

# **Becoming a Matthew 25 Church: Mission in Solidarity, Incarnated and Ecumenical**

*Rev. Jose Luis Casal, Director  
Presbyterian World Mission*



It's no secret that we are living at a time of decline for mainline denominations in North America and the Western Hemisphere. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is taking an active role in changing this trend, and the parable of the Judgment of the Nations in Matthew 25 can help us in this effort.

Matthew 25 models the way Presbyterians strive to do mission. Showing our love for God through service to others is not only about feeding the hungry, giving water to the thirsty, clothing the naked and freeing those who are imprisoned. These are good and necessary works, but these efforts can end up being just charity. As Christians we need to do more.

Many years ago, I served a congregation in Chicago. One Thanksgiving, as a mission project, we hosted a community meal for homeless families in a church in the city's South Side. The church we worked with had a permanent feeding program. During the day we distributed Thanksgiving food baskets, and that evening we served around 300 people a hot meal at the church. When we finished serving, we shared our experiences with the pastor. He responded, "For us the most rewarding is not the number of people we feed or the amount of food we give, but the relationships we establish. These homeless are our friends. We love them, and they love us." In that moment I understood. To give food is only charity; they, on the other hand, were doing much more. They were practicing solidarity in mission.

Mission in solidarity happens over time and through consistency. It is constant and forms a bond of trust. In contrast, mission as charity happens overnight and is sporadic. Mission in solidarity happens as part of a strategy based on collaboration. Mission as charity is based on opportunities and circumstances without a long-range purpose or plan. A Matthew 25 church practices mission in solidarity, not charity.

Matthew 25 teaches us that mission is incarnational. The mandate to feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, look after the sick and care for those in prison requires our commitment to do the right things. This includes having the courage to denounce those who perpetuate hunger by monopolizing food and promoting unequal distribution of resources; those who manipulate the law for their own privileges; and those who try to control natural resources for their own benefit. Incarnational mission is a commitment to suffer with "the little ones" and to confront unjust suffering.

Matthew 25 also leads us to affirm that mission is ecumenical. In the parable, the "doers" of the right things don't have any name or identifying label — their fruits identify them. The "doers" are just part of God's family. Our actions have no denominational, national, cultural, racial or gender identity; for this reason, we are encouraged to join others in common actions to show God's love for humankind. Showing God's love through our service makes us all equal in the family of God.

**Mission in solidarity is an incarnational and ecumenical task of a Matthew 25 church!**



## February 2019 — 'Once In a Refugee Camp': The Pain, Resilience and Memory of Two Extraordinary Women

*Rev. Shelvia Smith-Mather, Mission Co-worker  
Serving the people of South Sudan Presbyterian World Mission*



**In 1993 fighting erupted within the small South Sudanese town of Yei (pronounced "Yay"). Machine guns mounted atop land cruisers and AK-47s shouldered by men wearing fatigues launched shells of ammunition into the air. Mothers and grandmothers hurried out of gunfire with babies tied to their backs and**

cooking to their backs and cooking pans seated on their heads. They emptied into forests, pushed through branches, waded through streams, moving up, up, up gravel-covered hills and down, down, down shadowed valleys. They assembled at border crossings bulging from the influx of refugees. Thousands upon thousands flowed across the border into United Nations-sanctioned areas in Uganda. Once registered, families built semi-permanent homes with white UN tarps. In each of the homes, the tarps stretched across the wooden beams of the ceiling and hung from the wall to the floor. The modest material flapped when winds blew, yet was strong enough to provide some relief from the fierce sun. Family members too weak, too young or too old remained close to the small one-room home as other family members journeyed off daily to bundle firewood and haul cans of water from the bush. One plot of land sat next to another plot of land. Plot by plot they sat; family by family they settled. Among those who settled in the sprawling refugee camps were my future co-workers Margret Sadia and Lucy Awate.

Margret and Lucy often tell me stories of war. Some days the mood is somber, but most days the tone is surprisingly upbeat, rich in laughter and punctuated by high-fives. Their stories usually begin one of three ways: "During the war," "When the bombing started" or "Once in the refugee camp." Today Margret and Lucy's story began with the latter.

I often sit quietly during these conversations, awed by their ability to laugh at memories that once were so painful, wondering how they became so resilient.

"Once in the refugee camp, rebel soldiers came by night in a raid." Margret began. "Two young boys had just been tortured and ears cut off. My neighbor's brother was taken and he saw soldiers moving toward my home, so he shouted, 'They got my brother! Margret, run for your life. Run! Ruuuuuun!'

"I don't know," Margret continued. "Maybe they would have cut off my ears. I don't know. Maybe they would have raped me."

Margret sprinted into the night as fast as her feet would take her. From the other side of the refugee settlements, Lucy did the same. The soldiers berated those whom they captured, asking them, "Do you want to laugh, or do you want to hear?" If the family chose to hear, the soldiers cut off their lips. If the family chose the ability to laugh, the soldier cut off their ears.





While the moment was terrifying at the time, today Lucy laughs as she recounts the memory. She emphatically pumps her arms to show how she ran. The corners of her smile touch the tops of her cheeks. Margret and Lucy's laughter seems to grow as they remember the 25-year-old memory.

