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Mission Crossroads

Spring 2020



CARING FOR God's Fragile Earth

Confronting Climate Change Together

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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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On the cover:

Yenny Delgado and Eva Esther Morales hug a toborochi tree, meaning "tree of refuge." Native to countries in South America, it can grow up to 55 feet tall and 50 feet wide. Read Yenny's story on page 14.



Juan Castillo

AT THE CROSSROADS

Sara Pottschmidt Lisherness

Director, Compassion, Peace & Justice Ministry,
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'The Fierce Urgency of Now'

Confronting climate change together

As stewards of God's creation, we are challenged to care for planet Earth and all its inhabitants. This is an awesome responsibility, but also an incredible opportunity. There are many concerns facing our planet, with climate change and its impact on the most vulnerable at the top of the list. Related concerns include privatization of the earth's precious resources, threats to the safety of our world's water supply and the effects of toxic emissions.

In 2020, most Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) congregations will commemorate Earth Day the Sunday before or after April 22. This 50th anniversary of Earth Day will focus on the theme "The Fierce Urgency of Now," a phrase used by many people in many contexts to emphasize the dwindling time remaining for change. As we reflect on the many global environmental issues that face us, we will be working together in the most diverse and passionate global movement since Earth Day was established in 1970: pcusa.org/ministries/environment/earth-day-sunday/

Every country is facing a myriad of environmental concerns. There is also a growing movement churchwide to strengthen our witness and efforts to care for God's creation holistically. This ministry is being done collaboratively by all Presbyterian Mission Agency ministry areas and global partners, including Presbyterian World Mission and Compassion, Peace & Justice.

One of the primary goals of Presbyterian Mission Agency offices addressing environmental ministries is to equip congregations and mid councils as they engage in healing and restoration of God's creation.



For inspiration, read the article on page 16 by the Rev. Jed Koball, who serves with the Presbyterian Hunger Program's partner Red Uniendo Manos Peru (Peru Joining Hands Network). Jed's work supports a partnership with Joining Hands that is greatly enhanced by 84-year-old Victoria Trujillo, better known as Mama Toya. In the past two decades, Mama Toya has worked with the Conservation Committee of her beloved Villa El Sol community and Presbyterian Disaster Assistance to plant more than 30,000 trees on the community's contaminated lands.

If you wonder what kind of impact one person can have on climate change, consider Mama Toya and give thanks for her inspiring witness. On a visit to Villa El Sol, Jed asked for Mama Toya. Her daughter told him, "She has been out working in the hills since sunrise. That's where she is every day, all day."

"It was there that we found her," Jed said. "Lifting rocks, moving soil, watering trees, never stopping. 'These hills give me life,' she said. 'I thought I was going to die, and these lands healed me. God healed me. And you walking with me gives me the strength to keep going.'"

What footprints are we leaving?

Mission trips and carbon emissions

“Our congregation wants to go on a short-term mission trip outside the U.S. Are there PC(USA) global partners that can host us?”

“I am planning a trip next summer for families in my church. Does the PC(USA) have a devotional guide for intergenerational trips?”

These are questions I respond to regularly. Congregational mission trip leaders often reach out to seek guidance for where to go and resource materials to help them lead short-term mission trips.

I recently exchanged emails with Jed Koball, a PC(USA) mission co-worker serving with the Joining Hands Network in Peru. Jed accompanies groups of Presbyterians from the U.S. who come to Peru to learn about causes and effects of poverty. They go back to the U.S. prepared to advocate for Peruvian brothers and sisters and to learn more about (and act on) root causes of poverty at home.

A recent email from Jed started a conversation about the impact of mission trips on our carbon footprint. Jed commented, “As I was reviewing the resources, evaluating the mission experiences we facilitate here in Peru, and obsessively fretting over the demise of the planet as the Amazon burns and the Andes icecaps melt, it occurred to me that we Presbyterians should take more responsibility for our carbon emissions . . . not only in support of our global partner initiatives (both advocacy and project-based) but also in relation to our personal activity.”

God calls us to do what we can to leave all kinds of good “footprints” in mission, both for creation as well as for the well-being of all of God’s people around the world. As you prepare to participate in mission or service near or far, consider the following ways to engage in mission



Elmer Zavala

Ellen Sherby walks with one of her sons while visiting family in Honduras. Sherby met her husband of more than two decades, the Rev. Elmer Zavala, while serving in a short-term mission program in Honduras in 1995.

while also caring for the planet:

- **Participate in mission** in ways that cause as little harm as possible, including potential environmental impacts your group may have as it travels to and lives in a host community.
- **Offset your carbon footprint** as you travel to, serve and live in communities away from home.
- **Commit to deeper engagement** in your own community upon your return home. One way is to engage your congregation in conversations about climate change.

Visit presbyterianmission.org/blest-tomorrow to download “Let’s Talk Faith & Climate” and “15 Steps.”

Ideas to help planet Earth

Mission co-worker Jed Koball has proposed a few ideas to Peruvian partners to attempt to offset carbon emissions of groups visiting Peru:

- Charge an additional \$10 to \$20 per person, per mission team, to help fund an ongoing reforestation project of our partners.
- Engage mission teams in more environmental activities (as opposed to construction).
- Continue to address climate change as the most urgent issue of the world today.
- Eat out less.
- Eliminate red meat from mission team diets (and slowly move toward a culturally appropriate vegetarian diet).

Take note: These are Jed’s ideas for the context of partners in Peru. If you are planning a trip, please work with the host partners to ask them about their ideas for offsetting your group’s carbon footprint. Follow their guidance to determine what kinds of activities are most appropriate in their context.

- Unpack the Short-Term Mission Trip Toolkit: presbyterianmission.org/short-term-mission.
- Learn about Joining Hands: presbyterianmission.org/joininghands.
- Take the Presbyterian Hunger Program’s Climate Care Challenge: pcusa.org/cc.

A rising tide of urgency

Churches help islanders respond to environmental challenges

When discussing the issue of forced migration, we see images in the U.S. of violence and economic inequality in Central America, South America and parts of the Middle East, but in Asia and the Pacific, the Rev. James Bhagwan, general secretary of the Pacific Conference of Churches, said some areas are facing the extinction of entire cultures by rising sea levels, increasing ocean temperatures and extreme weather.



The Rev. James Bhagwan, general secretary of the Pacific Conference of Churches

The Pacific Conference of Churches, a PC(USA) global partner, follows the mandate to speak truth to power on issues of justice. One of the most impactful is caring for God's creation.

