy



The Presbytery of Lake Huron installed as moderator the Rev. Philomena Ofori-Nipaah in December 2019.

Vision for Companionship, Cultural Humility, and Co-Development,” former World Mission Director Hunter

strategy can perhaps best be described as a theology of companionship.”

Philomena and Ben have been wonderful gifts to the GMN, to their local congregations and to the entire PC(USA). Together with other pastors and members with roots in our African partners, they are actively helping to make the PC(USA) a denomination of vital congregations in which all of God’s children are welcome — a central focus of the Matthew 25 vision.

Farrell and co-author Bala Khylllep mention GMN member the Rev. Ben Nti, a Ghanaian-born pastor educated at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary who served First Presbyterian Church in rural Brooklyn, Iowa. Farrell and Khylllep write that Ben and his family “had a crystal-clear understanding of themselves as missionaries: imperfect people called to cross lines of difference to share God’s love with a particular group of people — the people of Brooklyn. They sought to do that following the model of Jesus Christ, and their missionary

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Welcoming the stranger

As part of his sabbatical from Eastminster Presbyterian Church in Columbia, South Carolina, a few years ago, pastor Brad Smith brought his wife, Nancy, and their three young adult children to Taiwan to experience the richness of both Taiwan's culture and church life. During their visit, they visited an aboriginal village and shared

in Taiwan. For years, Eastminster has been a partner with me, a mission co-worker, so this connection was a natural one.

I have brought three groups of Taiwanese pastors to Montreat Conference Center in North Carolina for two weeks of spiritual renewal. Taiwanese pastors live right

pastors have joined the Taiwanese pastors along with groups of PC(USA) pastors.

At one homeless shelter, a Taiwanese pastor knelt to wash the feet of a homeless man. As she washed his feet, he began to cry, and said, "The last time I was with Asians I was shooting them in Vietnam. And now they are kneeling to wash my feet in Christ's name."

Eastminster has hosted two groups of these Taiwanese pastors for a weekend. They stay in the homes of church members and are warmly welcomed by their new American friends. The Rev. Billy Graham once said that every American Christian should have the opportunity to welcome Christians from other countries in their homes. In this day of division, it is wonderful to see Christians from other countries sleeping under the same roof and eating at the same tables.

So many international friends come to the U.S. and never have the chance to stay in the home of Americans. So, these pastors are thrilled to spend time around the table of their hosts both sharing about their life in Taiwan and also learning about the lives of their new American friends.

On Saturday evening, Eastminster hosted a culture night where the Taiwanese aboriginals taught everyone some of their songs and also one of their traditional dances. At the adult Sunday school, four of the Taiwanese pastors shared about their families and ministries in Taiwan. They were delighted to find that the folks at Eastminster were very interested in what God is doing in Taiwan. Since one-third of these Taiwanese pastors come from some of the 17 tribes of Indigenous Taiwanese,



Taiwanese aboriginal pastors Varuvu and Sai make music with Rev. Luke.

a meal with three women pastors from the Tyral tribe. Brad and Nancy are wonderful ambassadors of Christ's love and these three pastors felt deeply affirmed and listened to by the Smith family. The Smiths also visited other churches in Taiwan and learned how God is at work on the island of Taiwan.

Because of their rich experience in Taiwan, Brad hoped that there could be an ongoing connection with the pastors

at the church where they serve, so it can be difficult to find time and space away. So, these weeks are wonderful times for the Taiwanese pastors to leave their busy schedules and come to a place of natural beauty and welcome. These pastors are renewed both by the beauty of Montreat, the sharing among different people groups, and by visits to churches and homeless shelters. For two of these years, Guatemalan and Malawian

they wear their traditional aboriginal clothing in worship. It was beautiful to see them singing the anthem that day in their colorful clothes from different tribes.

After the weekend in Columbia, the church arranged transportation for us to drive back to Montreat, where we welcomed about 20 PC(USA) pastors, women and men, also from different people groups in the U.S. It was exciting for the Taiwanese pastors to learn that America also has a wide variety of people groups.

The generosity and interest of the Eastminster church deeply impressed the Taiwanese pastors. They were impressed by their willingness to learn from their new Taiwanese friends as well as were delighted to learn about the ministry of Eastminster in their



Taiwanese and PC(USA) pastors together at Montreat.

associate pastors, Mark Durrett, and two young adults, Justin and Miles, made the long journey across the Pacific.

youth and joined in their activities at the village community center.

It was beautiful to see the reversal of roles, from Eastminster folks hosting the Taiwanese, to the Taiwanese hosting the friends from Eastminster. After the weekend in the village, we all traveled to a church center to host a two-day retreat with the American guests and the Taiwanese pastors who had traveled to Montreat.

Jesus in Matthew 25 tells of those who ask, “When did we see you hungry and lonely?” Folks from very different places learned that they have neighbors on the other side of the world. By opening their homes and their hearts, they discovered gifts that they have to share and also received gifts from former strangers who became friends in the Lord.



Justin joins aboriginal youth in a dance on the basketball court.

mission work locally and globally.

A year later, folks from several of my partner churches came to Taiwan to see God’s work in that land. One of the

Miles and Justin, both young fathers, had the opportunity to stay in an aboriginal village over a weekend. They played basketball with village

MAKE A DIFFERENCE

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Building congregational vitality from theological education as an ecumenical effort

There are still so many wonderings about what the church would look like, to face the current state of affairs in the world. What does it take to transform entire generations into disciples of Christ on their journey witnessing that a better world is possible?