They can laugh at such things now, but their laughter comes only after many years of reflection and attention to healing deep emotional wounds. Lucy and Margret achieved some of their healing through the PC(USA)'s longtime South Sudanese partner, RECONCILE International. They both attended the RECONCILE Peace Institute (RPI) and completed the Community-Based Trauma Healing certificate program. Margret went on to become a prominent advocate against human rights violations in Yei. She was later elected chairperson of the RPI alumni chapter. Lucy has worked tirelessly counseling survivors of violence, as well as those responsible for war crimes. She was hired by RECONCILE years later and has become the first RPI graduate to become an RPI lecturer. Both women are committed to helping South Sudanese refugees address the trauma of war and are courageous beyond imagination. They have grappled with their traumatic pasts and are committed to helping others do the same. They are wounded healers.

I have been blessed to work with Margret and Lucy for several years, but I am especially honored to have had the opportunity to work alongside them in Africa's largest refugee camps last year. With a team of RPI alumni, RECONCILE staff and partner organizations, we implement trauma healing activities within the same areas Margret and Lucy fled years ago. This year RECONCILE seeks to expand its impact through the PC(USA)'s South Sudan Education and Peace Building efforts. Please prayerfully consider financially partnering with RECONCILE to mobilize courageous leaders like Lucy and Margret to counsel survivors of war and train other local community leaders to do the same.

Give to the ministry of Shelvis and Nancy Smith-Mather: [pcusa.org/donate/E200316](https://pcusa.org/donate/E200316)

Give to South Sudan Education and Peace Building: [pcusa.org/donate/E052172-1](https://pcusa.org/donate/E052172-1), where a portion of your gift will be matched by Westminster-Minneapolis.



## March 2019 — Walking the Lenten Labyrinth

*Elen Sherby, Coordinator, Equipping for Mission Involvement  
Presbyterian World Mission*

In mission co-worker Sarah Henken's last Mission Connections letter, she writes about a week-long, bilingual retreat she co-led in Ohio for youth from Cartagena, Colombia, and from Dayton. At the conclusion of the final vespers service, they walked a labyrinth in a clearing in the woods. The stars were bright overhead as the group quietly walked the path under the night sky. At one point, Sarah heard a young man behind her say, "Which way is out?" Sarah encouraged him to follow her. As everyone emerged from the labyrinth, she heard some sighs of relief and saw some clustered together in prayer. Sarah writes, "Honestly, if we take walking the labyrinth as a metaphor for life as a disciple of Jesus, I can relate to [the young man's] confusion. There are days when I myself wonder where in the world the path is taking me, whether I'm actually getting anywhere."



Sarah's reflection made me think of Jesus' journey of 40 days in the wilderness. Today we observe Lent as a time to remember his wilderness journey and recall his suffering and subsequent death and resurrection. Some choose to give something up for Lent as a spiritual discipline to reflect on Christ's sacrifice; others choose to take on a spiritual discipline just for this time. For all, Lent is a time to reflect inwardly about who Jesus is for us personally, for our community and the world, while looking forward to the empty tomb.

In Easter we are reminded that death does not have the final word; the joy and light of the resurrection encourage us to keep moving forward. This is the never-ending circle of the Christian journey: Being Christian doesn't mean we will always be happy and our path straightforward; often our path will be filled with indifference, disappointment, doubt, fear and anguish. Being human means we will always be cycling through joy, pain and a multitude of other emotions. The word "Lent" comes from an Old English word that means springtime. Being Christian means we can be inspired to seek "springtime" ways to respond to every season and every moment.



Sarah serves in two roles as a mission co-worker in Colombia: as a peace initiative promotor with the Presbyterian Church of Colombia and as the Young Adult Volunteer site coordinator. She walks with Colombian people throughout the country as they seek peace through education and advocacy; and she walks with YAVs as they seek understanding, transformation and growth. Sarah's service as a Young Adult Volunteer in Argentina and Uruguay in the 2000s ignited her love for Latin America and helped her develop Spanish fluency; her time as a YAV set a foundation for a longer journey in mission.

Later in Sarah's letter about the bilingual youth retreat she writes about the story of the Prodigal Son, a parable the youth wrestled with during the event. As Jesus tells the story in the Gospel of Luke, there is no final resolution. So, as part of a conversation on being peacemakers, the youth wrote endings to the parable with varying approaches: Would the older brother forgive his younger brother and let hurt and pride go? Leave town in disgust? Or murder his brother in his sleep?

As we walk the Lenten journey this year, let us look inward as tradition has taught us, through disciplines of prayer, reflection and fasting. And let us also walk the path of discipleship that calls us to look outward, choosing relationships of peace and love. Let us walk illuminated by the bright, starry light of the resurrection, our hearts connected with others.'

To read more about Sarah Henken and her ministry with partners in Colombia, visit her [Mission Connections](#) profile.

The Young Adult Volunteer (YAV) program is an ecumenical, faith-based year of service in sites around the world and across the United States. YAVs (ages 19–30) accompany local agencies working to address root causes of poverty and engage in reconciliation while exploring the meaning and motivation of their faith. Encourage young adults to learn more and apply.



