

December 2008 issue: **Freedom in the Philippines**

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CELEBRATING FREEDOM IN THE PHILIPPINES

Pastor will spend Christmas with family after being unjustly jailed for 15 months

After spending 15 months in jail accused of a murder he didn't commit, a Filipino pastor will be spending Christmas with his family.

Berlin Guerrero, a minister with the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP), was released from jail in September by order of the Philippines' Court of Appeals. Human rights groups say the pastor was abducted by Naval Intelligence and Security operatives on May 27, 2007. He was detained from that time until his release was ordered by the appellate court. He was accused of killing a police officer in the 1990s, but the appellate court ruled that the lower court lacked probable cause to issue an arrest warrant.

In an affidavit Guerrero said he was tortured and accused of being an officer of the Communist Party of the Philippines. Many pastors and other church leaders have been arrested or killed under

suspicious circumstances for advocating human rights and anti-corruption efforts in the Philippines.

"Berlin's freedom is an occasion for rejoicing," says Mark Koenig, coordinator of the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program. "However, the pursuit of justice in the Philippines continues. November 2008 saw the arrests of several union leaders."

Larry Emery, pastor of Walnut Grove Community Presbyterian Church in Walnut Grove, Calif., and other Presbyterians in the United States have worked on Guerrero's behalf with elected officials in the United States and in the Philippines.

David Hudson, area coordinator for Asia and the Pacific, and others from the PC(USA) visited Guerrero in October. "The importance of being in solidarity with those imprisoned became clearer for several colleagues from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) who shared a meal and visited with Pastor Berlin and leaders from the UCCP," Hudson says. "Berlin expressed gratitude for all who visited him while in prison and had prayed for his release."

Read mission worker Rebecca Lawson's account of the release at

http://www.pcusa.org/missionconnections/letters/lawsonr/lawsonr_0809.htm

Read a Philippine newspaper account at <http://www.pcusa.org/pcnews/2008/08661.htm>

WORLD MISSION CHALLENGE PLANNED FOR THE FALL OF 2009

World Mission Celebration set for October 21–24, 2009

World Mission Challenge is the successor to the very successful Mission Challenge '07, which sent 48 PC(USA) missionaries to visit 144 presbyteries in September 2007. The month-long program will begin September 25 and end October 18, 2009. In cooperation with the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program, this year several mission workers will be accompanied by international church partners. For more information visit <http://www.pcusa.org/missionchallenge/>

World Mission Celebration will follow soon after the Challenge, October 21–24, 2009, in Cincinnati, Ohio, and will begin with meetings of PC(USA) mission networks. The Celebration will be a gathering of "Presbyterians passionate about mission"—mission network participants; congregational, presbytery and synod mission leaders; mission trip leaders; and other mission initiators and supporters. It will offer an opportunity to learn about new resources, hear inspiring speakers, talk with mission personnel, and meet international church partners. "Stay tuned" for more information at <http://www.pcusa.org/missioncelebration>

MISSION CONSULTATION ON WATER

Conferees told churches need to step up involvement in international water issues

Jesus' imperative to give drink to the thirsty is largely neglected by churches today, according to the head of two organizations dedicated to clean water access in the developing world.

David Douglas, founder of Waterlines and Water Advocates, told the 40 participants of the Mission Consultation on Water Nov. 13–15 at Westminster Presbyterian Church in Sacramento, Calif.: "Water will be one of the three most important issues in the 21st century, along with food and energy."

Douglas said most churches are not aware that 1.1 billion people lack clean drinking water and another 2.6 billion do not have adequate sanitation. And although water-related diseases claim between 2 million and 5 million lives each year, the issue has received scant media attention.

Participants at the meeting included representatives from congregations, middle governing bodies, country mission networks, and Presbyterian groups focused on water projects as well as General Assembly Council staff and international mission personnel. At the end of the consultation the group decided to form a mission network focusing on clean water and sanitation around the world.

The consultation was sponsored by the PC(USA)'s International Health Ministries Office and the Presbyterian Hunger Program. To read more: <http://www.pcusa.org/pcnews/2008/08864.htm>

A NEWBORN MALAWIAN BABY CRIES FOR HELP

Moses survives-and receives a new family

Half buried in the sand along the Phapa River in northern Malawi a newborn baby cries for help. Standing at the door of her mud-brick dwelling, a young woman thinks she hears something . . . Could it be a crying baby? Cautiously she makes her way toward the source of the noise and comes upon a scene she will not forget-a baby, half-buried, with his umbilical cord still attached.

"Let us call him Chotondo," suggests a volunteer worker at the Lusubilo (Hope) Nursery in Karonga, where the little one is brought. Chotondo means "victor"!

After a few weeks, however, little Victor is still struggling for life. The nursery in Karonga contacts the Ministry of Hope Crisis Nursery in Mzuzu and asks for help. The next day Crisis Nursery's staff make the three-hour drive north to pick up their newest charge, underweight, undernourished Chotondo. The baby abandoned in the reeds by the river is re-christened Moses.

