



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

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Mission Crossroads

Spring 2024

The Fruit of Justice Will Be Peace

– Isaiah 32:17



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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.

AT THE CROSSROADS



Dear siblings in Christ

Rev. Mienda Uriarte, *Director of World Mission*



In a recent conversation with fellow practitioners and sojourners, we spoke wistfully about world peace. As wars rage on and people around the world continue to be victimized, peace feels like nothing more than a dream. Descriptions such as elusive, fleeting, and not-in-my-lifetime permeated and punctuated the discussion that pressed on for an evening.

Of course, it is hope of God that speaks into the feelings of resignation and the bleakness of our broken world. And, it is mission co-workers who lean into inspiration and creative imagination and love, as they walk beside sisters and brothers in communities of faith around the world. Read their stories and listen to their hearts. We invite you to join us on the journey to peace.

The word is Peace. ...

It is what we have hungered for.

Not just the absence of war. But, true Peace.

A harmony of spirit, a comfort of courtesies.

Security for our beloveds and their beloveds.

All the earth's tribes loosen their voices

To celebrate the promise of Peace.

We, Angels and Mortals, Believers and Non-Believers,

Look heavenward and speak the word aloud.

Peace. We look at our world and speak the word aloud.

Peace. We look at each other, then into ourselves

And we say without shyness or apology or hesitation.

Peace, My Brother.

Peace, My Sister.

Peace, My Soul.

Excerpts from *Amazing Peace: A Christmas Poem* by Maya Angelou, 2005

Sincerely,

Rev. Mienda Uriarte

DIRECTOR OF WORLD MISSION

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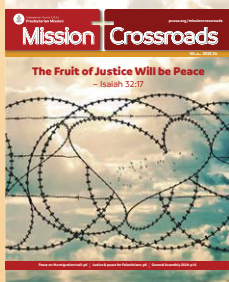
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On the cover:

The world events of this time cry out for justice and peace. The Church is called to follow Jesus by seeking the justice that creates peace for all. When we follow Jesus, we find hope.



Cover photo: Karen H. Black



Network advocates for justice and peace

Stephanie Caudill, *Mission Associate for Resources and Promotion*



Mission and partnership networks bring together Presbyterians from around the United States who share a common international mission focus. These networks facilitate building and maintaining healthy partnerships and provide a place for representatives of various PC(USA) partnerships to share information, learn from each other, coordinate their efforts and find ways to have greater impact together.

The Syria Lebanon Partnership Network (SLPN) is one such network, focusing on issues related to justice and peace in the Middle East.

The following is an interview with Ann Owens Brunger, the network's moderator.

Q: When was SLPN formed? What are its goals and purposes?

A: SLPN was launched in 2014 by Presbyterians with ties to Syria and Lebanon, supported by World Mission staff. The first American Presbyterians arrived in Greater Syria in 1823. Today, American Presbyterians can relate to Reformed Christians in Syria and Lebanon through SLPN. Our founding principles include mutual partnership, prayer, caring for and learning from one another, and building trust. SLPN partners advocate for more just U.S. foreign policies and raise financial support for projects defined by our mission partners who struggle with economic collapse and political dysfunction.

Q: What are SLPN's successes and challenges?

A: American participants are transformed by SLPN-sponsored trips to Syria and Lebanon, where they worship in churches, visit schools and mission projects, and meet faithful pastors, teachers and church members committed to doing God's work in very challenging situations. Long-term partnerships between U.S. and Middle Eastern congregations are meaningful. SLPN has presented overtures adopted by the General Assembly that allow the PC(USA) to speak out for justice and peace in Syria and Lebanon. We have lobbied U.S. lawmakers and State and Treasury Department officials to lift the crippling sanctions that prevent Syria from redeveloping its economy. SLPN has raised money for building repairs following the Beirut port explosion, \$48,000 for earthquake relief in northern Syria and over \$10,000 to support families displaced from South Lebanon by the Israel/Hamas war.

When the global pandemic made international travel impossible, we began using Facebook and Zoom to meet with our mission partners virtually, rather than in person. Opening these technical lines of communication has allowed American partners to learn about realities in the Middle East that are never reported in the media.

Q: Why should people in the U.S. and in Syria and Lebanon work together on peace and justice issues?

A: Americans have much to learn from Arab Christians regarding Middle Eastern power imbalances. It is humbling that our mission partners can trace their ancestry back to the beginning of Christianity. We can learn from them about keeping faith alive in times of social, political and financial turmoil. Hearing Syrian and Lebanese partners tell us about their needs for justice, Americans can use our voice and vote in our democracy acting as their advocates. Our partners give us hope in our own circumstances, as they continue to pray for us even as we pray for them.

WAYS TO GET INVOLVED:

- Join SLPN. Learn more about the network, including meeting dates, at: syrialibanonpn.org.
- Follow SLPN on Facebook. Visit: facebook.com/groups/FriendsofSLMN.
- Order the Syria "The Burden of Memory and The Hope of The Gospel" Study Guide, created by SLPN, from the PC(USA) Store. Find it here: bit.ly/SLPNStudyGuide.
- Explore creating a partnership between your congregation and a Syrian or Lebanese congregation. Contact Tim McCalmont at: macrev44@gmail.com.
- Learn more about the work of PC(USA)-related mission networks at: pcusa.org/missionnetworks.

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Exposing trafficking networks in Madagascar

Douglas Tilton



Rev. Raobiarizafy Andriafarantafika (left), pastor of FJKM Antesranana Fahazavana, and Pastor Helivao Poget.

On a Sunday morning in March 2023, people fishing off the coast of Ankazomborona in northwestern Madagascar discovered two corpses floating in the sea. Soon, alarmed villagers were combing the coast in pirogues for signs of mariners in distress. Rescuers eventually recovered 34 bodies, including three children. The dead were determined to have been passengers on a small boat that ran aground on its way to the French island of Mayotte, about 250 miles from Madagascar. Twenty-three survivors were also rescued but fled, fearful of being arrested for evading immigration laws.

As the incident gained national visibility, a government official, speaking anonymously on a radio broadcast,

confirmed what many local people already knew: This was not an isolated tragedy, but a predictable outcome of a regular pattern of illicit crossings. He claimed that two or three small craft made the crossing to Mayotte or Comoros daily. Each boat typically carried 40 to 60 people — adults in search of work and a better life or children traveling, often unaccompanied, to join parents who preceded them.