*Tracey King-Ortega, regional liaison, Central America  
Presbyterian World Mission*



Several years ago on a visit to Guatemala, I met with the general coordinator of The Protestant Center for Pastoral Studies in Central America (CEDEPCA). I was there to get things ready for a new mission co-worker assigned to accompany them in their work. I asked if there were any needs or concerns to be shared, so the co-worker could be preparing before arriving in Guatemala. I was told the co-worker should be sure to “come spiritually prepared to maintain hope in a place where hope isn’t readily seen.”

The global partner couldn’t emphasize enough the need to be nourished and encouraged by hope. Guatemala has become a country strangled by the grips of violence, corruption and insecurity. I could hear the exhaustion in her voice and her desire to be energized by Christ’s message, which for many has been stomped all over by the day-to-day realities.

I know about their daily reality but was genuinely surprised, as well as humbled, that our partners are asking us to keep hope alive, asking us to be their spiritual warriors, reminding them what hope is and why it is important. It surprised me because so often the case is just the reverse. When U.S. partners visit and experience the strength and faith of the people in Central America, despite seeing daunting circumstances of poverty and violence, they leave energized, in awe of people’s utter reliance on God. Hope is renewed. A place that has taught and, I believe, continues to teach hope was reaching out to U.S. mission partners, asking for something they have shared in abundance with travelers from the U.S. for years.

Another powerful memory I have related to hope is an image burned in my brain of a visit nearly 20 years ago to what was formerly the village of Posoltega in northern Nicaragua. It was about two months after Hurricane Mitch, and in this particular place, a mudslide had wiped out an entire village, burying nearly 3,000 people. As we walked around trying to make sense of it all, the heaviness of tragedy and loss enveloped us. I remember coming across human remains protruding through the caked mud. It was all I could do to push away thoughts of their last moments of life. And then, just a few yards away, I saw a single, small, brilliant, purple flower springing up through the mud. A sign of hope and rebirth. But rather than filling me with hope, I remember that it just made me mad. How dare there be hope where so much death and destruction had occurred? Here we are grieving, actively mourning for thousands, not understanding how anyone can recover from a tragedy of this magnitude. And yet there, right before me is this promise of new life.

I couldn’t see it in that moment, but that image taught me a great deal about my Christian faith. For isn’t that the crux of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection. The landscape is dim. The empire is crushing down, crucifying us. Just when we think we’ve given up and the oppressor has won, Jesus returns to assert that no, that is not the case, God wins! The kingdom is the prize that we have won, and hope gives us strength to live that truth anew each day.

These memories inform my understanding of mission. In doing partnership in mission, we are called to become bearers of hope for one another. This is not insignificant work. Hope is necessarily central to the Christian faith. Easter, Christ’s resurrection, is the ultimate source of the hope we have as Christians. But given the harsh reality of today’s world, hope is hard to come by and may even feel inappropriate and downright offensive. I have witnessed countless reasons for hopelessness — situations of poverty, injustice, exclusion and violence that are heartbreaking. But in the end, actively following God’s call through the gift of partnership, I have been led beyond desperation, and into hope. Not just “doing mission,” but “doing mission in partnership” has deepened and strengthened hope in me. The power of faith transforms death, but we can’t do that alone or in isolation. It is in relationship with our international mission partners that I have begun to understand that together, as the whole body of Christ, we are called to be an Easter people, people of unstoppable hope.



## May 2019 —Holy (re)Orientation

Blake Collins, Associate for Recruitment and Relationships

Young Adult Volunteer (YAV) Program

YAV (Peru, 2013–14)

### Acts 2:1–4 (New International Version)

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.



Knocking on the wooden door in a dry heat, I was encouraged to see Hermana Ana milliseconds later standing in the entryway with a smile. Hermana Ana, a matriarch in the church I attended while in [Comas, Peru](#), as a [Young Adult Volunteer](#), invited me to visit before attending Bible study together later that evening. Handing me a piece of pan dulce and a cup of coffee, she told me to “come, flaquito, come!” (“eat, skinny boy, eat!”) and “tome, hermanito, tome!” (“drink, little brother, drink!”). Then Hermana Ana opened her Bible and read from Isaiah. Because my Spanish was weak, I enjoyed following along in a Spanish-English version. When Hermana Ana finished, she closed her Bible, laid it on her lap, and began to speak and share ... and speak and share ... and speak and share for what must have been three hours. I

understood little what was said, and was unable to respond, but I recall the time flying by, feeling really comfortable on her couch, and recollect it as one of my favorite conversations. Hermana Ana was teaching me a new way to be, a different way to participate in ministry, a more holy way to show up.

I understood little about the [context and history](#) of Comas and struggled with the language. Yet, at every table where I was invited, my opinion was asked on topics I did not understand nor had the words to respond to. My identities around race, gender, faith and nationality — and the messages each holds — were inescapable to recognize, wrestle with and confront. I realized how much space I constantly take up at the table. I still struggle with how to show up to the table.

In the Scripture describing Pentecost, I’m reminded by stories from the Old Testament. In [Genesis](#), God “confused their language” so the masses couldn’t communicate. In Deuteronomy, God encouraged the Israelites to follow the law in a way that made them somewhat of an exclusive community (although they were still called to [take care](#) of the [stranger](#)!). Yet at Pentecost, God was reorienting followers to be a new community, participate in God’s mission differently, and expand each other’s ideas of who and what is holy.