Here is the story of an initiative called REET (the Ecumenical Network of Theological Education):

REET is an academic space in formation, based in the city of Buenos Aires, Argentina, sponsored by some historical Protestant churches from the River Plate region: the Evangelical Church of River Plate; the Evangelical Waldensian Church of River Plate; the Evangelical Church of the Disciples of Christ, as founders; and as adherents the Anabaptist-Mennonite Church of Buenos Aires and the Evangelical United Lutheran.

This institutional project aims to resume and expand, in a deeply renewed institutional and programmatic format, the Latin American and global projection of the prestigious Superior Evangelical Institute of Theological Studies, which functioned as an official university institute between 2001 and 2016. In a sense, the space seeks to resume the basic and non-delegable principles of the rich common tradition of River Plate ecumenical Protestantism in the field of theological education, as set forth in the Declaration of Commitment signed by the sponsoring churches:

1. Service to God's mission in the world, to the building of communities of faith and the realization of their public witness in our societies.
2. The theological and spiritual heritage of the Evangelical Reformation, approached from an ecumenical perspective.
3. Critical thinking, including the gender perspective and the inclusive paradigm.



4. The orientation to the reality and culture of our Latin American communities and peoples in the global context.
5. A clear commitment to the defense of human rights and the promotion of justice, peace and the ecological integrity of creation.

Based on this, REET sets out to promote the creation of a renewed and quality academic space for theological and ministerial education, at the service of the churches, their communities of faith and any interested person, as well as our peoples and societies in general.

Through REET, the sponsoring churches have accepted the programmatic challenge, which is expressed in the name of the space, contributing to the articulation of a network of exchange and academic cooperation between various national and foreign educational and university institutions, whose purpose is to develop programs of study and research projects in the extensive field of intersection between theology, religion, science and society in the scope of the entire American continent.

What is the current context and what are the issues affecting churches that REET seeks to respond to?

The churches of the ecumenical Protestantism constitute religious and cultural minorities that, with their testimony, service and participation, have contributed significantly to the common good since the beginning of the organization of nation states of the River Plate basin.

Such churches, according to their confessional identity and their specific ecclesial characteristics, gave crucial significance to the theological formation of their ministerial body and their membership, as well as to the education of the general population.

An approximate estimate of the real dimension of the current needs for reflection, training and research in the



Daniel Carlos Beros is the General Coordinator of the Systemic Theology Area of the Ecumenical Network of Theological Education (REET).

field of theological education in the country and the region must consider, in addition to the strictly academic aspects, the specific characteristics of the theological profile and ecclesial imprint of the ecumenical Protestantism. Likewise, the specific conditions and challenges that are posed to their churches and other related institutions must be taken into account, in the context that is evident at the beginning of 2022, namely:

- a. the reality of the diaspora of the Protestant communities, which are scattered over huge territorial extensions, in different countries, each with its respective legal framework.
- b. its minority character within increasingly diverse, plural and complex societies.
- c. the development of transformational processes in the constitution of religious identities that have a significant impact on the personal, social, cultural and ecclesial levels.
- d. the constant need to critically reflect on its normative texts and historical heritage, the understanding and practice of its mission, its community life and ministries.
- e. the challenge of continuing to actively contribute to the enrichment of the religious, social and cultural fabric of the societies of the region, from its vocation, imprint and specific contribution, particularly through the defense of human rights, the promotion of understanding between peoples and the various creeds, and care for the environment.

In addition to these aspects of a structural and permanent nature, the churches face the challenge of articu-

lating their social and public advocacy actions on a sound and effective basis. In this sense, it is worth highlighting the challenge posed to theological reflection and the scientific study of religious phenomena by a series of factors and trends present in today's society, such as those that express various forms of fundamentalism, the struggles and debates carried out by the movement of women and sexual and ethnic minorities in defense of their rights or the complex issues that concern the relationship between churches and the state — among other issues of great significance, in the framework of the global and regional crisis, of complex characteristics and multicausal.

This set of realities, factors and problems, which configures and impacts in a particular way on the ecclesial context of ecumenical Protestantism in our country and the region, does not exclusively affect its communities. Rather, it is equally relevant to a wide range of institutions, religious groups, and people of diverse denominations and world-views, far beyond their confessional, institutional and geographic boundaries.

MEET NEEDS

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God provides hope in Syria – and the U.S.

Al-Hassakeh is a major town in northeast Syria that has existed for almost 1,000 years as part of the historic Silk Road. This part of the world has been Christian from around the time Paul encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus. The Rev. Mathilde Sabbagh ministers there with her congregation, the National Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Al-Hassakeh, to support her community without regard to religious affiliation. She says there are “pressing circumstances that our nation and our Christian community are trying to survive.” For the past 11 years, Syrians have lived through a complete upheaval of their lives, their communities and their nation. The majority of the people of Syria have endured these years without reliable supplies of water, food, electricity or medicine, and in some cases no safe home, church or school. There is limited available employment, and the nation’s financial structure is in ruins. But Christians do their best to assist, heal and comfort their communities.

Over 6 million Syrians have been uprooted and displaced within their own country. On a recent Sunday in February, the Al-Hassakeh congregation gathered a donation for a woman who has pressing health problems and no financial resources. Sabbagh describes

her as “a faithful woman, [from] maybe one of the most faithful and kind families I have ever met. ... [Her] faith helped her walk through this sickness with hope in God’s saving plan.” This woman is one of those who have immigrated into



The Rev. Mathilde Sabbagh of the National Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Al-Hassakeh.

their community. The congregation itself is not wealthy, but clearly heard God’s call to help their neighbor and shared a financial gift without a thought for themselves. “This is the time for the church to revive faith and hope through love and mercy actions,” Sabbagh says.