For Pastor Helivao Poget, the situation was familiar. Poget is the director of the National Chaplaincy Program for the 6-million-member Church of Jesus Christ in Madagascar, a PC(USA) global partner, which goes by its Malagasy acronym, FJKM. A social worker and a missiology lecturer at one of FJKM's theological seminaries, much of Poget's ministry has been with marginalized people, including those exploited by labor traffickers and Madagascar's sex tourism industry.



Human trafficking has been called the fastest growing criminal enterprise in the world, generating annual revenues estimated at \$150 billion. Poget first became involved in addressing trafficking following the 2009 military coup d'état in Madagascar that damaged the economy, deepened the nation's poverty and drove many people, particularly women, to seek work abroad. After discovering that hundreds of Malagasy women were trapped in exploitative employment in Lebanon, she worked with government officials to bring them home. In 2013, when members of a colleague's family became trapped in similar circumstances in Kuwait, Poget asked me to help her make the connections that would enable her to navigate this new situation. In the process, she found scores of Malagasy women imprisoned in Kuwait for running away from their employers and thereby violating their visa restrictions.

For the past several years, with help from Presbyterian Women, the FJKM Chaplaincy has run a human trafficking prevention initiative, Mamonjy (Malagasy for "save"), to raise awareness of the dangers of trafficking and to emphasize a simple message: "People are not for sale." After learning that women saw foreign employment as an attractive option to escape abuse at home, Poget added a parallel initiative to educate congregations to confront



Pastor Helivao Poget (sixth from left, with glasses) is with church members outside of FJKM Ankazomborona.

domestic violence. For these trainings, she adapted materials developed by PC(USA) partners in the Democratic Republic of Congo that my colleague, Christi Boyd, regional facilitator for women's and children's interests in Africa, had shared at a regional meeting of the FJKM Women's Association (Dorkasy).

In February 2023, Christi and I joined Poget on a Presbyterian Peacemaking Program travel study seminar to the Philippines and Hong Kong that focused on the root causes and current challenges of forced migration and labor trafficking. The experience helped us to understand the global scope of trafficking and the ways in which church partners in the region are advocating for migrant workers.

"Madagascar and the Philippines are both island nations," Poget observed, "so I felt that our hearts were in similar places. We are accustomed to looking outwards and to viewing the sea as a highway to opportunity."



Pastor Helivao Poget (right) discusses social concerns with members of FJKM Antseranana Fahazavana.

Despite this similar outlook, the conditions in the two countries are very different. Madagascar prohibits its nationals from moving abroad to take up labor contracts, ostensibly for their protection. As a result, people move clandestinely, placing them at the mercy of traffickers — and often corrupt officials. The Filipino government, on the other hand, actively encourages its citizens to work overseas. In both countries, many households rely on wages remitted by family members working or residing abroad, but in the Philippines, such remittances are officially recognized (and taxed) and the government provides at least some protections to overseas workers.

In mid-November, I traveled with Poget to the area around Ankazomborona to learn more about trafficking networks in the region, to sensitize local FJKM congregations to the dangers of trafficking, and to encourage them to raise the awareness of the communities where they minister.

"Our visit has helped to open the eyes of pastors and congregations to what is going on here," Poget remarked. "It has also helped them to understand that preventing trafficking is not 'political' but a core calling for followers of Christ." Poget hopes that the FJKM will continue to engage church and public officials to explore ways to provide more sustainable and effective protection to vulnerable workers.

Douglas Tilton is the PC(USA)'s regional liaison for Southern Africa.

Like a mustard seed

How minority churches in Asia prepare for a time of harvest



Christians are minorities in Asia and the Pacific. The area is known to be home to the most Buddhists in

the world, with a projection of 476 million followers in 2050. Nonetheless, the Christian population may rise by about 33% and reach 381 million in 2050. The highest growth in

considered “underground,” and the government may close the venue for the slightest misunderstanding or violation of the law. This happens when the group is not affiliated to the “mainline” denominations recognized by the government. The state has the right to control the activities and all businesses of a “legal” house church.

Church growth is due partly to the success of local Chinese missionaries. The leaders know their community well and have an influence on their fellow

achieve better outcomes, as they consider this growth along with their civic loyalty rather than nurturing a cradle for civil disobedience.

Chinese Protestants are organized in two groups: the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) created in the 1950s and close to the Chinese Communist Party, and the informal house churches. One study estimates that in the city of Wuhan, the membership of TSPM is between 18 million and 30 million. The house

The way we do mission will change radically: What kind of ecosystems will prevail 25 years from now? What would Christian ethics mean at that time? What would be the impact of economic wealth in our relationships as groups and nations?

church membership occurred between 1970–2020. In countries like China, the phenomenon of house churches continues to grow, which is in direct contrast with the global North where church membership is declining.

With house churches, believers are authorized to worship from their home, usually in one large room that fits 20 to 50 people. They may have several gatherings during the week. Some of these groups are still

worshippers. Thanks to the basic ecclesial and Scripture training they receive, these leaders easily captivate new members. The state closely follows this expansion, but that does not prevent those groups from obtaining more and more of a following. The regulations imposed by the state are supposedly aimed at restricting influence of the West. Church leaders would permanently try to balance legislation, morality and culture. They claim that they

churches are believed to have between 45 million and 60 million members. The latter benefits from an affiliation that is younger and better educated. That is only one facet of how a minority and “underground” movement navigates a dominant and repressive regime.

It is no secret that in the past 40 years Christianity has been declining in the global North. Seen from another lens, churches in Europe and North America are now being overtaken in numbers

by the rise of church attendance in the global South. Surprisingly, evangelism continues to win people in many Asian countries like India and China.

A study of world Christianity forecasts that by 2050, 77% of all Christians will live in the global South, but our institutions are not fully aware of the implication of such shift on the future of global missions. As the world is shrinking, churches have not yet realized the impact of such repositioning in their activities. On the contrary, churches continue to organize themselves as self-subsistent and egocentric. Many themes will change drastically, as the context and environment evolve. How would we train our leaders?

In an attempt to respond to these questions, the Rev. Prof. Dr. Jerry Pillay, the general secretary of the World Council of Churches, addressed the 15th General Assembly of the Christian Conference of Asia last October in India. He described the signs of the times through the “poly-crisis” or shocks being faced around the world today, such as geopolitical problems, and crisis in the domains of energy, economics and the climate. He noted the inability or

unwillingness of political establishments to address such multidimensional and complex challenges.

