

December 2020 — God journeys with us

*Sara Pottschmidt Lisherness, Director, Compassion, Peace & Justice Ministry
and Interim Director, Presbyterian World Mission*

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God.

Isaiah 40:1



Photo by Rodolfo Clix from Pexels

Friends in Christ,

Never have the words of the Prophet Isaiah, from the second week of Advent, meant more than in this particular year. It has been, by all standards, one of the most challenging years in recent history.

The impact of COVID-19 has unsettled our personal lives and disrupted our plans for ministry, individually and collectively. It has also had a huge economic impact — especially for people and communities with an already precarious financial position. We have also been confronted by the glaring sin of racism and the realization that as a predominantly white Church, our position, power and privilege have allowed us not to confront this reality.

Presbyterian World Mission has been impacted in several ways. As the threat from the pandemic grew across the globe in the spring, Presbyterian Mission Agency leadership instituted a travel ban, asking that in-person meetings be suspended and requesting that mission personnel return to the U.S. from their country of service when possible. The economic challenges further challenged our ministry of presence with our global partners.

In the summer, PMA leadership, in an effort to be good stewards during a precarious time, offered a voluntary separation package to 71 Presbyterian Mission Agency staff, including mission personnel, based on the criteria of age and years of service. Twenty-five mission co-workers chose to take this opportunity. This has reduced our number of mission co-workers by almost 25%.

In these unprecedented times, these words of comfort from Isaiah remind us that God listens, God cares, God journeys with us and is present. In this Holy Season of Advent, as we prepare for the coming of the Christ child, we are reminded that we are never alone. God shows up, in a humble manger, in a time of chaos to redeem and restore.

Just as God is ever faithful to us, World Mission has sought to faithfully respond. Mission co-workers have been creative and learned new ways to be present and serve alongside our partners from afar. Congregations, mid councils and mission networks continue to generously support our ministry.

These realities have challenged us to think differently about ministry in a global context. In 2017, World Mission began a strategic planning process that was paused with change of leadership and the onset of the pandemic. Under these circumstances, having a clear vision of ministry is essential. Over the next six to seven months, we will be discerning together with our partners, congregations, mid councils and mission networks to imagine how to be a Matthew 25 church in the context of our times.

We step forward in trust and faith, knowing that the God who has offered comfort in the most difficult of times will accompany us in the journey.

Blessings to all in this Holy Season.