The congregation lives out that statement daily. One of the most important concerns for Syrians is the education of their children. The Al-Hassakeh congregation provides a private school for students of all faiths. It is licensed with certified teachers and operates for the benefit of the community. The church also offers Sunday school (on Saturdays) where children through college age are nurtured in the Word, and with love. A university in the city has been destroyed and causes Sabbagh to wonder, “What can the church do for all these students who became like the disciples amid the storm?” [referencing Matthew’s story in chapter 8] “Where to find HOPE? Of course, we lament, and we cry for our children whom God almighty promised abundant life. ... We are called not [just] to speak about hope, but to live it and above all to be it for others.”

Sabbagh is the living embodiment of a statement in the document “We Choose Abundant Life.” That statement reads: “Our Christian presence must be founded on service (diakonia) to every human being, dedicated love and genuine forgiveness, in obedience to the will of God.”

“Love God, love neighbor” has been lived out not only in Syria, but also in the United States. Over the past more than two years, COVID-19 has uprooted our communities, many have



Arab Renaissance School.

sought comfort, support and hope from their immediate and extended families, their friends and their church families. Others have found strength in meditation, quiet walks, reading Scripture and praying. Yet there are those who, like our Christian siblings in Syria, have turned to caring for their neighbors as a way of healing themselves in body, mind and spirit.

Across the breadth of the PC(USA), congregations have reached out to those in their neighborhoods and communities as needs became greater. People who had lost their jobs needed food for their families, and congregations have met that challenge by focusing on the mission of providing boxes of food to those in need. Young children continue to need a place to learn in safety, so church preschools continue to ensure that children of all faiths

and ethnicities can learn together. Still other congregations provide space for COVID-19 vaccines and testing to be done in the community.

U.S. issues are not as dire as those in Syria, yet as Christians we all receive hope from our common faith in Jesus Christ. Our deep love for humanity allows us to pray for one another and to share what we can. “Hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us” (Romans 5:5).

The Syria Lebanon Partnership Network, a mission network of the PC(USA), identifies within its mission statement these principles: “Pray with and for the people of Syria and Lebanon; listen to the concerns of all parties in the region; and partner with our brothers and sisters in Syria

and Lebanon as they strive to live out their witness to Jesus Christ.” We invite you to consider walking with our partners in Syria and Lebanon. See syrialibanonpn.org and the Facebook page Friends of Syria Lebanon Partnership Network — PC(USA).

Dr. Scott Brunger and Billie P. Sutter, members of the Education Team of SLPN, and pastor Mathilde Sabbagh of the National Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Al-Hassakeh contributed to this article.

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God's church: A liberated and diverse community of faith

Many people understand the church from the concept of community: a group of believers with a heart composed of faith that embraces liberation; welcomes diversity; preaches God's good news; and has love, compassion and care for people in need. However, the church's history shows us that there has been a continual struggle to be that community that practices God's good news.

Indeed, it is not easy being an open, ecumenical and diverse church of God in the United States. The ethnic-diversity, languages, background and understanding of God continually challenge us in finding ways to be an inclusive community. How are we living God's callings to serve the poor, migrant, and refugee and welcome "the other" to our community? How can we preach a faith embedded in liberation without practicing it in our own community?

In the predominant European descendant church, the center of diversity was exclusion, and ethnicity was understood as a social construction of race, where supremacies were created

and promoted. For the past decade, our churches have been struggling to become a multiethnic community, and until today, we are in the process

of becoming a more collectively inclusive place.

Our denomination, like many others, is struggling with the long history of



Jennifer Martin

At first the Rev. Shawna Bowman wasn't sure what the relationship would be like with the members and friends of Friendship Presbyterian Church. Now Bowman can't imagine serving anywhere else.

exclusionary practices or simply neglect of societal problems as we seek greater diversity within our community. In Paul's letters to the Galatians 3:26–28, we are reminded that despite our differences, we are all one in Christ. We are all children of God through faith. God's Creation comes in different expressions, languages, rhythms, skin color and ethnicity, but if we fail to understand this message, how we can be the church of God? Are we jeopardizing the integral nature of our community of faith?

When a community is reduced to only one ethnic minority/majority, everything

sorrow for the past and allow us to see the future with hope.

The church in the United States has so much to offer. Our theological experience and reflections can help us to open the door to move to a better place as a community, a place of healing, acceptance, growth and liberation. In a diverse church, a rich understanding of God helps us to shape faith in a broad way where God can intervene. If we read carefully, we can find this message of God's liberation in the text that Jesus read at the beginning of his ministry in Luke 4:18–21.

God speaks to us through these words:

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant,

and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, 'Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.'"

Reading these words in a new light, we can receive the good news today. Rather than envision ourselves as the proclaimers, we must see that we are the ones who need sight and freedom. God's inclusive message can break the chains of our past actions. Still, old practices prevent us from receiving the good news of being liberated and free of a history of division and supremacy that underestimates God's Creation and separates the rest as the privileged ones.

As a community of faith, the Scripture provides the news of God to us; God's church must hear and receive this message. Today our church received these words and believed them. Today we embrace the Spirit who is on us and guiding us to leave behind the discriminatory practices of the past as we recognize our struggle to welcome the other.