Pillay said: “Human beings, as moral agents and agents of social change, possess the power to make positive moral choices and engage in liberating actions aimed at the transformation of society in accordance with the moral

human being (especially the Christian) must be radically involved in the struggle for justice, and willing to suffer courageously for the redemption of the human community.”

Hery Ramambasoa is area coordinator for Asia and the Pacific.



Myung Sung Han

A church service in Nanjing, China.

norm of justice. Justice demands that we focus especially on meeting the needs of the poor and oppressed both domestically and globally. Justice must also be extended to non-human life. Thus, economic policies and systems must also be evaluated socially and ecologically on the basis of their benefits and harms to the well-being of all in our interdependent relationships. In harmony with divine purpose, the

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Oasis of peace on the migration trail

As a fundamental pillar of our Christian experience and testimony, justice is inseparable from peace and a fulfilling life for every human being as proclaimed by the good news of the Kingdom of God. Currently, there is a grave deficit of both justice and peace in many countries around the world, particularly in Central America.

This region was scourged by military dictatorships for the vast majority of the 20th century, when the first forced migrations began out of a desire to save lives. This period was interrupted by civil wars of liberation, achieving peace agreements that led

peace and violence prevention. In our 2015–25 strategic planning, peacebuilding became a permanent program for the church and now with the accompaniment of the PC(USA).

In this continuous search for justice and this call to serve the most vulnerable families, IRCES and the PC(USA) find themselves strongly convicted to respond to the migration crisis in Central America. In response to large waves of migration and mass deportations, in 2014, IRCES began working with returnees. But it was not just about caring for people in need, but also seeking to change the conditions

Central America and the United States. This resolution was approved, but due to the Covid pandemic, the work was delayed. However, in 2024 the Central American Mission and Migration network finally launches.

The network seeks to address the root causes of migration while promoting respect for the rights of migrants in transit, in their destination country and upon return. Migration issues cannot be resolved if the conditions of violence, exclusion, poverty and discrimination continue hurting families in Central America. The vision of our God's justice requires social, economic, political

Justice will produce peace, peace of mind and confidence forever.
—Isaiah 32:17 (direct translation into English from Dios Habla Hoy)

the entire region to sign a democratic security treaty, managed by the Central American Integration System, with an international community of guarantor countries. However, the corruption of states and powerful groups, organized crime, drug trafficking and gangs have significantly weakened the democratic aspirations and economic and social development of the countries of the region. This situation has forced many families to leave their communities of origin and seek a better future in other countries.

Since the '80s, the Reformed Calvinist Church of El Salvador (IRCES) has been working for

that marginalize them by influencing public policies, promoting human rights, and stopping the violence that, together with the difficult economic situation, drives migration and denies families the ability to a fulfilling life in their communities of origin.

As part of this strategy, the Presbytery of the Pacific accompanied the request of IRCES by presenting an overture to the General Assembly of the PC(USA) in 2018. The overture called for building a mission and migration network to develop different initiatives that promote rootedness of families in their communities of origin and continue advocating for change in Northern

and cultural conditions that allow for full participation in society in the countries of origin so that emigration is not an obligation. In both transit and destination countries, we demand tolerance and respect for migrants' rights so that they do not experience exploitation and violence. God's command is that we love the stranger "as one born among you" (Leviticus 19:34).

Thus, the network strives to be an oasis, together with many others, on that long route of migration for migrants at any stage of their journey. On the one hand, an oasis must be a place of fresh springs but also a place full of fruits of justice and the



Coming together as a community to support one another and work for change.

enjoyment of their rights by those people who made the decision to leave their communities of origin.

This is the spirit of solidarity that motivates the work of the Central American Migration Mission Network. It is a prophetic word that demands sowing peace through justice. It is an evangelization of the churches and communities of faith from the global south to the churches and people of faith in the north, especially the United States.

Thus, in March 2024, a group of church, social and community leadership from Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico and the United States will convene to share, exchange and build possible responses based on love, peace and

human rights in addressing migration in Central America.

The Calvinist Reformed Church of El Salvador (IRCES), and the Central American Migration Mission Network, accompanied by the PC(USA), appreciates the opportunity to write this article jointly with our mission co-worker Joseph Russ.

The Rev. Santiago Flores is pastor of the Reformed Calvinist Church of El Salvador, a partner of the PC(USA).

Joseph Russ is a mission co-worker in the Northern Triangle: El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala, and serves with the Calvinist Reform Church in El Salvador and their nonprofit arm, Alfalit.



Preparing for communion are, from left, Josefina Menjivar, the Rev. Santiago Flores and mission co-worker Dori Hjalmarson.



Joining with Salvadoran and Honduran partners for a workshop on women's leadership in Reformed and Presbyterian churches.



Celebrating the connections that weave together a community in Rosario de Mora in El Salvador.

Seeking justice and peace for Palestinians

The pictures of the hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from Gaza being forced by the Israeli military to evacuate the northern part of the Gaza Strip heading south evoked old memories of the 1948 Nakba. In 1948, Jewish Israeli terror groups destroyed and erased over 500 Palestinian villages and displaced nearly 800,000 Palestinians,¹ including over 50,000 Palestinian Christians who had to flee, thus becoming refugees in Gaza, the West Bank, Jordan and Lebanon.

The British Empire sowed the seeds of injustice in 1917. It was in that year when Lord Balfour promised Jewish Lord Rothschild that Palestine would be established as “a national home for the Jewish people.”² The Jewish population of Palestine at the time was less than 5%. The declaration did not give any attention to the rights of the Arab population of Christians and Muslims that constituted 95% of the population.³

To facilitate the permanent settlement of European Jews in Palestine, Britain lobbied for the Mandate for Palestine, and this was granted on April 25, 1920, by the League of Nations.⁴ While all other mandates were to “prepare the natives for independence,” the British Mandate over Palestine was to prepare Palestine for a Jewish settler colonial

project. In defending this decision before the House of Lords in 1922, Balfour explained the theological motives behind his colonial policy. He stated: *We have never pretended that it was purely from these materialist considerations that the declaration originally sprung. ... It is in order that we may send a message that will tell them (the Jews) that Christendom is not oblivious to their faith, that it is not unmindful of the service they have rendered to the religions of the world, and most of all to the religion that the majority of Your Lordships' house profess, and that we desire to the best of our ability to give them that opportunity of developing, in peace and quietness under British rule, those great gifts which hitherto they have been compelled to bring to fruition in countries that know not their language and belong not to their race.*⁵

The British Empire, the United States and major European countries continue to support Israel. Nowhere was this clear like in November in Gaza. After the attack of Hamas on Oct. 7, the heads of the United States, United Kingdom, Germany, France and Italy came to show their unwavering solidarity with the State of Israel. The United States opened its military storages for Israel and asked for \$14 billion in addition to the \$3.8

billion annually⁶ originally approved under the Obama administration.