In [my work](#), I love inviting young adults into a transformational year of service and accompaniment to continually reorient the ways we each are called to partner in God’s mission. The [Office of the General Assembly](#) is engaging in this reorientation through the [Hands and Feet program](#); the [Presbyterian Mission Agency](#) is joining in through the [Matthew 25 initiative](#); and [World Mission](#) is reimagining service through several [consultations](#) with partners around the world and across the United States. God, like on the day of Pentecost, is at work.

Similar to those gathered in the early days of the church, how are we being called to consistently reflect on [“what this means”](#)?!

In this season we are called, individually and as community, to regularly reorient our lives toward ministries of reconciliation — and the Spirit is present!

The [Young Adult Volunteer \(YAV\) program](#) is an ecumenical, faith-based year of service. YAVs (ages 19–30) accompany local agencies working to address root causes of poverty and reconciliation while exploring the meaning and motivation of their faith in community with peers and mentors.

Applications for the 2019–20 YAV year (August to August) are open until June 1. National sites are available.

[Learn more and apply!](#)



Images from the YAVs (re)Orientation Event, when the program hosted the 2018–19 YAV class last summer. Photos by the Rev. Ashley McFaul-Erwin.



# June 2019 — Mission Beyond Institution



*Stephanie Caudill, Mission Associate*

*Equipping for Mission Involvement*

*Presbyterian World Mission*

*Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God — what is good and acceptable and perfect. – Romans 12:2*

The church is ever-changing and evolving; so, too, is mission and the ways in which God calls us to participate in it. How will you join in? How will others join you in mission and ministry?

On Aug. 1–3, hundreds of Presbyterians will come together at Big Tent in Baltimore to explore the theme “Called to a Movement Beyond Institution.” Guided by Romans 12:2, attendees will participate in worship, Bible study, learning opportunities and community engagement to help them be renewed, refreshed and inspired so they can effect change in their own communities when they return home.

Big Tent is an excellent opportunity to meet Presbyterian World Mission staff as well as other Presbyterians interested in engaging in God’s transformative mission. There’s still time to register!

World Mission will offer a luncheon from noon to 1:30 p.m.

Friday, Aug. 2, in the Lord Baltimore Hotel Ballroom. Titled “Mission Beyond Institution,” the luncheon will feature a speaker who participated in one of World Mission’s global consultations, designed to shape a new strategy for the ministry area. Attendees will hear about the outcomes of the strategy process as well as the speaker’s hopes for the future of international mission. We hope you will join us! A limited number of tickets are available.

Additionally, World Mission staff will lead several learning opportunities during Big Tent:

- **Mission in Your Neighborhood: New Models and Tools for Short-term Mission (held off-site)**  
Led by Ellen Sherby, World Mission coordinator for Equipping for Mission Involvement, and Kate Foster Connors, executive director of The Center, which inspires and equips churches and individuals to engage boldly with their neighborhoods.
- **Engaging Diaspora Communities: Toward Covenant Agreement**  
Led by Mienda Uriarte, World Mission coordinator for Asia and the Pacific, in collaboration with the Office of the General Assembly and the Presbyterian Mission Agency’s Office of Asian Intercultural Support.
- **Intergenerational Dialogue on Ecumenism and Social Justice Movements**  
Led by Destini Hodges, mission specialist, Interpretation Assignment Support, Presbyterian Mission Agency, and Everdith Landrau, manager of Ecumenical Relations, Office of the General Assembly.
- **Breaking Down Walls: Lessons Learnt in Reconciliation from South Sudan, Congo and Rwanda**  
Led by Bob and Kristi Rice, mission co-workers serving in South Sudan.

For full descriptions of these and other learning opportunities at Big Tent, visit [pcusa.org/resource/schedule-events-big-tent-2019](https://pcusa.org/resource/schedule-events-big-tent-2019).

Several World Mission-related networks/partnerships are planning to hold meetings or other events either before or during Big Tent. The Haiti Mission Network will hold its annual meeting July 30 to Aug. 1. The Israel Palestine Mission Network is offering a learning opportunity called “Cross Movement Solidarity, and Why Palestine Matters” on Friday, Aug. 2. The Presbyterian Peace Network for Korea is also having a learning opportunity called “Remembrance – No More Erasure” on Friday, Aug. 2. The Guatemala Partnership Mission Network, along with CEDEPCA USA and the New Castle Presbytery Guatemala Partnership, will hold a breakfast on Saturday, Aug. 3. Network and partnership meetings are open to all Big Tent registrants.

Another great way to connect with World Mission staff during Big Tent is to stop by our table at the Presbyterian Mission Agency exhibit area. The Big Tent exhibit will be in the promenade between the Radisson and Crowne Plaza hotels. We will have numerous mission resources available, including our “Called as Partners: Serving Together in God’s Mission” International Partnership Manual, promotional materials for our mission toolkits, mission co-worker prayer cards and the latest issue of Mission Crossroads magazine. We hope you’ll stop by and say “hi.”