As God's church, we can be set free to evolve into an inclusive community of faith that welcomes the Spirit. Let's bring to the table a multiethnic, diverse congregation hand in hand. Let us be a church that is a genuine community of faith.



Children and adults worship together at Faith Presbyterian Church.

of God's understanding is at risk. Our theological knowledge struggles to maintain an honest reflection; God is manipulable, the life of our active community is reduced, our thoughts become limited and our actions are chosen. Even so, in this struggle, the church often finds comfort in its traditions and isolation from a more diverse society.

Here is our call today. The church is in the process of trying to understand what it means to be a real community in this day and time. To transition to a better place, we must recognize our failures. Lament and sorrow help us express



Yenny Delgado is a psychologist, public theologian, ruling elder in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), director of Publica Theology and convener of Mujeres Doing Theology International. She writes about the intersections between ancestral memory, diversity and faith in the public square.

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Ebb and flow: Taiwanese American congregations connecting between the U.S. and Taiwan

One of the churches I visit every few years is Grace Taiwanese American Presbyterian Church outside of Trenton, New Jersey. I was briefly its youth director during seminary, and it was part of my call to ministry in Taiwan. The last time I was there, one of the guiding elders of the congregation talked to me about how the church was doing. “We were around 30 members when we chartered 20 years ago, and we’re around 30 members now,” he said. The church has often relied on part-time and interim pastors, and its feel can change if a few people join or leave. It is a small church, especially compared to the larger Chinese American churches in central New Jersey. There was some wistfulness to the elder’s voice, and I could tell that he often wished that the church had continued to grow. At the same time, visiting every few years as we do, I’ve always been impressed by the vitality of this church. I’ve seen several members during their sojourns back to Taipei, youth I knew from 20 years ago have married and started their own families, and several former youth leaders went on to ministries involving cross-cultural work. It’s a church for which I’m deeply grateful, connecting people back and forth between the U.S. and Taiwan.

The PC(USA) has about 50 Taiwanese American congregations. Because I grew up in the Midwest and South, I tend to see churches in these regions most often. I was surprised to find a tiny Taiwanese American church in Cincinnati. Recently, the Rev. Ho-tek Tan, the pastor of Ann Arbor,

Michigan’s Taiwanese American church, also introduced me to a small, satellite congregation in Detroit. Visiting Louisville, I’ve watched the congregation that meets at Calvin Presbyterian Church shift several times over the past 10 years. My wife Emily’s aunt is from Washington, D.C., and

also often visited Taiwanese American Fellowship Presbyterian Church in Hillsborough, New Jersey. The pastor now is the Rev. Annie Tsai, a graduate of the seminary where I teach, who had earlier pastored at a Taiwanese American church in Atlanta. Although these are some of the main congregations I’ve



Jonathan A. Seitz

On Easter 2019, the Seitz family visited Grace Taiwanese-American Presbyterian Church, for the Church's 20th anniversary of becoming a full PC(USA) congregation. Elder Chao-nan Liu was a main influence in the organization of the church and has continued to help guide the congregation.

we’ve also gotten to know two of the churches there. We were surprised recently to see that one of the main supporting congregations we have now is the Taiwanese Presbyterian Church of D.C. in Derwood, Maryland. We’ve

met, I also was surprised on a church visit to the Albany, New York, area to First Presbyterian Church of Pittsford to discover that there is a monthly Taiwanese Presbyterian fellowship led by long-term members of that church.

Getting to know these churches is often a surprise to me. Like other PC(USA) congregations, they vary widely. Some attract students, others individuals and visitors, and others have a strong network of families or attract people from local businesses or companies. In some cases, the Taiwanese American churches have revitalized their sister churches, or helped congregations be able to stay in ministry. Almost every congregation I've mentioned shares its space with another Presbyterian congregation.

These congregations are also multigenerational. Taiwanese American congregations face many of the "worship war" questions other U.S. churches face around music style and liturgy, but this is also compounded by language, as the older generation tends to speak Taiwanese, English and Japanese, and the younger generation grew up more in Mandarin but also began studying English earlier. Taiwanese Americans have also faced a long range of experiences in the U.S. Many Taiwanese began coming to the U.S. more than 50 years ago on student visas. Taiwanese Presbyterians of that era faced a hostile, authoritarian government in Taiwan, and relocating to the U.S. often meant escape from a hostile situation.

Taiwan is an island country floating between empires to its east and west, and its modern history is one of dislocation and lament, but also of hope and vibrancy. Like many people, I came to know the Taiwanese church via its larger neighbor. I had lived in China as an undergrad and then in Singapore and

had never been to Taiwan. However, my seminary neighbors were a Taiwanese American couple with a young daughter. Through them, I began working at Grace Taiwanese American Presbyterian Church. First, I worked with the next-door neighbor, Shang-Jen Chen, and then with the Rev. Ralph Su, who is now the PC(USA)'s Associate for Asian Intercultural Congregational Support.