The bias toward Jews versus Palestinians continues from the time of Balfour to today. This bias is based partly on Christian Zionist ideology that keeps equating the Israelites of



A tableau at the Evangelical Lutheran Christmas Church in Bethlehem shows the Christ child amidst rubble.

the Bible with the Israelis of today.⁷ The Palestinians, on the other hand, continue to be demonized, portrayed by

1 Rempfer, Kyle. *Israeli Operations Uprooted Palestinians in 1948. Many Fear a Repeat. The Washington Post*, Nov. 3, 2023. [washingtonpost.com/history/2023/11/03/israel-nakba-history-1948.](https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/2023/11/03/israel-nakba-history-1948/)

2 *Who Was Behind the Balfour Declaration?* interactive. [interactive.aljazeera.com/aje/2017/behind-balfour/index.html.](https://www.aljazeera.com/aje/2017/behind-balfour/index.html)

3 Khader, Bichera. *The Palestinian Question and the Arabs (1917-2017): Popular Support, Government Stakes. IEMed Mediterranean Yearbook 2017. European Institute of the Mediterranean. iemed.org/publication/the-palestinian-question-and-the-arabs-1917-2017-popular-support-government-stakes.*

4 *British Mandate for Palestine. encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/british_mandate_for_palestine#:~:text=The%20British%20army%20ruled%20Palestine,by%20the%20League%20of%20Nations.*

5 *Palestine Mandate: Vol. 50: Debated on Wednesday 21 June 1922. UK Parliament. hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/1922-06-21/debates/4a00f5d1-4cca-41fd-8d0b-2ab961c1e70e/PalestineMandate.*

6 Cortellessa, Eric. *'War is Expensive': How the Israel Aid Package Went From Big to Bigger. Time*, Nov. 9, 2023. [time.com/6333253/aid-israel-price-us-14-billion.](https://www.time.com/6333253/aid-israel-price-us-14-billion)

7 Krusch, David. *Zionism: Christian Zionism. Jewish Virtual Library. jewishvirtuallibrary.org/christian-zionism.*

Without dismantling the settler colonial system of oppression with its apartheid policies, its theological justifications and its subtle cultural bias against the Palestinian, our region will continue to experience wars. Equality, human dignity and compassion are necessary ingredients to any solution. The shortest road to peace is through justice. The fruit of justice will be peace.

the Israeli State as “barbaric,” “human animals” and “terrorists,” slogans the Western media keep reiterating.⁸ The suffering of the Palestinian people continues to go unnoticed. The death of over 12,000* Palestinian civilians in Gaza with over 30,000 injured, the deliberate⁹ targeting of hospitals and schools, and the destruction of mosques and churches does not seem to count nor move the hearts of Western leaders. Palestinians are seen as the “others” while Israel is seen as an ally. Israel is run by Ashkenazi European Jews and thus members of the “white” tribe. They are the last surviving Western settler colonial project that needs to be defended by all means, especially after the failure of these countries to prevent the Holocaust.¹⁰

The injustice against the Palestinian people that started in 1917 by the British Empire, the ethnic cleansing that was done to the Palestinians in 1948¹¹ and the ongoing colonization of Palestinian land is the root cause of what we see today. The war on Gaza today is just another episode of the 100-year war on Palestine. The so-called Peace Accord, which was signed at the lane of the White House in 1993, did not bring peace because it did not take the settler colonial dimension of the State of Israel, the complicity of the Anglo-Saxon

world, nor the legitimate rights for self-determination of the Palestinian people seriously. The attempt to keep ignoring the Palestinian people by signing the so-called “Abraham Accords”¹² between Israel and a few Arab countries was blown away in November. The doctrine based on pure military and surveillance approaches failed. Without dismantling the settler colonial system of oppression with its apartheid policies, its theological

justifications and its subtle cultural bias against the Palestinian, our region will continue to experience wars. Equality, human dignity and compassion are necessary ingredients to any solution. The shortest road to peace is through justice. The fruit of justice will be peace.

The Rev. Prof. Dr. Mitri Raheb is president of Dar al-Kalima University.



Banners hung near the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem on Christmas Eve.

⁸ Medet, Halil Ibrahim. Israel Paints Palestinians as ‘Animals’ to Legitimize War Crimes: Israeli Scholar. Anadolu Ajansi, Oct. 10, 2023. aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/israel-paints-palestinians-as-animals-to-legitimize-war-crimes-israeli-scholar/3030278.

⁹ Omar, Qais Omar Darwesh. Israel Bombs Another UN-Affiliated School in Gaza, Killing and Injuring Dozens of People. Anadolu Ajansi, Nov. 18, 2023. aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/israel-bombs-another-un-affiliated-school-in-gaza-killing-and-injuring-dozens-of-people/3057867.

¹⁰ Ayyash, M. Muhanad. Israel is a Settler Colony, Annexing Native Land is What it Does. Al Jazeera, July 7, 2020. [aljazeera.com/opinions/2020/7/7/israel-is-a-settler-colony-annexing-native-land-is-what-it-does](https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2020/7/7/israel-is-a-settler-colony-annexing-native-land-is-what-it-does).

¹¹ Pappé, Ilan. The 1948 Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine. *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 1, Autumn 2006, pp. 6-20. [jstor.org/stable/10.1525/jps.2006.36.1.6](https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/jps.2006.36.1.6).

¹² The Abraham Accords. U.S. Department of State. [state.gov/the-abraham-accords](https://www.state.gov/the-abraham-accords).

* Visit ochaopt.org/crisis for current casualty numbers and other real-time updates.

Peacemakers, delegation visit border ministry to collaborate on migration

In October, a PC(USA) delegation that included three international peacemakers from the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program journeyed together to Frontera de Cristo, located in the twin cities of Agua Prieta, Mexico, and Douglas, Arizona, for four days of interconnected collaboration on the dynamics of people on the move.

One of the three peacemakers was Efi Latsoudi of Lesvos Solidarity, a grassroots organization based on Lesvos Island in Greece, which focuses on a strong advocacy presence for the rights of the refugees, and runs housing, educational, employability, psychosocial and medical programs. Efi came to learn about migration in this binational context. Lesvos Solidarity is a partner program for the Southern Europe Partnership Network.