"The sense of justice, the sense of providing sacred space, safe space, hospitality and helping

people to be accompanied in that journey, where they are actually for the first time having to uproot themselves from generations of embedment in the land and the sea and come to somewhere else."

More than 2,000 languages are spoken in the Pacific and on an atlas, the islands look like tiny dots spread across the page. That presents its own challenges.

"We understand the ocean does not separate us," Bhagwan said. "It's what connects us. So, we recognize that the ocean is our home and part of who we are, part of our identity."

Pacific island nations are located in the Pacific Ocean, east of both Australia and the Philippines, as far west as Papua New Guinea, and as far east as Easter Island. The region is also referred to as Oceania — which also includes the Australian continent.

These people being forced from their homes are often referred to as climate refugees, environmental refugees or climate change migrants.

Natural disasters like droughts and cyclones have become increasingly common in the Pacific island nations and many other countries as well. According to a report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released at the U.N. Climate Change Conference in Paris, if the sea continues to rise at its current rate, some islands will be completely under water by 2050.

Because of excessive carbon emissions, the world's oceans are absorbing the



Children at the village of Narikoso, Fiji, where the ocean has forced the village to relocate.

extra heat in the atmosphere, but the effects are far beyond just rising waters. Pacific islanders are watching many types of marine life struggle and often die trying to adapt to the warmer water. This struggle has devastated coral reefs and fishing, resources that many depend on for their livelihood. The warmer waters are also causing storms around the world to be more intense.

At an international climate conference, former Kiribati President Anote Tong said his nation, with a population of about 105,000 people in the central Pacific, could be completely submerged in the next 50 years. Kiribati

is a sovereign state in Micronesia made up of more than 30 islands. However, the current president, Taneti Maamau, believes that while climate change is real it is not man-made, so his administration has put aside the pessimistic image of a sinking nation and is focusing on building luxury resorts and attracting investors.

In Fiji, a haven for tourists for its natural beauty, coastal homes are flooding at high tide and the island's sugar cane is being destroyed by the sea water. The Marshall Islands declared a state of emergency in 2013, after a crippling drought that caused water shortages and crop damage. A year later, the islands were hit by a massive high tide that caused hundreds to evacuate.

In May 2019, the Pacific Conference of Churches hosted its third Climate Action Pacific Partnership Conference in Fiji. The consultation involved 45–50 people, most of whom were from Pacific island countries, including Kiribati, Nauru, French Polynesia, Niue, Marshall Islands, Solomon Islands, Fiji, Tuvalu, Vanuatu,

Tonga, Samoa, American Samoa, New Caledonia, Papua New Guinea and the Cook Islands.

A statement issued from the conference said in part:

“As we seek to reweave the economic, ecological and ecumenical strands of the mat on which we all sit in the context of climate change, the Pacific Churches urge innovative and ecological frameworks for truly sustainable, decarbonized development that draw on the nature-affirming spiritualities of the Pacific and the rest of the world and incorporate traditional knowledge with wisdom of Pacific and indigenous peoples.

The Pacific Churches will continue to accompany and advocate for communities facing climate-induced relocation, for relocation with dignity — particularly around non-economic loss and damage, spiritually-based trauma counseling and a framework for hospitality in the context of climate-induced relocation for receive communities who themselves are impacted.”

The statement calls on all church members and all Christians in the Pacific to eliminate single-use plastic bags, plastic straws and Styrofoam containers, both in their personal lives and in church activities. They are also asking for member churches to advocate with their government to ban single-use plastic bags and Styrofoam containers.

Although the crisis is critical, the Pacific Conference of Churches hopes it can have a realistic impact. “If we cannot be brothers and sisters to the fish, the land and the air, at least let's be good neighbors,” Bhagwan said.

The Pacific island nations are not alone. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Center, headquartered in Geneva, reports that in 2018, 17.2 million people in 144 countries and territories were displaced by disasters within their own country. From 2008–18, their numbers show that 265.3 million were displaced worldwide. South and East Asia and the Pacific were the most affected.

Kathy Melvin is director of mission communications for the Presbyterian Mission Agency.

Getty Images



The beaches of Fiji attract visitors from around the world.

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pcusa.org/donate/E864200

Climate crisis in Madagascar

Exacerbating hunger and loss of biodiversity

“That is the greatest injustice of climate change — that those who bear the least responsibility for climate change are the ones who will suffer the most.”

Mary Robinson, adjunct professor of climate justice, Trinity College Dublin; former U.N. high commissioner for human rights; former president of Ireland (Global Hunger Index 2019)

The Fiangonan'i Jesoa Kristy eto Madagasikara (FJKM), PC(USA)'s partner denomination in Madagascar, believes strongly in spreading the gospel and helping people improve their lives. The FJKM also believes that Christians have a responsibility to help preserve creation. Church leaders often quote Genesis 2:15, “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it” (NIV). Helping people improve their lives while helping to preserve Madagascar's unique biodiversity is especially challenging given the extent of hunger and poverty in Madagascar and the environmental degradation threatening many species with extinction. The climate crisis is intensifying these challenges.

Alarming poverty and hunger

According to the World Bank, “Madagascar is among the poorest countries in the world with 75% of the population living on less than \$1.90 per day.” The majority of people are subsistence farmers who produce most of their own food, with hopefully enough extra to sell to purchase necessities such as clothes and medicines, and to pay school fees. The Global Hunger Index 2019 found hunger in Madagascar to be in the alarming category, the fourth worst of the 117 countries for which sufficient data was available. Chronic malnutrition is so prevalent that nearly 55% of children under 5 years of age are stunted.

Kathy Melvin



A Simpona lemur watches from his perch in the Andasibe region of Madagascar.

Unique biodiversity

The vast majority of Madagascar's plants and animals are endemic to the island nation, meaning that they are found naturally only in Madagascar. Lemurs, tenrecs, the fosa, the Tahina palm and six species of baobabs are some of Madagascar's endemic animals and plants. Should they go extinct in Madagascar, many would go extinct entirely.

Environmental emergency

Hundreds of Madagascar's plants and animals are threatened with extinction. For example, six of the world's 25 most endangered primates are lemurs from Madagascar (according to the report *Primates in Peril 2016–18*). A distinguished group of scientists recently declared that the world is facing the “last chance for Madagascar's biodiversity.” The Association for Tropical Biology and Conservation concluded in 2019 that “without urgent action, it will soon be too late to save some of Madagascar's most iconic habitats and species.”