It's been fascinating to watch how Taiwanese American churches also influence Taiwanese congregations. A classmate of mine from seminary, Peter Chen, took an English ministry at Shuanglian Presbyterian Church in Taipei, but now has returned to the U.S. Friends like Chi Yi Chen, who was an organist at Princeton Seminary, helped bring Taiwanese hymns into the recent PC(USA) hymnal; around the same time, the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan updated its hymnal, also pulling in many newer hymns from the U.S. and other churches. In Taiwan, Taiwanese Americans have been part of a cycle of ministry to and from. Many innovative ministries in Taipei have been founded by Taiwanese American churches and there's a cycle of exchange also between Presbyterians and other traditions (in Taiwan, Presbyterians are the oldest and largest Protestant denomination). These are not short-term trends; instead, they have developed over more than half a century. A couple of years ago, I met Shirley Lung, a Ph.D. student and Fulbright Scholar from Johns Hopkins, who is studying these trends. It has been fascinating to learn about her work, which tries to track the relationship

between Taiwanese Presbyterians, Taiwanese Americans in the PC(USA), and the back and forth with other Taiwanese and Taiwanese American congregations. As a mission co-worker, I have also written before about how knowing Taiwanese Americans has helped me to understand our life in Taipei as immigrants: working and raising children in a different language, loving this culture but missing our own, and often relying on a mix of Taiwanese and foreign friends and co-workers for help in daily life.

There's often a tendency to reduce congregational vitality to a set of points on a graph: attendance, giving, programming, worship, outreach and so on. These things are important. At the same time, chasing "bigger and better" can become a kind of idolatry in U.S. congregational ministry, and for me one of the main correctives has been getting to know first- and second-generation Taiwanese immigrant fellowships and congregations. They often have different experiences of what it means to be Presbyterian, different experiences with the dominant culture and different ideas of what it means to be a faithful church. Immigrant experiences carry a variety of laments, but they also offer a clear hope for what can be.

MAKE A GIFT

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And yet it moves: The partnership between the PC(USA) and ECCB in the time of pandemic

When COVID-19 struck in the spring of 2020 in the Czech Republic, it meant, above all, a radical reduction in contacts. This reduction was a reasonable response from the authorities to the pandemic, which was spreading through physical encounters between people. The schooling of children and young people as well as the work of many adults have moved to their households. When people outside the home had to meet others, such as on public transport or in shops, the obligation to wear a mask began to apply.

These measures surprised people. Quarantine has revealed the social differences that exist between people — and especially between children. Home-schooling has had great difficulties in some families. For many people, quarantine was a great economic shock. Some people have retreated to the shell of their household. But here they often suffered from cabin fever.

I was surprised at how quiet those days were — and it wasn't just out of the curfew. In the mall, where the people still had to go from time to time, they walked in silence and without greeting, as if a sudden fear had deprived them of words. I go jogging twice a week. I took my 11-year-old daughter with me. Still in the city I started whistling in a mask to break the silence. "What are you crazy about, Dad," she warned me, startled. She felt the unspoken pressure to be dumb.

The church, as the community of Christ's people, is built on communication. In many churches, pastors spent hours phoning people who were left alone. Many churches have

launched online services. Sometimes ministers hung prerecorded sermons, sometimes they streamed services from an empty church, and sometimes church members joined from their homes using conference platforms like Zoom. Those who were not connected received printed sermons.

Since the early '90s

When the pandemic broke out in the spring of 2020, it seemed that the contacts between American Presbyterians and members of the

of people have visited the other continent, become a part of the partner church for a short time, and shared the experience of their home-churches. In the summer of 1992, a group led by Betty McGinnis helped with the reconstruction of a home for the disabled in Klobouky near Brno. In the following years, several other American missions took place helping in various ECCB or Diaconia facilities. Later, a partnership was established between the individual churches of the PC(USA) and the ECCB. American friends from the First Presbyterian Church

of Annapolis in Maryland helped build a new CCE church in Letohrad. In the following years, the pastor of Letohrad, Pavel Ruml, and many other members of his church visited the United States and temporarily joined the church in Annapolis. Later, Letohrad and another large church in Olomouc, in collaboration

with a church in Atlanta, moved on to preparing summer camps with English lessons. The camps open Czech churches to local children. Members of the partner church from the U.S., being native speakers, usually work as instructors there. These camps enjoy great interest and help to break down negative prejudices against the church, which many Czechs have.

ECCB



A typical worship service at an Evangelical Church of the Czech Brethren church.

Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren (ECCB) would have to fall asleep for a while. The canceled air connections and the closure of the borders meant the cancellation of planned visits and English summer camps. However, the opposite turned out to be true.

These contacts were established already in the early 1990s. In the following three decades, hundreds

A distinctive chapter of American-Czech friendship is the scholarly partnerships between Columbia Theological Seminary (CTS) in the suburbs of Atlanta and the Protestant



A group from the PC(USA) and Czech partnership in Prague at ECCB headquarters.

Theological Faculty of Charles University (PTF) in Prague. Many teachers from Prague and about 10 students stayed at the CTS as visiting scholars. Several American students from CTS spent a semester in Prague. In addition, CTS organizes regular students' visits to the Czech Republic and Hungary as part of a course called "Global Contexts." They get to know the culture of these countries, but also the service to the church, the Diaconia of the ECCB (charity agency of the ECCB) and the PTF. A visit of this kind also includes a joint seminar on an afore agreed theological text, read and discussed by both American and Czech students (we have read so far texts by Miroslav Volf, Marcus Borg, Walter Brueggemann and — finally — Pope Francis). An encounter took place in January 2022. Despite skeptical voices, professor Mark Douglas and seven students finally managed to visit Prague. They arrived shortly after the launch of the Omicron variant. Until the last moment, it was uncertain

whether the group would arrive. Yet finally all planned visits took place in the unusually deserted Prague. A joint seminar on the papal "ecological" encyclical *Laudato si'* was also held. It is

difficult to say whether it is more surprising that Czech Protestants and American Presbyterians discussed the Catholic document together during the seminar, or that the seminar was held at all, given all the restrictions. As he later admitted,

Douglas had a B scenario in reserve in case anyone in his group fell ill with COVID-19. Fortunately, he didn't have to apply it.

