

Summer 2022

Leveling the Playing Field for Global Partnerships

Dear siblings in Christ,

With the imminent threat of the COVID-19 pandemic abating, societies are reluctantly finding their way back to a new normal where nothing will be the same as before. The pandemic has laid bare socio-economic inequities causing a greater number of COVID-related illness and death among communities of color in the U.S. and depriving the global poor/poor countries around the world of access to vital medical treatment and vaccines to beat the disease/virus. There is much work to do to eradicate these symptoms at the intersection of structural racism and systemic poverty.

Meanwhile, the church worldwide has been awakening to the realization that modern communication technology can help overcome geographical boundaries and level a lopsided playing field of mission relations that historically has been dominated by a financially privileged minority. For us as co-laborers alongside global partners on behalf of the Presbyterian Church U.S.A., our denomination's connectional nature has throughout the pandemic proven a particular, unique asset to help strengthen our kinship in Christ across the PC(USA) and worldwide.

In a twist of fate, being grounded by the COVID-19 imposed travel ban gave me the opportunity to revisit partners and their communities by diving into my video archives. I always regret not having enough focused time on hand between partner visits to work with collected footage. The two-year confinement at our home in Kinshasa, Congo, combined with the seismic shift towards virtual formats for congregations' worship services, mid-council assemblies, constituent network conferences, and staff meetings within the Presbyterian Mission Agency finally provided exactly that.

And so, by employing any communication tools accessible to our partners, from telephone, e-mail, WhatsApp and Zoom, to Dropbox, Google Drive and other cloud storage options, I got to work with partners and colleagues across Congo, the African continent and the U.S. to piece together video presentations visualizing experiences from the past and present while looking towards the future. What follows is a sample of the various occasions from the last two years for which the presentations were made, with links to the videos embedded in the text.

Soon after the worldwide lockdown went into effect, the Congo Mission Network (CMN) decided to transform the venue for its traditional three-day in-person annual conference into a series of bi-monthly or quarterly thematic virtual events, each of them led by multiple presenters from Congolese partner churches, their counterparts in the U.S., mission co-workers and other PC(USA) staff, and resource persons relevant to the theme. Where CMN would normally invite just one or a couple of Congolese church leaders to attend the conference in the U.S., this format allowed multiple leaders at ministry levels the opportunity to share, with several more participating in questions and answer sessions. This is how, over a period of 18 months, nine

two-hour events were co-organized by U.S. and Congolese partners on a range of different topics.

For the CMN session focused on Women and Children, I worked with Elder Annie Ntumba, the late Director of the Women and Families Department of the Presbyterian Church in Kinshasa (CPK), on a presentation that became a [celebration of 65 years of witness and service](#) by the CPK women. Besides making myself a short video presentation on “[Healing Hearts.](#)” a trauma-informed ministry of the Protestant Council of Churches, the Church of Christ in Congo (ECC), I pieced together a presentation with Pastor Benoit, who shared how a local center-based [ministry for vulnerable children](#) of the Presbyterian Church in Congo (CPC) morphed into denomination-wide, congregation-based child protection program. Earlier this year, during a CMN event focusing on local communities as agents of change, Benoit provided [an update](#) on the progressive implementation of this shift with initial outcomes. The [CPC General Secretary spoke](#) to the Church’s embrace of the shift through the decision of the CPC General Assembly to implement the approach in all CPC Synods starting with the Greater Kasai region. For the same event, I had also worked with Elder Victorine Manga to explain the creation and operations of [Women’s Savings and Loans Associations](#) (VSLA), and with Medi Kanda of the Presbyterian Development Program for the Kasai (PRODEK) on [strengthening the economic capacity of local communities](#). For an earlier CMN session on environmental protection, the Director of the all-girls’ school “Les Mages” in Mbuji Mayi, Ivette Bukumba, sought to work with me to [highlight “Les Mages” integral pedagogical approach](#), while the Congo Mission Network education coalition had asked me to make a clip in support of [their partnership drive to provide adequate infrastructures for a Presbyterian school in Tshiabantu](#). All presentations were catered to French and English-speaking audiences through bilingual slides and subtitles in French, English, or both in the case of personal stories shared in Lingala or Tshiluba.