Deforestation is the major driver of biodiversity loss. Selective removal of endangered species, such as rosewood trees for making high-priced furniture and the angonoka tortoise for the international pet trade, also plays a role. Deforestation is often done



The FJKM Fruit Center in the northwestern region of Mahatsinjo provides mangos and other fruit.

Elizabeth Turk



Children hold fruit trees for planting at their FJKM school.

to obtain agricultural fields (known as slash-and-burn agriculture), to get firewood and to make charcoal for cooking meals in urban areas. Cutting trees to build houses and to make boards for construction also contributes to deforestation.

Population explosion

Madagascar's population, currently estimated at about 27 million, is expected to grow to more than 55 million by 2050. Population growth alone will put extreme pressure on agricultural production and remaining natural forests.

Climate crisis

In 2019, Time magazine, using analysis from Verisk Maplecroft, declared Madagascar to be one of the "10 countries most vulnerable to climate change." The changing climate is expected to cause an "increase in temperature of 2.5 degrees Celsius to 3 degrees Celsius, increased unpredictability of seasonal rains,"

and "increased incidence or intensity of extreme weather events, including droughts, cyclones and floods" (USAID Climate Change Risk Profile, Madagascar). Extreme weather events exacerbate hunger. In their search for means of survival, people often adopt environmentally destructive practices, such as cutting native forests to make charcoal or doing slash-and-burn agriculture to grow corn as a cash crop. These secondary effects on Madagascar's biodiversity are probably much greater than the direct consequences of higher temperatures.

What can be done

Recommendations for alleviating hunger, loss of biodiversity and the effects of the climate crisis are similar and interrelated. Common recommendations for Madagascar include diversifying crops, increasing funding for national parks, planting fast-growing trees, reducing corruption, enforcing environmental laws and improving educational opportunities.

Climate justice means that countries largely responsible for creating the climate crisis should help countries like Madagascar that have very low carbon emissions but suffer the consequences of climate change.

The church's involvement

The FJKM, the largest Protestant church in Madagascar, is fighting hunger and loss of biodiversity in many ways. It has integrated training in growing fruits, vegetables and fast-growing trees into the program of study for student pastors. This helps the new pastors feed their families and provide technical assistance for others in their communities to help reduce hunger and promote resilience in the face of climate change. As

part of their training, seminary students do field trips to natural forests where they see lemurs in the wild and learn about the threats that jeopardize their continued survival.

The FJKM's Fruits, Vegetables, and Environmental Education (FVEE) program provides native trees for planting at FJKM schools and churches to help people learn about the value of Madagascar's amazing trees. The FVEE has set up a fruit center in northwestern Madagascar to harness the potential of mangos and other fruit trees to reduce poverty and hunger. Mangos grow well on soils of low fertility in areas that have a long dry season. With assistance from the Presbyterian Hunger Program, over 100 low-income farmers have recently been trained to plant, grow and graft mango trees. By growing selected mango varieties and grafting their own trees, these farmers will have opportunities to greatly improve their lives.

In Madagascar, the challenges of hunger and loss of biodiversity are made worse by the climate crisis; nevertheless, the FJKM, in partnership with the PC(USA), is helping to make a difference.

Dan Turk and his wife, Elizabeth, are mission co-workers serving in partnership with the Church of Jesus Christ in Madagascar (FJKM). Dan has a Ph.D. in forestry and a master's in agronomy and soil science, with over 25 years' experience in Madagascar.

GET INVOLVED

Support Dan and Elizabeth's work to improve the lives of Malagasy people:
pcusa.org/donate/E200418

Are we really all on the same boat? Or are some in Noah's Ark and others on the Titanic?

Another hot and dry summer caused many heat-related issues and stresses for farmers in Central Europe. Plants had to be watered around the clock, just to keep them alive.

Thirty years ago, I remember we had to clean smashed insects from our car windshield practically every other day. Now we hardly have to do it at all because our insects are fewer in variety and number, and even our bees are in danger.

People everywhere are talking about climate change and a silent war against nature. It's a necessity to talk about trees and bees, since they disappear as a signal of our complex wrongdoings as citizens of planet Earth:

- The vicious cycle of excessive meat production and consumption results in deforestation and harmful production of methane from cattle.
- Ever-increasing burning of fossil fuel has stripped us, in just a few years, from resources accumulated over thousands of years.
- Climate change has led to environmental degradation.
- Increasingly, migration is caused by the effects of climate change.

More and more people understand that the justice, peace and integrity of God's Creation form a triad. Justice needs peace and peace needs justice. A fair and humble use of natural resources is an important element of justice and thus a precondition for peace. A destruction or poisoning of or robbery of nature causes people to



Burkhard Paetzold (center), World Mission's regional liaison for Central and Western Europe, is flanked by Presbyterians for Earth Care members, Gary Payton (left) and Paul Henschen (right) at the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)'s 222nd General Assembly (2016).

leave their homeland and limits our fairness to future generations.

Looking at 16-year-old Greta Thunberg, who started the movement of students in Sweden, I think these are fragile shoulders to carry the whole world. It's like when we delegated pacifism to 18-year-old conscientious objectors, while others hid. But this movement is growing. Youth in Europe have learned that their future is at stake. Students participate in "Fridays for Future," a campaign against fossil fuel. Communities are protecting their bees by spreading the word that

"Cutting your lawn short should be embarrassing," and that people should plant flowers instead of maintaining carefully manicured lawns. Their slogan is "*Wir sind hier, wir sind laut, weil ihr uns die Zukunft klaut*," which translates to "We are here, we are loud, because you steal our future." This makes me sad.

In June, I attended Kirchentag, a large Protestant-German lay assembly in Dortmund in northern Germany. Together with tens of thousands of other attendees, I sang about God's beautiful Creation, discussed our ecological sins and, most importantly,

"God placed humankind in the Garden of Eden to cultivate it and guard it" (Gen. 2:15).

encouraged others. I was also encouraged in the ongoing work of caring for Creation.

Europe is divided over the issue of migration and doesn't have a strategy. At the Kirchentag, we had opportunities to hear the voices of refugees and others who witness the suffering of refugees. We commemorated the thousands who have died in the Mediterranean and protested against criminalizing their helpers. (The former Italian interior minister didn't even allow rescue boats to enter Italian harbors.)

I was part of a group carrying long banners made by participants in the Kirchentag, listing the names of thousands of people who drowned. We hung the banners from one of the tallest church steeples in Dortmund.