To learn more about Big Tent 2019 and how to register, visit [oga.pcusa.org/section/big-tent/big-tent-2019](https://oga.pcusa.org/section/big-tent/big-tent-2019). **The registration deadline is July 1.**





## July 2019 — Traveling the road to peace

*Kurt Esslinger*

*Mission Co-worker in South Korea*

*Presbyterian World Mission*

I asked Rev. Moon-Sook Lee if there is anything she wants Americans in the U.S. to understand about Korean reunification, and she responded immediately: “They should let Koreans decide how that will happen.”

Lee, one of 14 International Peacemakers visiting the U.S. in September and October as part of the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program, currently serves as a co-chair of the Reconciliation and Unification Department of the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCCCK). As a PC(USA) mission co-worker serving with NCCCK, I have heard this sentiment expressed often among our partners in Korea. She and many other mission partners say that any process of Korean unification should be carried out by the will of Koreans in Korea alone. Our partners believe that U.S. Americans, including Korean Americans, and the U.S. government should avoid seeking to direct the conversations or the process between North Korean and South Korean people and governments.



I also take care not to cross this line myself as a mission co-worker; I am not trying to teach Koreans how to reconcile or how to build a peace regime, but rather learning from Koreans how they are struggling for peace and sharing those lessons with Presbyterians and others in the U.S.

Most importantly, I hope to share with U.S. Presbyterians that thoughts on both reunification and peace are much more diverse than Western media typically presents. A 2019 survey by the South Korean government’s Korea Institute for National Unification (KINU) found that a strong support for reunification, around 65% in 2018, continues in South Korea. It also noted there is a growing disinterest in reunification among young adults, who see North Korea as simply another neighbor, and who place concerns of economic anxiety as a higher priority than reuniting a people that have never been “one” during their lifetimes. Still, among young adults, support for an end to the war remains as strong as other age groups. This survey, as usual for most surveys, did not provide details into what kind of reunification those in favor prefer.

A colleague of mine wrote an article last year to help U.S. Americans interpret different understandings of reunification based on different assumptions about the identity of North Korea in relation to South Korea. Dr. Chris Rice was born to PC(USA) mission co-workers, Sue and Randy Rice. He currently serves as the Mennonite Central Committee co-representative for Northeast Asia. Part of his work oversees MCC’s humanitarian cooperation projects in North and South Korea. He writes about how South Koreans, who support reunification but consider North Korea to be an “Enemy Nation,” are hoping for a reunification by absorption or by conquest. This reunification would not honor the input of North Koreans. This has been the policy of every conservative government in South Korea, beginning with the seeds planted by the Republic of Korea’s first president, Syngman Rhee. When Rhee first arrived in the southern U.S.-administered region of Korea in 1946 after World War II, he immediately began calling to invade the Soviet-administered northern region of Korea to unite it by force. Many South Korean and Korean American Christians also pray for this kind of reunification, hoping that God will bring “peace” by bringing down the North Korean regime in the same way God brought the walls of Jericho down so that Joshua could destroy Jericho.

Dr. Rice noted in his article that another group of pro-reunification Koreans consider North Korea to be “Ruptured Family.” Our partner, the NCCCK engages in its ministry with the Korean Christian Federation of North Korea in this manner. They seek reunification through mutual trust-building that would include the voice of North Korean leadership in deciding together on what kind of reunification might arise. This reunification might be one state with a hybrid system, one state with two systems, or even a federation with two states and perhaps a unified military, and so on. Even within the NCCCK its members diverge on the specifics of the preferred system of creating a unified state or states.

These conflicting notions of reunification also guide how we approach ending the current state of war on the Korean Peninsula. They also relate to the different versions of peace for which Christians might be praying: peace as pacification by force/proselytization or peace as mutual trust-building and humanizing exchanges ending the war with a mutually beneficial peace treaty, but this is a subject for another article.

Our partners and Rev. Lee ask me, as a mission co-worker, to encourage U.S. Christians to urge our government to stop attempting pacification by force (military/sanctions/negotiation toward surrender) and to instead support the Korean initiated efforts of mutual trust-building, so that reunification, if it happens, can take place gradually, step-by-step.

This is also a reminder that we do not have to support reunification to support an end to the war.

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The Rev Kurt Esslinger (left), mission co-worker and coordinator of the Ecumenical Forum for Peace, Reconciliation and Development Cooperation on the Korean Peninsula (EFK) with the Rev. Kang Myong Chol, chairman of the Korean Christian Federation, after a meeting of the EFK in Geneva, Switzerland, in 2018. (Photo by Ri Kum Gyong/KCF)



# Mission Matters

## August 2019 — Called, sent, loved and chosen

*Rev. Ashley McFaul-Erwin*

*Community Outreach Pastor, Setauket Presbyterian Church*

*Young Adult Volunteer, Nashville (2011–12)*



I am writing this reflection as I sit in the manse of [Setauket Presbyterian Church](#) on Long Island, New York, where my wife and I have lived since July 2019.

My New York home is 3,126 miles from my hometown in Northern Ireland and 950 miles from Tennessee — the place I have called home for the past eight years.

This wild and holy calling of ministry and discipleship brought me across the Atlantic Ocean through a year of service as a [Young Adult Volunteer \(YAV\)](#).