Advent and Lent meditations represent another unique level of partnership. The early Christian custom of concentrating on the mystery of Christ's birth and his crucifixion and resurrection before Christmas and Easter materialized in a series of short reflections on a biblical verse, written by either American or Czech authors, both theologians and people of other professions, and published synoptically in Czech and English. So, at Advent 2021, we diligently read all the Advent devotions at home. Listening to a biblical meditation, one imagines the particular faces of its American or Czech authors whom we have come to know over the years. We mostly read it in Czech. Our daughter Hana then re-syllabized it in English: a little stuttering and interrupted by parental pronunciation corrections. These humorous scenes

are also a side effect of the partnership between the PC(USA) and ECCB.

The synthesis of all levels of partnership takes place at conferences that are held every two or three years either in the U.S. or in the Czech Republic. They would be attended by some 50 people. The last one took place in April 2019 at the CTS at the outskirts of Atlanta. It had an eye-opening effect on Czech participants as it showed some aspects and the history of the coexistence of different races, as well as the readiness of American Presbyterians to face the dark sides of their own past and the problems of their present. A pandemic broke out less than a year later.

Online communication

The isolation forced by the pandemic paradoxically led to the discovery of new forms of communication. Good experience with local online services gave rise to the idea of organizing joint thematic conferences, which would be attended by people from the U.S. and the Czech Republic in real time. In March 2021, a year after the outbreak of the pandemic, a Zoom conference was held, called "Prayer and Praise in Pandemic." Fifty people from both continents discussed what worship means to them and how their perceptions changed during the pandemic. Participants had the opportunity to break up into smaller groups and discuss sub-issues. This conference was a real oasis in which mutual relations weakened by prolonged isolation were refreshed.

MAKE A DIFFERENCE

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Congregational vitality

Returning to discipleship

West Gambella Bethel Synod, found in the Gambella region of Western Ethiopia, is a member of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus. It was founded in 1962 as a result of the gospel preaching of the missionaries from the PC(USA) after Dr. Thomas Lambie and his teammates erected the first Nuer-Christian church in Nasir in present day South Sudan.

This church (synod) has 156 congregations with 84 pastors who are nurturing the believers. With that many congregations, and it being a growing church, there have been challenges on effective engagement of members, and congregations as a whole, in discipleship ministry and stewardship training that would enable the members to live according to their call as the disciples of the Lord.

One thing that we Christians forget and do not look at is a living that reflects Christ's likeness. We are called to bear witness as disciples but at the same time, we are expected to live an exemplary life that reflects our call as the followers of the Lord Jesus. We normally look at 1 Corinthians 11:1 to find the pattern of life that Christ demands of us. This is why we, at West Gambella Bethel Synod, have taken the initiative to bring back our members to a biblical understanding of discipleship.

It has been difficult supporting this initiative as the majority of the membership is economically poor and had not been given training that whatever they have is a gift to share with others. These gifts can be food, music, leadership, funds or other things. They are being encouraged to use God-given



Rev. James Gatdet Tang, Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus-West Gambella Bethel Synod president.

resources wisely in God's purpose to sustain the ministry of the living God.

It has been a priority of this synod to strengthen and empower the knowledge of the congregations' leaders to understand the importance of supporting the church through giving and doing effective discipleship ministry. We have already begun seeing the fruits of trainings we have provided by increased giving and a better understanding of Scripture. There is hope for the members of this synod to continue to grow in the knowledge of Scripture and to be more involved in the church using the gifts God has given them.

I would take this opportunity to encourage congregational leaders to see the importance of engagement in discipleship and using God-given resources to do the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ before he returns.

MISSION RESOURCES

For a comprehensive list of mission resources, visit pcusa.info/wm_missionresources

Or scan this QR code



For a list of Matthew 25 resources, including those focused on Congregational Vitality, visit pcusa.info/matt25_vitality

Or scan this QR code



Faith in action: The Office of Public Witness advocates for Black maternal and infant health

At the Office of Public Witness, we strive to join in God's work of justice and love in the world by advocating for equitable policy. As a Domestic



Elizabeth Corsig

Issues Fellow, I learn that effective policy has the potential to rectify centuries of racial and economic injustice. Working alongside interfaith organizations through community organizing reveals the importance of small-scale efforts in the larger pursuit of justice. In a weary, polarized world, it is easy to become disenchanted with politics. Each day, political decisions are made that help or harm people, decisions that bring us closer to or further from God's vision for the world.

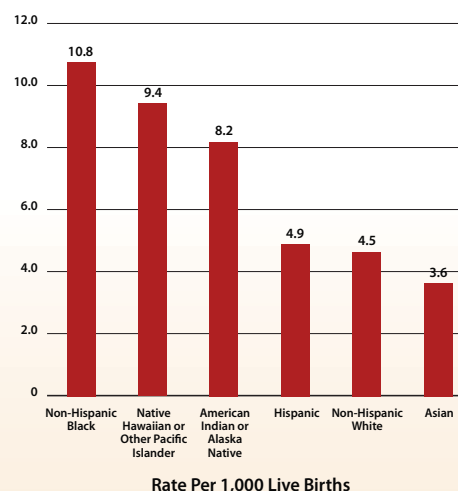
Black maternal and infant health is a cornerstone of the Office of Public Witness' domestic priorities. In the U.S., Black infants are 2.3 times more likely than white infants to die before their first birthday. Black women are 50% more likely to have a premature baby than white women. While many factors impact infant mortality, recent studies have linked exposure to air pollution with preterm birth rates. Preterm birth, defined by the CDC as birth before 37 weeks of pregnancy have been completed, is the leading cause of Black infant mortality in the United States. The Black Maternal Health Momnibus Act of 2021 seeks to rectify these systemic inequities

through policy. The Church must advocate for these policies to ensure that all mothers, regardless of race, can carry healthy babies to term.