The populist neo-nationalist political party Alternative for Germany sees all this very differently. Many of my fellow church members

and I were shocked to see them doubling their share of the vote in the recent elections (to now 23%). In my very secular state of Brandenburg, this party, which is led by a former neo-Nazi, sees my denomination (the Protestant Church in Germany) as part of a left-wing and ecological conspiracy. For the members of this neo-nationalist party, climate justice and support for refugees are misleading ideologies.

They say the church has lost God and only follows the current societal mainstream. However, in truth, they themselves are actually seeking to replace God with the idol of nationalism. That's something that's been tried before in German history, with terrible results.

There is a diversity in the streets that inspires me; from high schoolers to doctors; scientists to faith leaders; union members and everyone else demanding action on climate

change from our country's leaders.

I believe that right now Christians on both sides of the Atlantic need each other very much.

Burkhard Paetzold, regional liaison for Central and Western Europe, connects Presbyterians in the U.S. to advocacy work for the Roma people and refugees through churches, organizations and programs associated with the Conference of European Churches and Churches Commission for Migrants in Europe.

TAKE ACTION

Support Burkhard's ministry among the Roma people in Europe:

pcusa.org/donate/E200392



Fridays for Future demonstrators in Munich.

Alexander Preub

Protecting God's creation in Lebanon

Near East School of Theology puts faith into action, one tree at a time

The Near East School of Theology (NEST), a PC(USA) global partner, joined the Christian conservation organization A Rocha for a day of projects aimed at protecting God's many beautiful creations in Lebanon.

The project provided an opportunity for NEST students to put their faith into action regarding creation care, as well as social impact. They enjoyed working the soil and planting. Staff and faculty joined in.

A Rocha Lebanon was founded in 1996, with an initial focus to save the Aammiq marshes from destruction. The Aammiq Wetland is Lebanon's most significant remaining natural freshwater site, one of all too few in the Middle East. This major stopover site for migrating birds was under severe threat. The work was a success.

Due to the work of A Rocha, the reduction of its habitats has been reversed and the wetland is now a designated Ramsar site. Beyond Aammiq, A Rocha has gained valuable experience in working throughout the country, on behalf of government departments, nature preserves and international conservation bodies. This includes scientific research, practical conservation and environmental education.

A Rocha has worked in the Bekaa Valley for more than 20 years to protect and restore nature as part of its witness to God, the Creator, Savior and Sustainer. The Bekaa is a vast, open valley nestled in the east

between Lebanon's two mountain ranges, known since ancient times as the "bread basket of Lebanon." It is a checkerboard of fields, dotted with small villages, and is a visual testament of the region's agricultural heritage. The Bekaa Valley is a transit point between Damascus, Syria's capital city, and Beirut.

More recently A Rocha has begun looking into the social dimension of conservation as well. The West Bekaa has become overpopulated, particularly with refugees. So,

A Rocha started several small projects with local municipalities to create green spaces where families can enjoy nature in its full biodiversity. A project with a prayer maze was already planted in Qab Elias a couple of years ago. It proved to be very helpful for families and schools as well as for church groups.

NEST students and faculty worked on a park project in Mekse. The plot of land they planted was one of the very last unbuilt plots. They planted 125 trees in one day, then a few hundred



Rima Nasrallah van Saane

Students and staff of the Near East School of Theology (NEST) plant trees to care for creation in Lebanon. NEST students and staff planted 125 trees in a single day.



Interest in environmental stewardship is growing in Lebanon.

more trees were added later and a small pond was installed. The idea was not only to create a green space but also to involve locals in its creation and develop awareness of its importance and the many different types of trees, bushes, flowers and, since there is water, insects and animals.

The community park will become a clean and safe environment for local families to enjoy. And, with a school nearby, it will offer an outdoor classroom for students to take part in practical lessons about nature, native plants and pond life. Over the next three years, A Rocha Lebanon will coordinate additional landscaping work, including laying paths, further planting and removal of a significant amount of rubbish and building waste.

A Rocha Lebanon's local initiatives offer a fascinating model for biodiversity conservation and environmental education. In a little more than six months, the site at Mekse has been fenced, irrigation pools have been dug, and trees and

bushes have been planted by a group of refugees and volunteers from a wide range of backgrounds.

The Rev. Dr. Rima Nasrallah van Saane
is an assistant professor in practical theology at the Near East School of Theology (NEST) and an ordained pastor in the National Evangelical Church of Beirut, Lebanon.

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– NEST –

The Near East School of Theology (NEST), formed in 1932 by the merger of the School for Religious Workers in Beirut and the School of Religion in Athens, is built upon a history of Protestant theological education in the Near East, which goes back to 1835. In that year, the Rev. William Thompson, author of "The Land and the Book," founded the first Protestant seminary in Beirut. In 1843, the seminary moved to Abey, in the mountains not far south of Beirut, under the leadership of Dr. Cornelius Van Dyck, translator of the Bible into Arabic. It offered classes in theology and general education.

Out of the Abey Seminary grew, in 1866, the Syrian Protestant College, now the American University of Beirut. With the founding of the college, it was decided that the seminary pursue only theological studies, while the college would be responsible for general studies. The seminary had several locations in the subsequent years and, in 1905, moved back to Beirut.

Who owns the Amazon rainforest?

Intricately balanced ecosystems provide the breath of life for many

In recent months, the world's attention has focused on the Amazon rainforest, widely considered to be one of the most important lungs of planet Earth. Covering parts of nine countries in South America, this vast and incredibly diverse region both traps carbon dioxide that leads to global warming and creates the oxygen vital to many forms of life.

For decades these nine countries have debated with the world community how to balance environmental concerns with their desire to exploit abundant natural resources, ranging from medicinal plants, tropical hardwoods and water to petroleum and precious minerals.

The debate is whether the Amazon rainforest belongs to nine nation states or to all of humanity. Can exploitation for profit be allowed to supersede the common good?

One alternative has been an international agreement where Brazil, the country that hosts the largest portion of the Amazon rainforest, receives payment from other nations, including Norway and Germany, to prohibit deforestation. Studies suggest that under this program the rate of deforestation fell significantly.

Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, a far-right nationalist, insists that Brazil has the right to exploit the Amazon for economic gain. Both Norway and Germany have ceased payments to Brazil as deforestation under the Bolsonaro government has increased sharply.

According to the Rev. Romi Bencke, a Brazilian Lutheran minister who serves as general secretary of the National Council of Christian Churches in Brazil, under Bolsonaro large landowners — especially soybean farmers and cattle ranchers — have been given free rein to displace traditional

communities and slash and burn the rainforest to make way for the cultivation of export crops. More than 70,000 fires were documented in Brazil in 2019, the highest number on record.