The other two peacemakers were Milagro Mejía and Noemi Sánchez of the Calvinist Reformed Church of El Salvador (IRCES). Milagro is an ordained deaconess, Salvadoran theologian, lawyer, and member and founder of IRCES. Noemi puts her faith and skills into practice by assisting IRCES colleagues in coordinating youth workshops and community activities that promote peace and teach peaceful interpersonal skills. They were



Katherine Cunningham

From left: Efi Latsoudi, Noemi Sánchez and Milagro Mejía at the conference.

accompanied by Joseph Russ, a mission co-worker who focuses on migration issues, advocacy and mission in the Northern Triangle of Central America.

The Rev. Dr. Valdir França, area co-coordinator for Latin America and the Caribbean in Presbyterian World Mission, also participated. I joined the delegation as the Southern Europe Partnership Network representative. Also represented was the binational Young Adult Volunteer (YAV) program led by James Martin and a visiting group of Unitarian Universalist young adult volunteers based in Tucson, who joined our group in Agua Prieta.

The delegation was assisted by Miriam Maldonado and the Rev. Mark Adams, mission co-workers serving with Frontera de Cristo, a Presbyterian

border ministry that seeks to demonstrate gospel values by building relationships and bridges rather than walls. According to its website, the ministry's goal is to not only address the immediate needs of those migrating and seeking refuge (i.e., shelter, resources, education, emotional support, medical care) but also to "address the root causes of mass migration, creating safe and prosperous opportunities that allow our sisters and brothers to stay in the land they call home, if they so choose."

It was in the spirit of this affirmation that the delegation met with the ministries and community collaborations of Frontera de Cristo. These included the Migrant Resource Center, Centro de Atención Migrante and Agua Para La Vida, a program of an NGO that is part of a mental health, migrant support system and catering program for the residents of the program. Agua Para La Vida conducted a hike to the border wall along areas used by migrants and their coyotes, who are part of the organized human trafficking of migrants, as well as explaining the water jugs they fill along the migration routes. Miriam accompanied the group and provided translation for us.



On the Arizona side of the wall.

Guided by Mark, our delegation visited the wall on both the U.S. and Mexico sides, especially observing the artwork that the people of Agua Prieta have placed along the iron pilings of the wall, turning it into a



Filling water barrels in the desert.

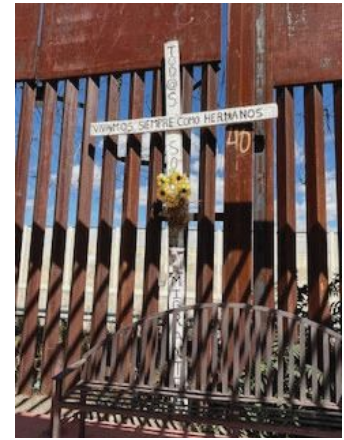
canvas of remembrance, resistance and messaging, as have other communities in the world that have had such walls imposed on them. In Arizona, we observed the surveillance system

installed by the border policing, which is capable of extremely close and highly sophisticated monitoring of the border, also known as the “silent wall.”

The visit concluded with a public forum called “Choosing Welcome: In the Face of Policies of Rejection” held Saturday, Oct. 14, at Café Justo y Mas. The forum was co-sponsored by the Universidad de Bienestar Benito Juarez, Southern Border Communities Coalition, Tucson YAVs, Presbyterian Borderlands Ministries, Frontera de Cristo and Café Justo y Mas. Efi, Milagro and Noemi all presented their perspectives (with wonderful translators from World Mission and YAV staff who were with us all weekend), along with three responders from different contexts. There is a video being made of the forum that should be available soon.

One of the clear conclusions to this amazing gathering at the borderlands is that many more visits and connections in global contexts with multiple voices, centering those who are part of people on the move and the solidarity programs and ministries that accompany them, is an important framework among partners, including the PC(USA).

The Rev. Katherine Cunningham is coordinator for the Southern Europe Partnership Network and a retired PC(USA) pastor.



Memorial in Agua Prieta at the wall.

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Christian religious LGBT advocacy in Ghana

According to the population and housing census of 2021, more than 71% of the people in Ghana identify as Christians in various church denominations. Given these figures, it is reasonable to assume that God's love will penetrate every sphere of society in this West African nation. However, the situation is the opposite, with church leaders and followers inciting hatred and prejudice against the LGBT community. This makes LGBT advocacy more and more hazardous, deadly and potentially catastrophic.

This pervasive animosity toward the LGBT community hangs from the cultural and Indigenous religious belief systems of Africans that homosexuality is taboo. Likewise, LGBT advocacy is disregarded by many of the faiths represented in the nation. Because of this, people who advocate for LGBT rights are not normally welcomed into the fellowship of their respective worship communities. They are often frowned upon, discriminated against or abused. This costs them unimaginable emotional, spiritual and psychological distress. Additionally, if parliament makes the anti-gay laws operational in Ghana, LGBT advocacy and activism will be criminalized and outlawed, with activists facing jail time.

I must say that the way the church regards and handles LGBT activists further exacerbates the situation. They are viewed as

reprobates, spiritually deprived and patronizing. In this sense, the public's attitude toward LGBT advocacy — including that of church leaders and members — remains antagonistic, denunciatory and confrontational.



The Ghana Mission Network is working as friends and colleagues in the midst of cultural and societal differences.

Like the political class of Israel, which perpetuates injustice on its citizens, the complacent attitude of the church toward LGBT people is terribly injurious to their safety and wellbeing. Just like Isaiah's call for the repentance of the oppressors of his day, the return of justice in the church will bring a complete transformation to the LGBT community so that people will be known for who they really are and have their dignity in society. This affirms Isaiah 32:17 and

emphasizes the fact that if the church takes action to promote justice, it will bring peace and genuine respect for LGBT people because peace and justice are inextricably linked.

This is why welcoming LGBT people in churches and including them as church members is crucial for the church's mission and discipleship. They are our friends and family, yet we deny that they exist. They do exist, and they are part of us. God is calling us to accept and welcome them into our fellowships.

This is why I feel God is calling me to this ministry of advocacy and pastoral care. It aligns with the dream and vision of the Center for Religion and Public Life, which is to create a climate of pastoral ministry for LGBT people to flourish in their spiritual lives and live meaningfully.

