

Global Partnerships Team
Minnesota Conference of the United Church of Christ
Annual Report 2015-16

The Global Partnerships team has had a busy and diverse year. We continued nurturing our partnership with the Minnesota Conference's sister jurisdiction in the Philippines, while working to deepen our own theological understanding of globalization, and addressing other issues as they arose.

Throughout the 2015-16 year, Global Partnerships has been providing prayerful support to the Rev. Tom and Dr. Monica Liddle and their family, who with the help of Global Ministries have raised enough money to return to their mission work in East Timor! They will be commissioned to this work by the Minnesota Conference during Annual Meeting, and will leave the United States on June 15.

Other mission personnel to Minnesota include Amena Cristovao, who is being sponsored by Peace UCC in Duluth, through Global Ministries. Amena worked at Clinic Imanuel in East Timor with Monica and Tom Liddle. She was responsible for the clinic's simple laboratory, where she performed malaria smears, sputum smears for TB, and basic urine tests. She was also provided care for TB patients, which includes distributing daily medicines, weight checks, and follow-up care. Amena will complete her studies and internships in Duluth this semester, and will return to East Timor with Thom and Monica in June as a fully-fledged Medical Laboratory Technician. While she was already working in this capacity at Clinic Imanuel, her new degree has increased her knowledge and skills, and she will return home as a leader in her chosen field.

Mission personnel from Minnesota who are serving in other parts of the world include Don and Maryjane Westra in Honduras. In 2013 they "deployed" to Honduras where they now serve with Global Ministries' partner, the Evangelical and Reformed Church. They work in the social service branch of the church Synod, AIEH, which oversees schools and clinics. Specifically, they are assigned to a vocational school, CEVER, in Yoro in the state of Yoro, Honduras. Maryjane works alongside the administration, and Don is working on sustainable projects to provide financial security into the future.

Our other work this year broke down into three main sections. First, the Minnesota Conference has a long-standing partnership with the Southeast Mindanao Jurisdictional Area of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (SEMJA). According to our "Guidelines on Partnership", "We understand partnership to be a sharing of faith-life experiences that hold one another accountable for our responsibility for ushering in the Reign of God."

SEMJA has been engaged in a fierce struggle to support the indigenous Lumad people, driven off their ancestral home by U.S. funded military forces in support of trans-national corporations who want Lumad land for mining and other sources of profit. Over 300 people have been camped out at the SEMJA headquarters (approximately half a square block in area) in Davao City for over a year. SEMJA has been public and bold in support of the Lumad. United Church of

Christ in New Brighton, First United Church of Christ of Northfield, Cherokee Park UCC, and Mayflower UCC had the privilege of hosting Lumad leaders when they were in Minnesota in May.

A Minnesota delegation led by Conference Minister Shari Prestemon and including Global Partnerships team members Josephine Fernandez and Thom Haines will visit SEMJA in August to express solidarity on behalf of the Minnesota Conference and seek to further deepen the relationship.

As a team, we depend on the wisdom of the Rev. Dr. Eleazar Fernandez as we seek to better understand the partnership with SEMJA. Eleazar is a professor at United Theological Seminary in New Brighton, as Global Ministries assigned personnel, is president of Union Theological Seminary in Manila. His book, *Burning Center, Porous Borders: The Church in a Globalized World*, has been particularly helpful to the subcommittee.

Global Partnerships' second main area of work has been the development of a foundation and plan for a young adult pilgrimage to our partner area in SEMJA. This was an idea that had been regularly discussed between us and our partners, but no real action had been taken until the Rev. Amy Wick Moore, of United Church of Christ, New Brighton, approached GPT with the idea of using part of her sabbatical in the winter of 2016 to travel to SEMJA to explore the possibility of taking a group of young adults there at a later time. Her trip went well, and it has been agreed that a group of young adults (college age, minimum 18 years old) will travel to SEMJA in late May, 2017, to attend the college student jurisdictional gathering. Rev. Amy will be giving a workshop and hosting a table at Annual Meeting.

Global Partnerships' third main area of work has been the implementation of the MN Conference 2015 resolution on Just Peace in Palestine and Israel, passed by the Annual Meeting in June, 2015, and assigned to us to implement by the Board of Directors.

As you will recall, this was Minnesota's second resolution on Just Peace in Palestine and Israel passed in Minnesota (the first, a decade earlier), and the MN Conference joined about ten other conferences at General Synod in Cleveland to present the resolution of the Palestine Israel Network. (Review the full resolution at ucc.org). At the national level, after a few slow months, several important things happened that relate to our work here:

-- A delegation of national staff, including Pres. John Dorhauer and Rev. Traci Blackmon, and several Conference ministers traveled to the Middle East to witness the work of Global Ministries.

-- Global Ministries launched the "Year of the Middle East" including many online resources we can use in our congregations.

-- Almost immediately, United Church Funds divested money from almost all of the companies named in the national resolution. There has also been some communication with Pension Boards but no change thus far.

-- More importantly, Boycott and Divestment strategies are working to pressure companies profiting off of illegal settlement activity: Veolia, G4S, and Ahava have all announced they are moving their business or selling off Israeli occupation-related contracts. These are huge victories.

Meanwhile in Minnesota, the working group has grown to about a dozen members from several congregations, including First Congregational of Minnesota in Minneapolis, Macalaster-Plymouth in Saint Paul, Mayflower Church in Minneapolis,, Plymouth Congregational in Minneapolis, First UCC - Northfield, Zoar, and Cherokee Park in Saint Paul. Our focus is largely on education – keeping the dialogue going in our churches. We’re offering a workshop at Annual Meeting, developing resources for ongoing congregational study, and making ourselves available to assist in getting these conversations going. In the fall, we plan to schedule some events with Jewish members of the community and we will promote other local resources your church can connect to. Resources for making occupation-free financial decisions will soon be available from the national PIN group, and these will be shared for church and personal use as well. We are starting to make fair trade olive oil available for sale in churches, and also to promote a pilgrimage hosted by Rev. Shari Prestemon next winter.

We want to issue a challenge to others in the conference, on the matter of interfaith work. We hope that folks involved in the many ministries of churches across the MN Conference will look out for opportunities to partner with Jewish, Muslim, and other interfaith partners. There are groups doing great work on immigration, the environment, economic and racial justice. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict need not be the only issue that prompts us to seek out interfaith dialogue.

A year from now, we hope that every church in the conference will have had the opportunity to learn about the Middle East and that there will be the beginnings of new interfaith friendships in our communities.

In summary, our year has been full and productive. We are grateful for the opportunity to serve the Minnesota Conference in this capacity, and we look forward to next year.

Respectfully submitted,

Jessica Allen
Chair, Global Partnerships Team
Plymouth Congregational Church, Minneapolis

Current team members:

Rev. Ava Adams-Morris, First Congregational United Church of Christ, Mankato

Josephine Fernandez, Mayflower Church, Minneapolis
Thom Haines, Mayflower Church
Rev. Glen Herrington-Hall, Cherokee Park United Church, Saint Paul
Jim Leslie, Plymouth Congregational Church
Gary Wagenbach, First United Church of Christ, Northfield
Staff liaison: ACM Rev. Steve Boorsma

The Rev. Emily Goldthwaite Fries is the leader of the Just Peace in Israel and Palestine Working Group, a subcommittee of Global Partnerships. We are grateful for her dedication to this cause.

An actively contributing friend of the team, who speaks wisdom to us when we most need it:
Rev. Dr. Eleazar Fernandez, United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities and Union Theological Seminary, Manila.