Bencke notes that the Amazon region is currently under threat “because both the minister of agriculture and the president deny climate change and have backed a major social media campaign claiming that the fires were started by environmental organizations, which is terribly false.”

Bencke continues: “The current government is proposing the industrialization of the Amazon to grow the GNP and insists that indigenous peoples are expendable and getting in the way of Brazil's right to progress.”

The Amazon region is home to many indigenous peoples. Some have had little or no contact with the outside world. Over the years, their ancestral knowledge of this complex web of intricately balanced ecosystems has played a vital role in conservation efforts.

The Indigenous Missionary Council of the Roman Catholic Church reports that several indigenous groups in northern Brazil face the threat of genocide. News reports describe how miners and loggers invade indigenous lands, displacing whole communities, while farmers and ranchers set fire to the forest. Reported assassinations of indigenous leaders have also increased sharply under the current government.

A pastoral letter circulated last October by several dozen ministers of the United Presbyterian Church of Brazil (IPU), a mission partner of the PC(USA), stated that:

“Reports of criminal activity resulting in forest fires in the Amazon — confirmed by serious

scientific studies — are ignored, distorted or attributed to the innocent practice of burning off crops. The enforcement apparatus to control these practices has been dismantled; with the cancellation of fines and of programs to maintain equipment used to combat deforestation.”

Later in their pastoral letter, the IPU notes that environmental depredation is closely related to the plight of indigenous peoples and of the landless in Brazil:

“In addition to threatening the lives of ‘the least of these,’ discourse that values money and the economy above all else jeopardizes our ability to see in the poor a key for discerning the nature and means of divine revelation.”

Finally, the letter laments the increasing polarization of Brazilian society and notes that religion, too, has become deeply divisive:

“Disguised under a godly mantle, false prophets have promoted death and division in our country and in our churches. ... Faced with this situation, we, as ministers of Word and Sacrament of the United Presbyterian Church of Brazil, come together to denounce publicly any religious discourse that camouflages hatred and prejudice against skin color, gender, ideology or any other characteristic used to define a person’s position in the world and in society.”

Dennis Smith is World Mission’s regional liaison for South America. Based in Buenos Aires, he works with 16 mission partners from Colombia to Argentina.

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Support the work of Dennis and Maribel Smith in South America:
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Ivars Kupcis/World Council of Churches

Rev. Romi Bencke, general secretary of the National Council of Christian Churches in Brazil, speaks during an ecumenical roundtable meeting on Brazil, convened in Geneva, Switzerland, last August by the World Council of Churches.



Ivars Kupcis/World Council of Churches

Dennis Smith, left, World Mission’s regional liaison for South America, attended the roundtable gathering, along with leaders of the World Council of Churches, the World Communion of Reformed Churches, the Lutheran World Federation and ACT Alliance. Speaking here is Rev. Agnaldo Pereira Gomes, president of the Alliance of Presbyterian and Reformed Churches of Latin America.

Presbyterian Church of Kabuga transforms schools

Ndayizeye Munyansanga Olivier



Newly registered students have their own trees to plant.

The Presbyterian Church of Kabuga, Rwanda, has two primary schools — Kabuga (with 310 students) and Muyumba (with 192 students). Parents, students and teachers are celebrating the fourth consecutive school year that students in Primary 6 in both schools have achieved a perfect score on Rwanda's national examination.

Each school was built to show how small actions can be of great importance. They have become the high-quality schools they are today by building one classroom a year.

It is a blessing to have high-quality education among schools in our educational system. Our students, as

early as nursery school, learn how a small action, like planting a tree, can be of great importance to our environment. This way of education contributes to the protection of biodiversity.

We plant trees to create a space for creative thinking and a source of inspiration for our students. Trees are an effective sound barrier and can limit noise pollution. Recent research shows that trees also help reduce the stress of modern life. To many people, a tree is the ultimate symbol of prosperity. Frank Lloyd Wright, an American architect, writer and educator, once said, "The best friend on Earth of man is the tree."

Trees provide restful shade to humans

and animals alike, and are home to numerous birds, insects and animals. Trees help us overcome fear, calm our bodies, and release our frustrations and anger. If you are dealing with issues from your past, use "green" to help bring harmony into any situation. Trees may even help to recompose unity among divided people, which is a challenge and vital mission in our society.

Green helps dissolve aggression in relationships or mend a broken heart. It helps release negative patterns and beliefs, and can assist in centering yourself in stressful or shocking situations. Green replenishes your energy and helps you relax, meditate and heal.

Green helps revitalize the nervous system, heart, thymus, lungs and liver. It also stimulates growth and helps heal broken bones, build muscles and repair tissues. Green has the ability to purify the blood and restore health. It contains antibacterial qualities. On the shadow side, green has been linked to envy, jealousy and superstition. It is a color of fertility, truth, youthfulness and innocence.

In requesting students to plant trees, we are helping them to be aware of climate change and the rapid destruction of our planet. Trees absorb harmful carbon from the atmosphere and are key ingredients in 25% of all medicines. Trees provide jobs to more than 1.6 billion people.

In looking after trees, through watering, removal of weeds around trees, and in protecting the trees, students developed the spirit of follow-up, the spirit of responsibility and the spirit of creativity. They are

able to generate creative ideas. We are always illustrating the power of planting by a Talmudic story:

An old man was planting a tree. A young person passed by, and asked, "What are you planting?" "A carob tree," the old man replied. "Silly fool," said the youth. "Don't you know that it takes 70 years for a carob tree to bear fruit?" "That's OK," said the old man. "Just as others planted for me, I plant for future generations."

You are requested to love trees wherever you are.

You are invited to keep planting trees wherever you are.

You are obliged to protect trees in any kind of situation.



In the Presbyterian Church of Kabuga, students enjoy the shelter of trees between the school and the church.

You are encouraged to plant at least one tree at the house you live in, and to check on it every morning, to feed it and to let it grow.

As Christians, we should be the best environmentalists on the planet, because we uniquely understand what the environment is, what has gone wrong with it, what is being done to fix it and what our role is in relation to it.

The Rev. Dr. Ndayizeye Munyansanga Olivier is dean of the faculty of theology and religious studies of the Protestant Institute of Arts and Social Sciences in Butare, Rwanda.

LET'S WORK TOGETHER

Designate a gift to support "environmental protection" through the Presbyterian Church of Rwanda:
pcusa.org/donate/E864102



Nursery school students wait to plant their own trees.