During the spring of 2010, it was more painful for me to stay in the closet than to come out and risk the rejection of my faith community. I knew that by coming out, the door to ordination (and nowadays membership) in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland would be closed. It was

in the midst of pain and grief that the Spirit called me to Tennessee — not somewhere one would expect a lesbian pastor-in-training to find healing.

On a particularly dark and lonely night in Northern Ireland, I googled “gay Presbyterians.” This led me to the website of [More Light Presbyterians](#), and then to the website of [Second Presbyterian, Nashville](#). I sat at my computer and wept. These tears were no longer the tears of fear, but of relief. It was through Second Presbyterian’s website that I found out about the YAV program, and on Aug. 17, 2011, I found myself sitting on a plane heading for the U.S.

When I moved to Nashville, in a sense I was running away. People said to me, “It is cowardly to run away from things.” I disagree. When you are being hurt, when you cannot be yourself, sometimes the most courageous move can be to run, to run from death to life. As I ran, the Spirit of God was at work in ways I could never have imagined.

Much has happened through my YAV journey in Nashville: I completed my MDiv at Vanderbilt Divinity School; met the wonderful Erica, whom I married in 2015; and on Sept. 1, 2018, I was ordained as a Minister of Word and Sacrament in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) — the first openly queer person to be ordained by the Presbytery of Middle Tennessee.

Nashville was the place I found so much healing, and I am excited to embark on this next phase of ministry on Long Island, as the community outreach pastor at Setauket Presbyterian Church.

The story of Jacob’s wrestling match in Genesis describes well my journey thus far. I have wrestled with the church and God, but mostly with myself. As a queer person of faith, who grew up with the idea that my sexuality was incompatible with the faith, I carried a lot of shame (and let’s face it, I still carry some). Jacob had a history of pretending to be someone else, a concept I am familiar with. When Jacob is down by the river, the sun is rising, and the one with whom he has wrestled says, “What is your name?” For someone who has hidden their true identity, this question calls Jacob to finally be himself, to be honest, and not to fear. In the words of author Rob Bell, “He’s struggled and he’s been broken and he’s done pretending. He isn’t trying to be Esau or anyone else; Jacob has wrestled and overcome. Jacob is ready to be Jacob.”<sup>1</sup> In recent years God has been saying to me, “Ashley, are you ready to be Ashley? Stop hearkening back to the people who rejected you. Stop giving them power. Be here in the present moment



with me. Look at how we can work together when you choose to create. We've got work to do. You might still have a limp, but you've got a greater blessing. So, let's get to work."

As we walk through life, may we know that we are called, sent, loved and chosen in the fullness of who we are. Friends, may we hold together our blessedness and our limping, knowing that wherever we are called, we are not alone. We are held in the embrace of the communal God, so may we get to work in witnessing to the image of God in all people.

*During the last week in August, the incoming [2019-20 YAV class](#) will gather at Stony Point Conference Center for a week of orientation before arriving at their respective YAV sites. Please hold staff, volunteers and the communities that welcome them in prayer.*

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<sup>1</sup> Rob Bell, Nooma video: Name, 2007.



## September 2019 — Which Jesus are we talking about?

Ellen Sherby, Coordinator, Equipping for Mission Involvement  
Presbyterian World Mission

A few weeks ago, a group of volunteer Christian educators from my home congregation, [Beechmont Presbyterian Church](#) in Louisville, gathered in the church library to reflect on Christian education.

We first explored our personal motivations for serving as Christian educators — particularly with elementary-age children — and then we asked, “What are our *congregational* objectives for Christian education?” We examined lists of possible purposes and outcomes. One purpose read, “Lead all learners to know, love and follow Jesus.” A possible outcome on another list read, to help participants “fully know and love their Bible.” We agreed that these were foundational to Christian education, yet we also asked ourselves, “Which Jesus are we talking about?” and “What does it mean to ‘love’ the Bible?”



In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31), Jesus tells us that the rich man lived a life dressed in fine clothes and eating filling, delicious meals. The man was content with his wealth and comfort. His neighbor, Lazarus, was hungry and covered with sores. He yearned even for crumbs from the rich man’s table yet passed unnoticed just outside his door. The story paints a picture of the rich man riding blindly past Lazarus

each time he left or entered his house. At the end of the parable, it is the rich man’s fate to suffer in eternal discomfort *precisely because* he was comforted during his life on earth, yet Lazarus finds comfort after a life of hardship.

It’s clear from the parable that the rich man knew Abraham was a pillar of the faith, yet he failed to see how that faith might have naturally brought him into relationship with Lazarus while they were living. If it had, at the very least the rich man might have invited Lazarus into his home to feed him and cure his wounds. He might have learned about many other “Lazaruses” living in their shared community. If it had, the rich man might have recognized his part in economic, social and religious systems that caused him to thrive and prosper while creating miserable conditions for Lazarus. He might have let go of his economic (or other) privileges or put them to radical use for charity and change. Perhaps he could have been an ally to people who were impoverished by the unjust systems. Perhaps he could have become an advocate to change those systems.

Christian education can play a role to connect us with people, leading us outside the walls of our homes and the church. Christian educators can create space for participants to see Jesus, who admonishes us to recognize our complicity as the “rich man,” and to see the Lazaruses who have suffered from our privilege. Learning and mission go hand in hand. In service learning, our faith encourages us to go out and relate with those who may be quite different from us, and yet understand that all of us together are unique, dynamic individuals participating in God’s mission. In love, God calls us to learn from *and* to serve one another. May it be so!