The Rev. Canon Dr. Confidence Bansah is CEO and founder of the Center for Religion and Public Life in Accra, Ghana.

250 churches in Northeast India burnt down: How to reconcile?

Tomas (not his real name) is a church minister in Manipur, Northeast India. He had teary eyes when he recalled what happened on May 3, 2023.

“I have never seen such violence in my lifetime,” he said. “They systematically ransacked our places. That first night, they burnt down a church nearby. The sky turned red by flames.”

A few months later, it was reported that 250 churches of different denominations had been burnt. For several weeks, the manhunt continued. Over 100 people died. The trauma is unimaginable, especially among women and children.

“We had to take refuge in camps, and those who could afford it fled to nearby states,” Tomas said.

Today, over 60,000 people have moved out of Manipur. Families are separated with little hope to reunite soon. The irony in this story is that the attackers are suspected of being Christians themselves, but of a different ethnicity than that of Tomas. So, how did this happen?

The Hindu Meiteis benefit from better infrastructure and government services. They are the majority population but occupy a small percentage of the land. On the other hand, the minority groups, namely the Nagas, Kukis and others, live in the hills. They enjoy much larger territories, with fewer services. Each camp has Christians among its members.



Displaced people in a temporary shelter in Majuro.

The Hindu Meiteis have contended to be recognized as a “Scheduled Tribe,” and gain further benefits, especially over land. On the other hand, minorities fear that a privileged status would work in favor of the majority. Sadly, Christian communities in both camps are trapped in this vicious circle and were involved in a way or another in the destructiveness. Meanwhile, the authorities were slow to react and left the field open for these acts of violence.

After a time of despair and helplessness, the Northeast India

Council of Churches (NEICC) gathered its own courage and decided to convene the leaders from different communities. The council will create a space for discussing grievances, misunderstanding and concerns between ethnic groups. The council is resolute to use its influence to advocate for

peaceful and nonviolent resolutions of the conflicts. As a Christian organization, the NEICC will collaborate with other faith-based organizations to promote interfaith understanding. They believe that it is by building relationships across religious lines that they would contribute to a broader sense of unity.

The Presbyterian Church of India is a partner of the PC(USA). It is a member of NEICC, the World Communion of Reformed Churches and the World Council of Churches.

Churches in Colombia work for peace and reconciliation

Katherine Cunningham



Rev. Milton Mejía

In Colombia, the Protestant evangelical churches and Christian organizations that are part of the Inter-Church Dialogue for Peace-DiPaz have been organizing for about 10 years, working to overcome violence and achieve peace through dialogue based on an understanding of the gospel that calls us to commit to nonviolence and antimilitarism; the search for truth and justice that make reconciliation possible in our country.

This work has not been easy since the different governments and armed groups that generate violence have not maintained a clear and constant commitment to the search for peace. Given this reality, DiPaz, with its member churches and Christian organizations, has developed different strategies and pastoral actions to accompany armed groups that have signed peace agreements with the government. Today, its members are in the process of reintegration into civilian life in territories where they are rebuilding their lives and carry out reconciliation processes with the communities.

The current president of Colombia, Dr. Gustavo Petro, a former guerrilla who signed peace with the Colombian government at the beginning of the 1990s, is currently calling on all armed groups to a dialogue to agree to set aside their weapons based on his proposal called Total Peace. According to the current government, Total Peace is the new social contract that will guarantee fundamental rights to all people in Colombia where Human Security will be based on the protection of life and its full realization through the implementation of social, environmental, economic and cultural policies.

To make this peace policy a reality, the president is inviting all of society to participate in its construction. This is how he has invited me, a Presbyterian pastor, to be part of the peace dialogue team with the National Liberation Army-ELN guerrilla. In addition, he has asked DiPaz to support other peace dialogue processes and encourages the international ecumenical movement and churches in other countries to accompany the search for peace agreements with armed groups and the reintegration of former guerrillas into civil society.

For this reason, we invite you to pray and walk with us in the hope that a peace that is the fruit of justice in Colombia is possible.

The Rev. Milton Mejía is pastor of the Presbyterian Church of Colombia and national coordinator of DiPaz.



Top: Participants at the International Meeting of Reconciliation in Columbia on Aug. 9 included: Sarah Henken, a mission co-worker in Columbia; the Rev. Dr. Valdir Franca, area coordinator for Latin America and the Caribbean; Sue Rheem, the PC(USA)'s representative to the United Nations; and Ellen Sherby, associate director for Global Connections in World Mission.

Middle: The panel that recognized churches and the ecumenical movement in Cuba for its contribution to the peace in Colombia.

Bottom: The panel that discussed the theme of International Experiences of Peace Construction.

Hoping for peace in Poland

It is an unbelievable paradox that in the recent years, Poland was ruled by a political party with “justice” (and “law”) in its name. Meanwhile, these years brought no justice to many marginalized groups in Poland, and since there was no justice, many spheres of life lacked peace.

LGBT people could not feel safe when hate speech and hate crimes based on sexual orientation or gender identity were not penalized, and justice for violence, including that perpetrated by state authorities, could not be pursued. Nor could they lead peaceful and carefree lives when there was no marriage equality or even civil partnerships to safeguard their loved ones and families, including their most vulnerable members — children. No justice: just insecurity.

Women were not trusted to take informed, independent decisions about conception and maternity, and often could not seek justice to terminate their pregnancies legally. And when their lives were at stake due to serious pregnancy complications, doctors were afraid to treat them, for fear of suspicion of illegal abortions. These doctors bought their peace from harassment by the authorities by failing their patients. This peace was no fruit of justice.

People with disabilities and their families were denied justice, too. They were either left alone in their daily struggles or treated as a political asset, with little consideration for their dignity. Decreasing financial benefits for disabled people and excluding their families from state support — but also from the right to earn their own money: This is no justice; this is neglect.



An International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia service is held in May 2023 at the Reformed Protestant parish in Warsaw.

Immigrants and refugees from places of war and poverty, seeking asylum in accordance with international laws, were also not treated with justice, but pushed violently through the border, day or night, rain or snow — children, women, the elderly and the sick. Meanwhile, government officials sold visas to other immigrants for bribes. No amount of “justice” in the name of the political party can make it right.

The October parliamentary election has been a game changer. New political parties at power are not a guarantee of ultimate justice — no one on Earth can be. However, they give us hope that justice to those who are weak, vulnerable and smaller in numbers will be pursued. And the fruit of justice to the underprivileged will always be peace.