Yenny Delgado, center, is with Juan Castillo, left, and Eva Esther Morales.

Addressing climate change requires reconciliation with indigenous communities

Over the past few months, the world's attention has turned to the burning of the Amazon rainforest with a primary focus on Brazil, which is home to over 60% of the primordial forest that serves as the thermostat and lungs for the planet. However, the burning and loss of forest lands in Brazil have also taken place in neighboring countries, including Peru, Bolivia and Paraguay.

Why is the forest burning? The burning is not due to global warming or power lines tipped over in drought conditions (e.g., Paradise, California). The forest is burning because it was set on fire to provide more land for farming and mining with a tacit blessing from the current government. However, because of changing weather patterns the fires have been more intense than in years past.

The impact of these fires continues to have a devastating effect, not only on the environment but also the many indigenous communities that live in the affected areas. Last September, in collaboration with local religious leaders, I had the opportunity to visit a community struggling to recover. Though the narrative and media gaze have turned from those suffering to international power politics and unrest throughout America, those on the ground are still trying to regrow what was.

This is the story of one affected community and how we can show solidarity to our brothers and sisters around the world.

The road was narrow in my journey to the Chiquitanos community in Bolivia, also known as the Monkóx community. The smell of ashen wood served as our guide and engulfed the fibers of our clothes, skin and hair. The once blue sky was transformed into a gray post-apocalyptic vision of what destruction can bring. The Monkóx survived the invasion of the Europeans, who sought to exploit their labor and destroy their land. Today the Monkóx are now suffering as a result of the recent fires. They are struggling to find out who committed this crime, not only against nature but also against them.

What should we do? We must remember first the church's call:

We are challenged by the cries of the people who suffer and by the woundedness of creation itself. We see a dramatic convergence between the suffering of the people and the damage done to the rest of creation. We have heard that creation continues to groan, in bondage, waiting for its liberation (Romans 8:22).

After the destruction, the time for healing and reconstruction is upon us all. Community members we talked with told us that when the fire goes out, the next job is going to be just as hard. They said we have to reforest, find water and keep the trees. Perhaps there is a need to dig wells for new water sources and make canals to ensure that



Deforestation of the single largest remaining tropical rainforest is a threat to all humanity.



In Bolivia, earth blackened by ashes showed traces of the flames that destroyed it.

the forest can grow. In addition to the physical damage, there is also acute awareness of the trauma caused by the fires, as well as the need to learn from this tragedy. There was a sadness for the loss, a deep agony for nature. They said, “We have laws, ancestral rules of respect, and protect the nature, but as a community we cannot control what outsiders do to our land.”

Reconciliation with Mother Earth requires recognition

Policies that seek unlimited growth and the current crisis are directly related to the development of neoliberal economic globalization, based only on the growth of wealth, without concern for the planet or its people. The price is very high and the resulting destruction to the planet will take hundreds of years to recover, if ever.

The suffering of the natives is not new. For many indigenous people around the world, the arrival of colonizing and Christianizing Europeans has led to massive socio-cultural and environmental changes. Centuries have passed and the constant invasions of supposedly protected lands continue; and many indigenous people struggle to have the right to exist in their homeland.

Not only does the destruction of the Amazon for government and corporate interest continue, but the desire that indigenous populations disappear so others can take possession of the land has led governments to commit massacres of leaders who have risen up as prophets. Native Americans want dignity and to remain present on the continent. Indigenous people have suffered a home invasion on

a continental scale and have been relegated to natural environmental reservations. Now, even Native American reservations are being overrun for business interests (gas pipelines) in both the Amazon and Dakotas.

Undoubtedly, the Monkóx are a brave community. They were survivors of European colonization, and they are in this moment of pain and loss. The attitude adopted by the community is reminiscent of that shown by indigenous leader Mura, from Brazil, who said, “If necessary, I will use the last drop of my blood for this forest.” Showing the world, as well as politicians, that a true leader gives life not only for their people but for the world, “What really is life in the world without the Amazon?”

To address climate change and the destruction of the environment, we must recognize the struggle and the efforts of indigenous people to be the guardian of the land. We must assume responsibility to seek reconciliation and repair relationships. Our faith requires us to seek repentance, change policies, move to a more sustainable community and, above all else, to stand in solidarity with those who have suffered, before time runs out.

Yenny Delgado is a psychologist, theologian and social activist. She is co-founder of *Umbrella Initiatives Foundation* and has more than a decade of experience working with religious leaders, local governments and social organizations. She serves as a ruling elder at *Bethesda Presbyterian Church* in Maryland.

MEET NEEDS

Support God's mission in Latin America and the Caribbean:
pcusa.org/donate/E864600

Trees of life

What can one person do to combat climate change? Ask Mama Toya.

Last year, I took more than two dozen flights. In many cases I could have taken a bus, but for little extra cost, I opted to save time. A flight from Lima (on the Pacific coast) to Tarapoto (in the Amazon) takes a little over an hour. The bus takes more than 25 hours. So, for about \$25 more per flight, it seems worth it to travel by air. I know my knees are grateful. But, like so many things in life, there are usually more costs than those that simply make a dent in our wallets. There are environmental costs, too.

Here in Peru those costs are adding up. Two years ago, unprecedented rains on the desert coast led to floods that displaced a quarter of a million people. This year, forest fires are decimating large swaths of the Amazon and threatening the lives of indigenous populations. Every year, farmers in the Andes are seeing their natural water supplies decrease. The water temperatures off the Pacific Coast are rising. The mountaintop glaciers are melting. The biodiversity of the rainforest is dying. This plus gross inequality and poor infrastructure make Peru one of the most vulnerable countries in the world to climate change.

In the grand scheme of things, air travel contributes to a relatively marginal 2% of all greenhouse gases. While not the most contributing factor to global warming, it is notable nonetheless. And, looking at my personal lifestyle, it is quite remarkable: The carbon dioxide emissions attributed to my air travel account for about 75% of my family's carbon footprint. Despite all of our recycling, reusing, repurposing, limiting red meat consumption, not owning a car and not using air conditioning, our carbon footprint is still twice that of the average Peruvian family. I came here to help, not hurt.

Of the more than 24 flights I took in 2019, all except two were for my work. Some of those flights were to help our global partners prepare for Presbyterian short-term mission trips. We Presbyterians travel a lot! Those of us engaged in World Mission really travel a lot! And, let's be honest: that's not going to end anytime soon. And it will be decades before air travel can be supported by renewable energies. So, how can we hold ourselves responsible? How can we live into hope and not out of guilt or fear?

