

December 2021 — World Mission looks ahead to 2022 and beyond

By Sara Lisherness

Advent is a time of hope and expectant waiting, of excited anticipation for what is to come. A year ago, we hoped that 2021 might see us returning to some kind of normality, that with the introduction of vaccines the COVID-19 pandemic might be tamed. How wrong we were! Life is still very far from anything “normal,” and for most of us the pandemic has been a major factor shaping our lives this past year. The same has been true for World Mission, whether we serve as mission co-workers or still work from our homes in Louisville, or wherever we have come to be located. The amazing and exciting thing, though, is that our work continues and in the challenges the pandemic has thrown at us we have found new and creative ways to connect people and congregations across the world in life-transforming ministry, supporting our global partners and enriching congregational life here.

In the past couple of months, we have recruited and appointed two new mission co-workers, giving us a team of 78 mission co-workers serving in over 80 countries around the world as we begin the new year. We have more appointments in the pipeline and are encouraged by the commitment and passion of those coming forward to join us in global ministry.

Thanks to the generosity of our supporters, we have distributed over \$1.6 million in grants this year, across 46 countries, supporting the ministries of our global partners as they share in their own versions of the Matthew 25 vision, meeting people in need, empowering and transforming communities, building life-inspiring congregational vitality and inviting people to join them as disciples of Jesus.

As the Presbyterian Mission Agency (PMA) visioning process moves into its implementation phase, we are excited by how the witness of our global partners has influenced its outcome and direction. One of the most-quoted stories from the process was that offered by the Rev. Lydia Neshangwe, now moderator of the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa, but then speaking from her experience as a local pastor in Zimbabwe. To quote from the Visioning Report:

She quoted the time-honored adage, “Give me a fish, and I eat for a day; teach me to fish and I eat for a lifetime,” which she then revised with a simple invitation: “instead of thinking that you can teach me to fish, come fish with me by the Zambezi River.” As she vividly described the conditions under which people fish by that river, she was presenting a model for cross-cultural global engagement. Rev. Neshangwe’s story sets a good context for how Global Partners describe the relational culture that they would find most conducive to effective collaboration. [The] facilitators consistently have heard from partners that they much prefer the language of fellowship and “with-ness” to humanitarian mission, because it rings of relationship and mutual understanding.

The report also noted our global partners’ expressed gratitude for the ways mission co-workers and our colleagues in Compassion, Peace & Justice engage with them. They felt like their insights and ideas are respected. At the same time, they struggle with the power dynamics inherent in grant-making and resource sharing.

These expressions of partnership as mutuality and listening went on to influence the conclusions of the report, and not just for how the PC(USA) relates to its global partners, but how the PMA should work with congregations and presbyteries. While we have learned a great deal, we recognize that we still have work to do in dismantling the vestiges of our colonial history and how it lives on in our structures and ways of working.

We therefore end 2021 once again hopeful, not this time in the face of a pandemic, which seems never-ending, but because our ministry and the importance of working with and learning from our global partners has been and continues to be affirmed by our supporters for whom we are deeply thankful and upon whose generosity we rely. Next year, we anticipate the PMA visioning process moving us to further explore how we can give a greater role to our global partners in encouraging and developing our global life and witness through, as the report recommends, the appointment of a global partners advisory panel. This will be a major step in developing the relationships that we have begun and sustained across the world for nearly 200 years. It is an exciting moment, which we hope all those reading this will join us in celebrating as we end this year giving thanks for the birth of the one who has changed all our lives and still calls us today into life-giving ministries of accompaniment and transformation.



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