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## Become a Matthew 25 church



Matthew 25 is a bold new vision and invitation from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) that calls us to actively engage in the world around us — serving people who are hungry, oppressed, imprisoned or poor. When we practice justice, love and kindness, we become a living translation of Jesus Christ. Your congregation can join us on this journey. [Learn more.](#)



**October 2019 — Legacy of faith: Julia and Lois**

*Leslie Vogel, regional liaison, Guatemala and Mexico  
Presbyterian World Mission*

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us. (Hebrews 12:1 RSV)*

Through the years, my life has been graced with opportunities to come to know strong role models. These inspiring women of faith have taught me much about living a life in service to God, loving God with all of my heart, soul, mind and strength — and loving my neighbor as myself. (Luke 10:27)



*Leslie Vogel (right), regional liaison for Guatemala and Mexico, with the late poet, professor and theologian Julia Esquivel in 2017.*

This year, two of my faithful women role models joined the “great cloud of witnesses”:  
**Julia Esquivel**, internationally known Guatemalan poet, professor and theologian, activist for justice and human rights, died July 19. She was 89. And, Presbyterian mission worker **Lois Kroehler**, music teacher, hymn composer and advocate for peace who served in Cuba for more than 40 years died at age 91 on Aug. 4.

When I was 23 years old, I was gifted with an opportunity to travel with a group of Presbyterian Women on a “global exchange” to Cuba. I met Lois, a Presbyterian woman



who, as a young mission volunteer, had followed her heart and faith and had stayed in Cuba when virtually all other mission workers left, at the beginning of the Cuban revolution in 1959.



Lois chose not only to stay in Cuba, but she became a commissioned church worker, focusing on Christian education, organizing national retreats and events for children and youth, and contributing to the growth and development of Christian music produced with a uniquely Cuban flavor.

*Lois Kroehler, secretary turned missionary to Cuba*

When I saw her again in Washington state two years ago, Lois was busy writing music to be used in liturgical settings. Once more, I was moved and inspired by her musical gifts and indomitable spirit, just as I had been in 1981.

Lois's embodiment of love for people in need of Christ's love, and her commitment to living out the gospel in very challenging circumstances, inspired me and fueled a discernment process in me that led me to studying Bible and theology and, eventually, to seeking mission service. During those same years, I was becoming acquainted with Julia Esquivel through her reputation and her poetry.

After years living in exile during Guatemala's 36-year-long internal armed conflict, Julia was able to return to her beloved Guatemala to live the final years of her life. When I moved there as a PC(USA) mission co-worker in 2013, I met Julia in real life, through a book study group in her home. In addition to her extensive knowledge about the socio-political situation in Guatemala, Julia shared with me her love for the people engaged in



peaceful resistance to mining in La Puya, and her commitment to living out the gospel of Jesus Christ in practical, concrete ways.

In the words of former nun and accompanier/facilitator, Carmen Martínez, whom I met through Julia, so that I could learn more about mining resistance, “Julia was “...deeply spiritual, profoundly ecumenical and interfaith, with an enormous desire for the radicality of Jesus, who has fully revealed to us the God of Life, a compassionate and solidary God.”

Both Julia and Lois continue to inspire me with their examples of clear, decided commitment to living out the gospel in ways that seek to empower and give voice to the most oppressed, despised and forgotten in our world.

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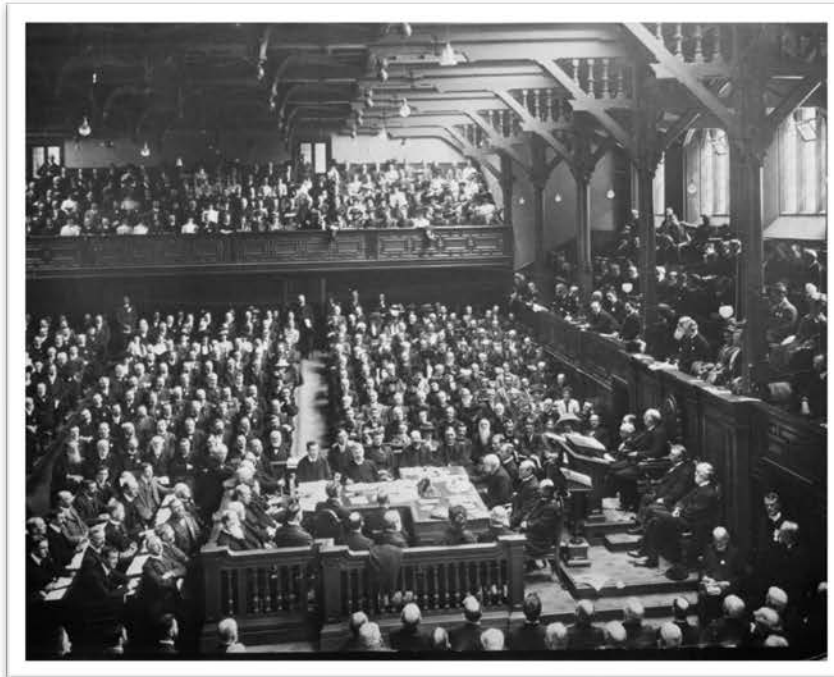
Learn more about the work of [Leslie Vogel](#), regional liaison with Presbyterian World Mission in Guatemala and Mexico. [Subscribe to her letters](#). *(Photo by Eric O. Ledermann)*