Uschi Pawlik is a member of the Faith and Rainbow Foundation.



The “Icon of the Friend” that Faith and Rainbow uses during prayers at weekend retreats.

The fruit of justice will be peace

General Assembly and the shaping of our witness

In a few months' time we will be gathered again in General Assembly, this time in Salt Lake City, discerning, according to our ecclesiology, the leading of the Spirit for our times as we consider how we organize our life and witness as the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). As part of that, we will consider many overtures (proposals) from presbyteries putting forward issues and concerns that they believe the Church should be speaking out on or acting on today. Much of our work in World Mission is shaped by the decisions General Assembly takes on these overtures.

At the 225th General Assembly in 2022 (General Assemblies are held every two years), the Assembly encouraged us to stand with and advocate for our global partners in situations of conflict; recognized that Palestinians live under a system of apartheid and called upon us "to seek appropriate ways to bring an end to Israeli apartheid"; and made a number of recommendations on our support for the Democratic Republic of Congo, supporting human rights in the Philippines, responding to the human needs of those affected by violence in Cameroon, responding to the situation of depleted uranium in Iraq, ending the siege in Gaza, responding to the needs of the people of Syria, advocating for a Korea Peace Treaty, expanding our engagement with Eastern Europe, promoting peace in Ethiopia and denouncing the Russian military invasion of Ukraine. General Assembly also directed us to explore a "global covenant" to facilitate ecumenical cooperation with global partners

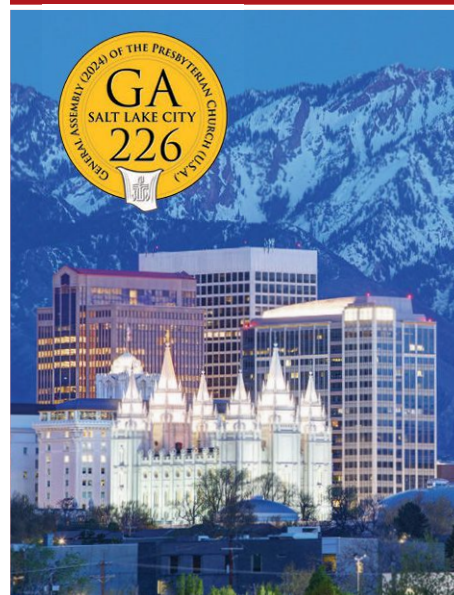
who are ministering alongside us in the U.S. with their diaspora communities here, made a number of recommendations on the treatment of refugees and asylum seekers, and called upon us to integrate concerns about and responses to climate change in our global relations.

This is a substantial agenda, which we have faithfully followed and will be reporting on at this Assembly, having woven it into our routine work of journeying with partners across the world, much of which is reflective of these concerns. Listed like this, they remind us how widespread and deep are the troubles of this world, and how we need to be showing up for our neighbors as Matthew 25, in its telling of the judgment of the nations, shows us. It also speaks eloquently to the theme of this issue of Mission Crossroads. With more justice in this world, we can also discover peace, and with peace we can all flourish.

At the time of writing, it is too early to know exactly what issues will come up at this year's General Assembly. For sure, though, there are plenty that deserve our attention at this time. We are ready to respond as part of our commitment to stand in solidarity with our partners as we journey with them and they with us, and as they share in our concerns about life here in the U.S., which is a whole other story that General Assembly will no doubt also be speaking to.

The Rev. Philip Woods is Presbyterian World Mission's associate director of global strategy and program.

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YAV learning how SDOP lifts up minority voices

As a Young Adult Volunteer (YAV) serving in New York City with a placement in the Self-Development of People (SDOP) ministry, my work is composed of program outreach, grant application workshops and site visits for grassroots organizations seeking funding.

My YAV year is providing me with an experience I would not have had anywhere else. I had viewed mission work as something Christians do as an extension of neo-colonialism. Rightfully so, I was uncomfortable with the word “missions” because it reminded me of exploitation and the silencing of marginalized voices.

Because of my placement, I now know that mission work does not always impose and can be vital in our communities when we shift power back into the hands of the people. Working with SDOP has opened my eyes to a missing sector in philanthropy: financial support for minority-led projects. The reality is most grants cater to established businesses or nonprofit organizations while overlooking the needs of minority-led grassroots efforts. This means that even though marginalized groups have ideas that can save their community, oftentimes they are forced to accept help from temporary resources.

By helping grassroots organizations file for SDOP grants, I have been able to see firsthand just how important it is that applicants use their own voices. My favorite experience so far is a

Connecticut trip I recently took with the SDOP Northeast task force. On the third day, we were invited to visit the Afro-Caribbean Culture Center

I am blessed to have been chosen to learn from the great individuals at my placement. I cannot wait to see what the rest of my YAV year brings.



The SDOP Northeast task force at First Presbyterian Church of New Haven in Connecticut.

in Waterbury. This cultural center provides the only visible safe space for the intersection of Black and Caribbean people in the community. They created a system for themselves that truly understands the needs of their own people. This solidified the true purpose of the Self-Development of People.

Juliet Owuor is a Young Adult Volunteer serving in New York City.

World mission and stewardship of opportunity

“Stewardship” is one of those strange church-y words that we rarely use outside church and that can carry with it obtuse meanings.

Stewardship is only about money, we say. Or, we say defensively, stewardship is about much more than money.

In my work, I take a “yes-and” approach. Yes, stewardship is about money, and it is about so much more than money. Yes, stewardship is about sharing our financial resources. And, to use the traditional language, it is also about sharing our time and our talent, our gifts and our energy.

But it about so much more than that ...

Lately, I have been thinking about the concept of “stewardship of opportunity.” What do we do with the opportunities the Holy Spirit presents us? How do we respond with our time and talent and treasure when moments cross the paths of our lives?

Our connectional Presbyterian ecosystem is rife with such opportunities, and our World Mission presents us with extraordinary moments to be such stewards.

That is to say: Even if we have global travel experiences, we will never be able to be in all of the places where our World Mission mission co-workers serve. We will never be able to share the relationships or



explore the contexts that these friends will. Few of us will meet such a rich diversity of God’s people, be faced with opportunities to serve, to meet human need, to teach, to be transformed.

And yet ...

Our World Mission mission co-workers are not independent agents. Because we are connected to them, with our prayers, with our commitments, and yes, with our money, wherever they go, we are there with them. Their work is our work, their relationships our relationships, their learnings and transformation our own spiritual experiences.