Systemic racism embedded in our nation's housing practices has forced Black Americans to bear the brunt of reckless environmental degradation for centuries. In the 1930s, the federal government used redlining to deem predominantly Black neighborhoods "risky," denying its residents lending programs. The legacy of redlining has far-reaching consequences today, as the neighborhoods marked as high-risk remain 74% low-to-moderate income and 64% people of color decades after redlining was implemented. Industrial facilities, warehouses and highways were built in and remained in these redlined areas, subjecting low-income communities of color to increased air pollution. A recent study in California found that the air pollution burden in every city is higher in redlined neighborhoods than in those the government had deemed desirable. This link reminds us that redlining was not a misguided mistake of the past but a reprehensible choice that continues to impact the health of Black Americans today.

The federal government has a responsibility to repair the inequity created by these racist practices. The Black Maternal Health Caucus addresses this crisis through targeted legislation. The Black Maternal Health Momnibus Act of 2021 was introduced in the House of Representatives on Feb. 8, 2021.

The bill is composed of 12 individual bills sponsored by members of the caucus. One bill, the Protecting Moms and Babies Against Climate Change Act, addresses the impacts of climate change and pollution on infant and maternal health. The Church has a moral obligation to be a voice for justice in our world. We must recognize that housing justice, climate justice and infant mortality are inextricably linked. As a Matthew 25 Church, addressing Black infant and maternal health is an integral part of our call. At the Office of Public Witness, my faith has propelled me into action, and I am grateful to be a part of a denomination that seeks to be a part of God's work in the world.



Source: Infant Mortality in the United States, 2018: Data From the Period Linked Birth/Infant Death File – Rates calculated via CDC WONDER using latest available data by subpopulation (2018).

When God created humankind, God designed a resourceful people

And if there's one thing that life during the pandemic has taught us, it's been how to make the most of evolving technologies to preserve and promote what's most important to us: relationships.

God created us for relationship. And despite all that has sought to separate and isolate us throughout COVID-19, we have nevertheless found ways to create community with our siblings around the corner and across the globe.

At Westminster Presbyterian Church in Greenville, South Carolina, "Faith thrives in service" is no mere tagline but rather the congregation's lived reality as it is expressed in both local and worldwide mission.

The Rev. Julia Watkins, the church's associate pastor for Mission and Congregational Life, says that Westminster's relationships with the mission co-workers they support "is a part of our DNA" and contributes to their congregational vitality.

"Mission co-workers expand our vision and understanding of God's kingdom, connecting with us the church across borders and helping us live into our mission to work for a more whole and just world," she says.

Julia explains that mission co-workers provide Westminster with an "invaluable context for the places where our congregation has long been focused on building relationships and making an impact," including Malawi, the Dominican Republic and Cuba.

"At critical points of discernment," she says, "we have turned to co-workers for



Rev. Rosemary Mitchell

guidance, trusting that their sustained connections help us to appreciate and engage with the resources that local communities already have available."

To cite just one example, when Westminster was looking to refine their partnership in the Dominican Republic, mission co-workers Mark Hare and Jenny Bent introduced the church to the Community Health Evangelism program, which empowers local people to harness existing resources for positive transformation within their communities.

"While COVID has limited our ability to visit with co-workers in person," Julia says, "we have maintained connection through their thoughtful newsletters. And, of course, Zoom makes it possible to share in conversation, even halfway across the world!"

As Westminster continues to demonstrate the grace and love of Jesus Christ

in local and worldwide mission, the congregation plans to make their gifts to the newly consolidated one fund, General Sending and Support, E132192, "in honor of" Mark Hare and Jenny Bent along with a number of other mission co-workers the church supports. We give thanks that the move to one fund gives mission co-workers like Mark and Jenny more freedom to build and nurture their relationship with Westminster as they serve Christ's church.

"Where it is possible to look at the surrounding world through a lens of deficiency, building relationships abroad helps us to appreciate the wealth of gifts that exist within any given community, whether in Cuba, on the U.S.-Mexico border or in our Greenville backyard," Julia says. "We do lament the brokenness that persists in our own lives and those of our neighbors, but every time we come together, we recall God's presence with us, no matter where we are, and uncover deep and lasting hope."

LET'S WORK TOGETHER

Join others to support the PC(USA) mission co-workers who are currently serving in 80 countries across the globe.

The easiest way to make your gift is through your home congregation.

If you have any questions, please visit presbyterianmission.org/mes-team to locate and contact the mission engagement advisor assigned to your region.



PEACE & GLOBAL WITNESS
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Climate change is negatively impacting Fiji and neighboring islands



“You go to most of our Pacific island countries and you find reefs dried up or there are no more colorful fishes. Local women who used to be able to walk along the beach to fish for their families now have to go out farther, spending long hours trying to find food. Many villages have had to relocate due to rising sea levels and the catastrophic impact of the cyclone season.”