## November 2019 — Give us friends: Joining together as partners in God's mission

*Philip Woods, Associate Director for Strategy, Program and Recruitment  
Presbyterian World Mission*

At the Edinburgh Mission Conference in 1910, one of the few delegates from the global South, V.S. Azariah, called on the assembled representatives of Western mission agencies and churches to “give us friends.” It was a plea from the emerging churches of the global South for the mission-sending churches to come alongside them — to engage in mission with them. Far less momentous, but equally significant, World Mission's global partners are calling on us to adopt mutuality in partnership.



The Edinburgh Mission Conference, held in Scotland in June 1910, is considered by many to be the beginning of the ecumenical movement. (public domain photo)

Over the past year, World Mission has consulted with most of our partners in four consultations organized by our global areas: Africa, Middle East and Europe, Asia-Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean. Following these consultations, World Mission also consulted widely within the PC(USA), engaging representatives of presbyteries, synods, mission networks, people of color caucuses, and colleagues from other PMA ministry areas and PC(USA) agencies in five additional consultations in the U.S. All of these consultations explored the same questions around how we have practiced partnership in mission, what are the mission priorities today and, in the light of this, what does it mean to be partners in God's mission today?

World Mission's global partners overwhelmingly called us to exercise mutuality in partnership. What do they mean by this? One clue is in their appreciation of our convening these meetings, and asking them what it means to share in God's mission together. Another is the commonality of the issues or mission priorities that were lifted up, not just with our global partners, but also in the U.S. consultations. If we are facing the same challenges, then surely we can find new ways to work together that complement and build up our ministries both locally and across the world. It is also true that our partners are called to the same practice of discipleship as we are, to be witnesses in our own context and “to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).



In this era of globalization, the world church is very much part of our life in the U.S. through the many individuals, fellowships and congregations representing the richness and diversity of our global partnerships living among us. The challenges we face globally are common to us all. We need to find new ways of connecting locally and globally, not as different forms of mission, but as different aspects of our commitment and call to join together as partners in God's global mission.

Responding to the call to be a Matthew 25 church is one way into this. The concluding part of Matthew 25 calls us to attend to our relationships with those on the margins of society. The transformative impact of the prison ministry of the women of one of our partners in Iraq has opened the eyes of some who have encountered it to how they too could and should engage in prison ministry in their own context in the U.S.

A local witness in Iraq has thus become a global witness, transforming in a small way ministry and mission in the U.S. Such small steps build up to a larger whole, whereby the whole church is built up not from the traditional centers of power, privilege and wealth, but from the margins where a lack of resources is no obstacle to living out our calling to be witnesses to God's promise of fullness of life for all.



*The Rev. Philip Woods is associate director for strategy, program and recruitment in Presbyterian World Mission.*



## December 2019 — Status Update: World Mission's strategic planning process



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

It's been a blessing to serve as the interim director of World Mission these past few months. I've been doing a lot of listening — to global partners, mid councils mission co-workers and staff. We are looking at the past to see what we need to carry forward and build on, but also looking toward the future.

World Mission's strategic planning process falls into both of those categories, and as we look to the new year, I wanted to share with you the status of that project.

World Mission began compiling information, both qualitative and quantitative, in the fall of 2018 to gather input from domestic and global partners, as well as allied organizations, with the intent of creating a new strategic vision to carry us through the next decade. Our previous strategic plan was formulated over a decade ago and there was a need for a fresh reading of the signs in a rapidly changing geo-political and religious context.

In the past 18 months, there were 10 consultations, domestic and international, with over 500 participants and 250 global partners. Those strategic conversations gave our partners the opportunity to talk in-depth with World Mission about the changing landscape in their communities, but also provided them with a space to share together and look for new ways to collaborate.

After nearly 18 months of gathering insights, there were 300 pages of notes to analyze. The PC(USA)'s Research Services spent weeks looking for common themes and produced a 40-page summary report, which offered deep insights but no clear priority or directive.

What it did show clearly was that there were areas where World Mission needed to dig deeper. Those included more in-depth missiological grounding, insights from our ecumenical partners and additional input from our mission co-workers.

Additionally, both the 222nd and 223rd General Assemblies (2016 and 2018) directed the PC(USA) to act boldly and compassionately to serve people who are hungry, oppressed, imprisoned or poor. This gave birth to the Matthew 25 invitation, adopted by the Church to actively engage in the world around us, so our faith comes alive and we wake up to new possibilities. Over 300 churches and mid councils have joined to support that work. This has been adopted by the Church, and whatever vision we set for the future will reflect this commitment.

The process for gathering additional input has already begun and is ongoing. It will become part of the PMA's overall strategic plan and will guide World Mission's work for the next five to 10 years.

We do not yet have a final date for rolling out a complete analysis because we want the quality of work to drive the process, not the timeline. There will be regular updates along the way.

From all of us at World Mission, we wish you a wonderful holiday season and a happy and healthy 2020.