Just east of Lima, in the heart of the Andes mountains, 84-year-old Mama Toya — a friend to many Presbyterians — gets up at sunrise to tend to the trees on the hills outside her home. She has planted more than 30,000 trees over the past 20 years to help restore fertility to her community's lands that have been contaminated by emissions from a nearby metals smelter as well as to adapt to advancing climate change.

Next year, our global partner, Red Uniendo Manos Peru, will donate \$20 to its own newly established tree fund on behalf of each Presbyterian short-term mission trip participant it receives. Every penny of these funds will support Mama Toya's work to help offset greenhouse



Mama Toya stands on the hillside above her community of Villa El Sol in the central Andes, where the 84-year-old has planted 30,000 trees over the past two decades.

gas emissions generated by short-term mission trip participants' air travel.

What if this offset idea became our Presbyterian practice? What if we Presbyterians put money into a Presbyterian Tree Fund for every single flight taken for Presbyterian-related work? What if global partners around the world were supported in their reforestation efforts with these funds? Yes, there are many such funds one can contribute to. But how often can you see exactly where that money goes, while also igniting passion for the care of the very Earth that sustains the people we have come to love through partnership in mission? In the face of a climate crisis that impacts us all, may such love show us how to live justly in the world today.

The Rev. Jed Hawkes Koball and his wife, **Jenny**, serve as mission co-workers in Peru. Jed accompanies the work of *Joining Hands*, a Presbyterian Hunger Program partner, in identifying and interpreting root causes of poverty, and Jenny coordinates the *Young Adult Volunteers* program.

Jed Hawkes Koball



Youth from Covenant Presbyterian Church of Madison, Wisconsin, join with local youth environmentalists organized by global partner Red Uniendo Manos Peru to support the work of Mama Toya.

MAKE AN IMPACT

Support the work of Jed and Jenny in Peru:

pcusa.org/donate/E200447

Real climate change is possible – and urgently needed



The Krista Foundation

I spent the last year as a Presbyterian Young Adult Volunteer (YAV) in Austin, Texas.

In my role as a YAV, I served with Texas Impact, an interfaith advocacy organization representing the mainstream faith traditions of Texas. I worked on a research project related to Hurricane Harvey recovery and began to draw connections between climate change and this local disaster. After a few months into the project, I had the opportunity to attend the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Katowice, Poland.

Before attending the conference, I knew about climate change, but it was never something that kept me up at night. It was not until I physically stepped into the conference space and could viscerally feel the urgency around me that I realized I was working on such an important issue.

It was humbling to be surrounded by thousands of passionate people all working tirelessly to reach the goals of the Paris Agreement and limit global warming to well below 2° Celsius.

It was eye-opening to see how my privilege has allowed me to think of climate change as something that did not directly impact me. I could engage with climate change more as a topic for intellectual stimulation rather than seeing it as a tangible crisis. I had a change in perspective after I attended a panel event led by faith leaders from around the world. It was challenging to come to the realization that climate change affects all of us. People are suffering. It has become a human struggle that we must inevitably overcome together. We must ask ourselves not only about the kind of

world we want to leave our children and grandchildren, but also about the world we want to leave our neighbors' children and grandchildren.

The current research presented at the conference paints a very stark picture of the current trends and potential future of our planet. It

may be easy to become overwhelmed by current reports, to be dismissive or to fall into despair. Perhaps it is more convenient to ignore the current state of affairs as something that the next generation has to deal with. However, the overall theme of the conference was not focused on discouragement but urgent hope. I am also inspired by people like Greta Thunberg, a teenager from Sweden and climate justice activist, and so many other young people who have chosen to call out inaction.

After the conference, I thought about my own values. Similar to the paradox of faith is the paradox of activism. It is grounded in the conviction that despite incredible challenges, insurmountable barriers and apparent impossibility of producing any real change, there is the radical belief that we always have a choice to act, so that the status quo never has the final word.

Noah Westfall served as a Young Adult Volunteer in Austin, Texas (2018–19). He is currently completing a master's degree in public health at George Washington University's Milken Institute School of Public Health in Washington, D.C.



While serving as a PC(USA) Young Adult Volunteer, Noah Westfall, second from right, attended COP24, the 24th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

EQUIP A YAV

Support the YAV program:
pcusa.org/donate/E049075



Climate change at Lent

As Christians, our response to climate change and its impact on our world is multifaceted. As you've read in this issue, the PC(USA) is committed to working diligently and creatively to support people experiencing the impacts of climate change around the corner and around the world, both today and in the future. The stories that arise from the work of the Presbyterian Mission Agency are heart-wrenching, yet uplifting; deeply disturbing, yet inspiring. The efforts referenced in this issue of *Mission Crossroads* represent a few of the many lives touched and transformed because you have participated in Presbyterian Mission through your prayers and giving.

In a few weeks, we will enter the season of Lent, and with it, One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS). Much of the work done by the programs supported by this offering — Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA), Presbyterian Hunger Program (PHP) and Self-Development of People (SDOP) — serves people in disasters influenced by climate change. From disaster relief and hunger alleviation for those who are suffering, to advocacy and support for those addressing the causes, the impact of OGHS is seen in all areas of the PC(USA)'s response.

The mission of PHP, for example, is "to alleviate hunger and eliminate its causes." Where hunger is rampant, climate change is often a culprit, changing ecosystems and upending



traditional food sources. And when climate change is the primary problem, advocacy, education and sustainable development are the primary solutions. Therefore, the work of PHP is intimately entwined with climate justice.

As we consider how the PC(USA) has ministered in Puerto Rico since 2017, when Hurricane Maria laid waste to vast parts of the region, we see another model of how these responses coalesce. Your gifts to OGHS enabled homes and infrastructure to be rebuilt using methods that will enable them to better withstand future storms. As infrastructure was rebuilt, neighborhoods once unattractive for landowners became safer and more desirable for homes and businesses. OGHS also enabled our partners to resist displacement and advocate for their rights, eventually acquiring

deeds and community land trusts to protect their communities.

Although our planet is experiencing devastating change, our calling to serve it remains the same. Amid disasters and dramatic environmental changes, the words of Isaiah 58 continue to call us to respond: "You shall be called the repairer of the breach."

Join us in praying and giving during the OGHS season. As hundreds of thousands of Presbyterians join together to give in gratitude and obedience to God through this Offering, your participation is one way we can work toward justice for our world.

Learn more about One Great Hour of Sharing (Feb. 26–April 12), the programs it supports and some of the resources developed to help pastors, leaders, educators and children understand this season: pcusa.org/oghs.