The South Sudan Mission Network also decided to hold their annual event virtually. At the invitation of the network, I prepared a presentation focused on [community efforts and concerns in rural Pochalla](#), including a women’s agricultural project with a school demonstration farm, peace-building and educational efforts and the community’s apprehensions about the negative impact of nearby mining activities. For a Presbytery discerning a prospective partnership in South Sudan, the Africa Area Coordinator asked me to work with four other colleagues to put together [a five-part pre-recorded video presentation called “Lessons from South Sudan”](#). Despite the mental burden of an increasing numbers of back-to-back Zoom meetings, leaders of the Presbyterian Mission Agency (PMA) and its various Program Areas embraced the virtual format to extend participation beyond headquarter-based staff to also include its domestically and internationally deployed staff. When the Africa team of Area Coordinator and mission co-workers was asked to provide a prerecorded overview on PC(USA)’s involvement with partners on the PMA’s Matthew 25 emphases in Africa, it gave me for the first time the opportunity to [highlight learnings and outcomes from the East Congo Travel Study Seminar](#). For the first virtual Giving Tuesday drive organized through the Presbyterian Special Offerings Program, the Africa Office asked me to work with the Presbyterian Church in Kinshasa (CPK) to piece together a video clip on the [relationship between systemic poverty and education](#) or the lack thereof. When the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program sought to fill the void of cancelled in-person speaking tours by International Peacemakers, the staff collaborated with mission co-workers for accompaniment of the invited speakers in their virtual Presbytery visits. This is how I worked

with Rev. Helivao Poget of the Church of Jesus Christ in Madagascar (FJKM) to prepare three prerecorded video presentations, each highlighting her role as missiology professor and her students' missiology internships with vulnerable communities. One of the video presentations focused on [Sexual Exploitation of Women and Children](#) only, another added to that the issues of [Human Trafficking and Domestic Violence](#) and the third touched on [reconciliation efforts in conflict-ridden communities](#). Rev. Helivao ended up presenting at seven virtual events in three different Presbyteries with participation of Presbyterians from many different congregations across the U.S. Now that congregations may start visiting again with their mission partners, staff of World Mission's Equipping for Mission Involvement facilitated a meeting with mission network leaders about thoughtful travels, for which I made a short presentation with footage of [Joining Hands visitors in Cameroon](#) and the question of well-intended but harmful gestures of charity when addressing systemic poverty.

In the last two years, there have been so many additional opportunities for us to connect with partners in the U.S. and in Africa. Various congregations have asked Jeff and me for [updates or personalized greetings](#). We have been invited by others to fill the pulpit, give [a moment for mission](#) or provide pre-recorded prayers. Mission committees welcomed us into their monthly virtual meetings, or asked us for prerecorded tributes for special celebrations, and Presbyterian Women groups welcomed me into their circles.

I hope this has given you a glimpse of how I have continued serving with partners and colleagues across Africa and in the U.S. while being homebound in Kinshasa. If you have wondered why you have not heard more from us in the past couple of years, you may appreciate the investment of focused time and energy it takes to overcome physical, technological and linguistic challenges to bring to churches in the U.S. the voices, realities, stories and efforts from our partners and the communities they serve. We nevertheless apologize for not having put this into writing earlier to reach those who were not aware or did not have access to these virtual events and video presentations.

Jeff and I would like to express our gratitude for the continued support of our mission service and of partner ministries despite the economic impact of the pandemic on local communities in the U.S. We appreciate the financial dilemma congregations and their members have been facing over the past two years in weighing local and global needs. We are looking forward to continuing our shared ministry with you, embracing renewed opportunities for in-person encounters and applying new learnings from this era to continue breaking down natural and human-made barriers for partnership. We would like to invite you to help make that possible for us and for our fellow mission co-workers through your contributions to E132192. If desired, you can make your appreciation for our mission service more personal by adding "in honor of Christi and Jeff Boyd."

Thank you,

Christi (also for Jeff)