— Frances Namoumou, International Peacemaker and ecumenical animator for the Ecologic Stewardship and Climate Justice Program in the Pacific Conference of Churches



The Presbyterian Peacemaking Program’s Companion to the Commitment to Peacemaking provides a curated collection of tools and resources to help congregations address climate change as their peacemaking commitment. It states: “Making peace with the earth and peacemaking go hand in hand. Having clean air and water, adequate green spaces and access to nature helps children’s emotional, physical and spiritual growth. As we care for God’s earth and combat climate change, people and whole communities will be able to pursue the pathways of peace.”

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Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
Presbyterian Mission



World Roundup

Rich Copley



✝ God's Mission in **EAST ASIA**

Working for peace as a bridge-builder

The Rev. Unzu Lee is the regional liaison for East Asia, focusing on Christian witness through ecumenical engagement in South Korea, North Korea and Hong Kong. She provides support for partner churches, strengthens the work of mission personnel by providing guidance and pastoral care, and implements regional strategies. She works with the National Council of Churches in Korea in South Korea, the Korea Christian Federation in North Korea, the Hong Kong Christian Churches and the Ecumenical Forum for Korea — a worldwide collaborative endeavor of Christians for Korea peace and reconciliation.

Lee serves as a liaison and bridge-builder among the ecumenical entities in South Korea, North Korea and Hong Kong. Through authentic listening, she hopes to contribute to increasing the level of trust that the ecumenical partners have in each other. Trust in each other will help partners to see the possibility for ministries that are mutually transformative, especially in the area of peacemaking.

“I feel called to help bring an end to this 70-year-old conflict on the Korean peninsula and to work for peace,” she said.

Lee is a fifth-generation Presbyterian of Korean heritage who has served the PC(USA) as a Minister of the Word and Sacrament for 25 years. She is a graduate of Princeton Theological Seminary.



✝ God's Mission in **AFRICA**

Improving the quality of primary education

The Rev. Cheryl Barnes serves as a mission coworker in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

As the education facilitator for the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP), she collaborates with the CCAP Education Department and the education departments of the five CCAP synods to improve the quality of primary school education. She strives to assist the CCAP in improving the quality of teaching and implementing best practices in educating children, including those with special needs. A focus of Barnes' ministry is working with the CCAP to safeguard the rights of children by developing child

protection policies and implementing them in schools. Of particular emphasis is protecting young girls against violence and empowering them to continue their schooling.

Barnes' call to long-term mission service did not fully evolve until her daughter became a 2017 Presbyterian Young Adult Volunteer (YAV) in Lima, Peru. As she supported her daughter and witnessed her spiritual growth during her YAV year, she became increasingly open to seeing her gifts being used in a different context within the church.

Barnes grew up in Georgia. She earned her Bachelor of Science in special education at Morris Brown College in Atlanta; her Master of Business Administration at Nova Southeastern University in Fort Lauderdale, Florida; and her Master of Divinity at Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia. She is a member of the Northeast Georgia Presbytery.



✝ God's Mission in **LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN**

The same vocation in a different context

Ruling Elder **Vilmarie Cintrón-Olivieri** and the **Rev. José Manuel Capella-Pratts** are the new regional liaisons for the Caribbean.

Along with the Rev. Cindy Kohlmann, Cintrón-Olivieri served as co-moderator of the 223rd General Assembly (2018), the first Hispanic Latina and first Puerto Rican person to be elected to this office. Capella-Pratts completed service as pastor of First Spanish Presbyterian Church in Miami in December, where he served for more than 10 years.

Although they are taking on new roles, they see their new call as the same vocation in a different context.

The Rev. Dr. Valdir França, World Mission's coordinator of the Office of Latin America and the Caribbean, said the new regional liaisons will work closely on issues of human trafficking, racism and other priorities. He said the issues facing the Caribbean are complex, including a long history of colonialism and enslavement. The oil and economic crisis in Venezuela reverberated throughout the region. The difficulties of the U.S. embargo have imposed hardship on the people of Cuba, and Haiti suffers chronic issues. He said the new liaisons will spend time listening and accompanying church partners.

"It's a blessing to have José Manuel and Vilmarie in this dual position," said França. "Their presence will allow us to collaborate more broadly throughout the Western Caribbean."



✝ God's Mission in **EUROPE**

Serving the Iranian Presbyterian Church in Berlin

The **Rev. Ryan and Alethia White** have been mission co-workers in Germany since 2013, serving with the Iranian Presbyterian Church in Berlin.

Many Iranians come to Germany seeking asylum because it can be reached overland and because the country has favorable laws for refugees. The Iranian Presbyterian Church helps refugees navigate the legal system and gain asylum. The congregation and the PC(USA) collaborate with Berliner

Missionswerk and other Christian organizations in outreach ministries to the Iranian newcomers. They help them with the challenges of resettlement in Europe's most populous and most industrialized country.

Alethia and Ryan both have a deep interest in the Middle East and its people. In 2007, while students at Fuller Theological Seminary, they participated in an eight-week practicum in Beirut. During her college studies, Alethia spent a semester in the Middle East with a cross-cultural education program. Alethia became interested in reconciliation and interfaith issues while in the Middle East and began sensing a call to mission.

Ryan was ordained through the Seattle Presbytery.



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Congregational vitality is evident when its structural systems, finances and discipleship practices are aligned in such a way that the community is actively engaged in the mission of God in their local community and the world, and they are powerfully focused on growing as disciples in the way of Jesus Christ. Faith comes alive when we boldly engage God's mission and share the hope we have in Christ. Matthew 25 challenges congregations and their members to deepen and energize their faith and grow as joyful leaders and disciples actively engaged with their community.

Visit pcusa.org/matthew-25.