The Rev. Dr. Jon Reinink is associate for church support for Special Offerings of the PC(USA), a ministry of Mission Engagement & Support for the Presbyterian Mission Agency.

SUPPORT ONE GREAT HOUR OF SHARING

Each gift helps improve the lives of people in challenging situations. Join the single largest way Presbyterians come together to show God's love with our neighbors in need: pcusa.org/OGHS



ONE GREAT HOUR OF SHARING

SPECIAL OFFERINGS

HUNGER • DISASTER • DEVELOPMENT

You shall be called repairers of the breach

— ISAIAH 58



One Great Hour of Sharing is the single, largest way that Presbyterians come together every year to work for a better world. Please join us!

Through One Great Hour of Sharing, we extend shelter to those who have no place to stay, offer compassion to those who have pain—be it physical, emotional or spiritual—and we set a feast, with God, for those who lack access to enough food to eat. We are called by Isaiah to be the church in the world and active followers of our faith.

To learn more, go to pcusa.org/oghs



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

World Roundup

Mark Crowner



✝ God's Mission in AFRICA

Addressing root causes of poverty and violence through empowerment and advocacy

Jeff and Christi Boyd are mission co-workers based in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). As a regional liaison for Central Africa, Jeff facilitates support for relationships and programs of PC(USA) partners in Congo, Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea. He also mentors mission personnel and helps connect Presbyterian congregations in the U.S. with partners in his region. When Congolese partners expressed concern about the former president of Congo extending constitutional term limits on his tenure, Jeff helped organize a day of advocacy for Congo Mission Network participants, with support of the PC(USA)

Office of Public Witness, to plea with legislators and the State Department for support for free and transparent elections in Congo.

Christi is a facilitator for women's and children's interests and works with partners across Africa. From faith-based trauma-healing ministries in Congo to a trafficking prevention campaign in Madagascar, she comes alongside partners and their communities to tackle systemic issues that perpetuate hardship for women and children.

"Through the words of Jesus and the prophets, God consistently defends the causes of the poor, vulnerable and oppressed," Christi said. "The Scriptures call us to follow in their footsteps."

The Boyds arrived in Africa in 1990 and remain committed to engaging with Presbyterians in the U.S. who wish to join efforts led by global partners in Africa.

Support the work of Jeff and Christi in the DRC:
pcusa.org/donate/E200314

Kathy Melvin



✝ God's Mission in ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

Strengthening partnerships for mutual mission

Based in the Fiji Islands, **Hery Ramambasoa's** ministry as regional liaison for Southeast Asia and the Pacific includes the PC(USA) global church partnerships with Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Singapore, Vietnam, Indonesia and the Philippines.

Hery facilitates and seeks to strengthen healthy relationships among entities of the PC(USA) and those of partner denominations and organizations in the region. He also supports mission personnel serving in Southeast Asia and the Pacific through communications, information sharing, guidance, encouragement and missiological reflection.

Though the challenges of economic disparities, rampant poverty and climate change are daunting,

Hery views them as opportunities for the church and the larger community to work together to "identify, reinforce and multiply projects that promote mutual understanding." He has faith that "through the light of partnership and mission, the church will continue to fulfill its prophetic role for justice and reconciliation among people and the whole of creation."

The seeds of Hery's call to mission were sewn during his adolescence. Engaging with the ecumenical Student Christian Movement during high school and university prepared him for work with vulnerable populations such as orphans, people experiencing homelessness and victims of natural disasters. As a student he followed the Anti-Apartheid Movement and embraced the power of prophetic nonviolence advocated by its Christian leaders. "They taught us," he said, "that a journey always starts with one step."

Support Hery's work in Southeast Asia and the Pacific: pcusa.org/donate/E200493

Tammy Warren



✝ God's Mission in THE CARIBBEAN

Training pastors, lay leaders, children and youth

After serving four years as the first Presbyterian mission co-workers to live and work in Cuba since the 1959 revolution, **the Rev. Dr. David Cortes-Fuentes and Josefina Saez-Acevedo** have accepted a new call to serve in the Dominican Republic and Caribbean region, effective Oct. 1.

David is serving as regional theological educator and curriculum consultant, alongside partners throughout the Caribbean. In this role, he facilitates connections among Caribbean and PC(USA) seminaries and other potential partners. As time permits, he also teaches short courses in his areas of expertise, such as New Testament and Greek.

Josey is serving at the invitation of the Dominican Evangelical Church (Iglesia Evangélica Dominicana). She is a resource for Christian education for the denomination, working as part of a team in developing and adapting curricula — particularly curricula for children and youth — based on the priorities of mission partners. She will help to develop Christian education materials to strengthen the church's libraries and theological instruction.

As they transition to new ministries, David and Josey are thankful they will continue their partnership relationship with the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cuba, as well as other theological institutions and the church in the Dominican Republic and the Caribbean.

David is a member of the Presbytery of San Gabriel, in Southern California, and Josey is a member of Claremont Presbyterian Church, in California.

Support David and Josey in the Dominican Republic:
pcusa.org/donate/E200519

Kathy Melvin



✝ God's Mission in THE MIDDLE EAST

Strengthening hope in the midst of heartache

The Revs. Elmarie and Scott Parker have served in the Middle East since 2013. Elmarie works as regional liaison for Syria, Lebanon and Iraq, and Scott serves as associate for ecumenical partnerships and as a writer in residence with the Middle East Council of Churches.

As regional liaison, Elmarie helps strengthen the relational ties between the church in Iraq, Syria and Lebanon, and Presbyterians in the United States. She is convinced that the witness of indigenous Christian churches in the region is essential for a peaceful future.

Scott leads the "Strong Kids, Strong Emotions" play-based program that helps Iraqi and Syrian refugee children

develop emotional and spiritual resilience. Scott's work centers on communicating current realities on the ground.

The National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon and the Assembly of National Evangelical (Presbyterian) Churches in Iraq, along with other PC(USA) partners in the region, are working to aid thousands of displaced families of all religious creeds. Their work includes providing basic necessities such as food, water, clothing, fuel, rent and medications; helping families rebuild their homes and start their lives again; providing education for students whose schools have been destroyed; and striving to develop a civil society built around the principles of international law, human rights and democracy.

Support Elmarie and Scott's work in the Middle East:
pcusa.org/donate/E200504



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Important dates:

March 1 — Most sites available (*final date to apply for international sites*)

June 1 — National sites only (*limited spots available*)

Visit youngadultvolunteers.org to learn more.