I have been privileged to travel in church-related ways to Kenya, to Nicaragua, to the Middle East, to Northern Ireland. Every trip I have taken has been a transformative

experience. And on every trip I’ve taken, I’ve had a sense that the congregation I was serving has been there with me.

Throughout these pages, you will read story after story about such transformative experiences. In our increasingly connected, yet broken, world, when one of our Presbyterian mission co-workers lives and serves in a place, they take us with them. We are there. It is crucial work, vital work.

We will be connected to these people, and these places, whether we support them financially or not. That is the nature of Presbyterianism, and it is the nature of our faith.

And yet I can’t help but think that those connections are stronger, the ties that bind deeper, when we are stewards of these opportunities as we share our financial gifts. We are there, and our money is as well.

Plus, the need is real, and you can be assured that what you give will make a difference in supporting ministry that matters.

In his fine book called “The Steward,” Canadian theologian Douglas John Hall writes that stewardship “pushes us towards the world.” Here, in our Presbyterian World Mission, you are presented with a tremendous opportunity to respond. Thank you for your generous support.

Your generosity makes their service possible!



Building faith-filled relationships around the world rooted in God's love

God created us for relationship. And despite all the forces that seek to separate and isolate us, God faithfully calls us to create community with our siblings around the corner and across the globe as together we engage in God's mission.

For nearly 200 years, Presbyterian World Mission has played an essential role in connecting Presbyterians in the U.S. with our global and domestic partners by sending — and supporting — mission co-workers and Young Adult Volunteers who address issues of faith and justice in the communities where they serve.

Your generous support for our mission co-workers and Young Adult Volunteers enables them to grow in their faith, love and knowledge of God even as they help to expand our own vision and understanding of God's world.

*Top photo: Kimchi Making by Dong Chan Kim
Middle photo: Farming by Seong Yo Lee
Bottom photo: Promoting Peace on Korean Peninsula by Ok Hee Lee*

Your financial gift is an important part of our global work of walking in partnership with our siblings in countries all across the globe.



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✝ *God's Mission in* **SOUTH SUDAN**

Peacebuilders serve their communities

In a recent letter, mission co-workers **Nancy and Shelvis Smith-Mather** detailed an opportunity they had to share a powerful story about two of their RECONCILE colleagues, Lucy Awate and Margaret Sadiya. Both South Sudanese women endured horrific trauma from war, and both now serve as peacebuilders. “These leaders stand in a liminal space,” Shelvis said. “They have one foot in the world of international peace organizations, and one firmly planted in their communities.” Nancy and Shelvis explained that

many outside organizations enter South Sudan hoping to promote peace, but they struggle to understand the culture and complicated context of the war-torn country. They write, “Working through Indigenous organizations, like RECONCILE, bridges that gap. Collaboration with South Sudanese faith-based organizations (FBOs) can transform good intentions into effective programs.”

Read more of their letter at pcusa.org/shelvis-and-nancy-smith-mather.



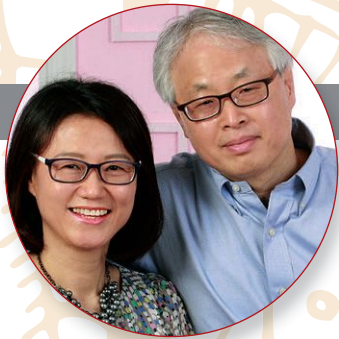
✝ *God's Mission in* **PERU**

Young adults in Peru

Jenny Valles (Koball) reflected on her time as the coordinator of the Young Adult Volunteer program in Peru, stating that, “I felt such privilege to see up close the miraculous work that God does in and through such faithful young people. And I felt great pride that God would call me — a Peruvian! — to play such a role.” Over the past 10 years she has served in this role, Jenny witnessed the positive impact that this program has on young adults from the United States, and she wondered why young adults in Peru

didn't have the same life-changing opportunity. Recently, Jenny shared that her suggestion for expanding the program to Peruvian young adults has come to fruition. She writes that despite some challenges, she has worked alongside global partners to identify young adults in the church in Peru who are eager to accept this invitation to service.

Find out more about Jenny's ministry with the YAV program at pcusa.org/jed-and-jenny-koball.



† *God's Mission in* **THAILAND**

Preparing spiritual leaders for ministry

In a recent letter, **Myoung Ho Yang** and **Jiyeon Yoo** expressed their appreciation for all those who come alongside them, praying and supporting their ministry in Thailand. They also asked for prayers as they continue to learn the Thai language and Myoung Ho prepares to teach a class in Thai at the McGilvary College of Divinity of Payap University, where he serves as professor of worship.

They write, “We desire that many faithful spiritual leaders be equipped, and that the Kingdom of the Lord be expanded and be placed on a firm foundation as a result of ministering together with you here in Thailand.”

Learn more about their ministry at pcusa.org/myoung-ho-yang-and-ji-yeon-yoo.



† *God's Mission in* **EASTERN EUROPE**

Helping refugees in Moldova

Ellen Smith, regional liaison for Eastern Europe, recently joined members of the Belarus-Ukraine-Russia Mission Network as they traveled to meet partners in Moldova and Romania (Transylvania). The YMCA Moldova has been receiving and supporting refugees at its new refugee center in Chişinău. Ellen writes, “With the help of Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, they started a program in rural areas, where

many of the refugees are living, that provides legal assistance, support for finding employment psychosocial support, and food assistance to address issues of food insecurity.” She adds, “It was a joy to spend time with YMCA Moldova because they truly love their country and want to find ways for Moldova to thrive so that people don’t feel the need to emigrate.”

Find out more about Ellen’s ministry at pcusa.org/ellen-smith



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A YEAR OF SERVICE FOR A LIFETIME OF CHANGE

YOUNG ADULT VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

A YEAR OF SERVICE FOR A LIFETIME OF CHANGE.

What is a YAV?

The Young Adult Volunteer (YAV) program is an ecumenical, faith-based year of service for young people (ages 19-30) in sites across the United States and around the world. YAVs accompany local agencies working to address root causes of poverty and reconciliation.

What do I get?

Benefits during the year of service, in-person, include a regular stipend, housing, food, all program-related transportation costs covered, medical coverage and student-loan assistance.

Where can I go?

How about a year in Scotland? Or maybe New York City? The YAV program has sites nationally and internationally working with local partners.

Find out more about the Young Adult Volunteer program by visiting www.youngadultvolunteers.org