Moses' story is told on national TV and touches the heart of the nation. For the first time many Malawians become aware of the vital work being done in God's name by Ministry of Hope.

Three months later smooth-skinned Moses is strong, healthy, and ready to become part of a village family. He is taken back to Karonga, where he is eagerly received by a foster family of mother, father and four children.

Read Darlene and Paul Heller's letter about Moses at http://www.pcusa.org/missionconnections/letters/hellerp/hellerp_0810.htm

A MINISTRY ON THE BORDER OFFERS COMFORT

. . . to suffering persons seeking to provide for their families

The Migrant Resource Center-a partnership of Frontera de Cristo (one of the six U.S.-Mexico Border Ministry sites), the Sagrada Family Parrish of Agua Prieta, and Just Coffee-in just the first six months of this year provided food, water, care and comfort for more than 11,000 people, including over 300 children.

One instance: A mother and her three children arrived barefoot at the Center after having lost their shoes in the mud after a rain in the desert and having been detained for over 24 hours in the

United States. The church provided a spiritual, emotional, and physical welcome for this mother and her children.

Mark Adams, mission worker at the Center, asks: "Please join us in prayer for governments on both sides of the border that they (we) may discover and enact more just and humane ways to be in relationship and that there will be an end to the death and suffering in our deserts of persons who are seeking to provide for their families."

Read Mark's letter: http://www.pcusa.org/missionconnections/letters/adamsm/adamsm_0807.htm

RUSSIA ROMA LEADERS SHARE VISIONS AND BEST PRACTICES

"The feeling of unity in this place was amazing"

A week-long all-Russian Christian Roma leaders meeting took place in Kursk beginning Thanksgiving Day. PC(USA) mission worker Al Smith in Moscow had been working for over two years with Piotr Romme, a Baptist coordinating Roma work in Russia out of the city of Kostroma, to reorganize and strengthen a network of churches working with the Roma (often known as Gypsies). They collaborate closely with Dick and Carolyn Otterness of the Reformed Church in America (RCA), working out of Budapest with Roma Mission partners in Hungary and Carpath-Ukraine.

Bernard Paetzold, PC(USA) regional liaison for Central Europe and Roma Ministries, writes about the meeting: My humble expectation had been to find a small group of most probably non-Roma gathering maybe in a kitchen to talk about "Roma problems." But what a surprise: We found more than 40 people, mostly Roma, from all over Russia talking about their own visions and best practices. Some from remote places in Siberia (3,000+ miles away) had been 48 hours on the road.

Ellen and Al Smith write: The leadership team of the network has worked together to organize evangelizations in different cities, and to help one another in what can often be very lonely work. The Roma are widely rejected, if not despised, by their Russian neighbors and tend to have a very low self-image. It is hard even to interest Russians in this ministry, let alone get them excited about it. . . . Participants shared their witness and their ministry. The feeling of unity in this place was amazing.

Dick and Carolyn Otterness, RCA, write: Our extended week with Roma and Gadge colleagues, where animated conversations were shared sometimes in three or four languages, was a powerful testimony to the strength and possibilities that come through ecumenical partnerships, both formal and informal.

To read more: <http://www.pcusa.org/worldwide/russia/roma.htm>

AND BRIEFLY . . .

- A joint **SIMULCAST WORSHIP SERVICE** between the Christmas Lutheran Church in Bethlehem and the Bethlehem Chapel at the Washington National Cathedral will be held Saturday, Dec. 20, at 10 a.m. Eastern time. The service is sponsored by the Ad Hoc Committee for Bethlehem, Holy Land Christian Ecumenical Foundation, Sharing Jerusalem, and the Washington Interfaith Alliance for Middle East Peace. The service may be watched online at

<http://video1.cathedral.org/nave>

- Some 250,000 people have fled their homes in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of **CONGO**, escaping the fight that broke out between the army and rebels in August. The country is trying to recover from a long civil war that reportedly killed some 5 million people, mostly from starvation and disease. As the newly internally displaced people join about 1 million already displaced in the region, there is fear of a humanitarian disaster. The PC(USA) is responding to the situation through prayer, financial support and advocacy. To read more:

<http://www.pcusa.org/worldwide/congo/pray-give.htm>

- February, March **MISSION NETWORK** meetings:

Iraq Mission Network, February 4-6, 2009, Louisville, Ky.

Czech Republic Mission Network, March 12-15, 2009, Pittsburgh, Pa.

For more information and contacts see the Iraq and Czech Republic country pages at

<http://www.pcusa.org/worldwide>

- An **INTERFAITH LISTENING TEAM** from **PAKISTAN** will visit six presbyteries February 13–March 8, 2009. The originally scheduled visit by team members Rev. Maqsood Kamil, executive secretary of the Presbyterian Church of Pakistan, and Khuram Dastgir Khan, elected member of Pakistan's National Parliament from the Muslim League Party, was postponed due to events in Pakistan. For more information: <http://www.pcusa.org/listeningproject/>

- Outreach in **MYANMAR** from **SOUTH KOREA**. Dan and Carol Chou Adams, missionaries in South Korea, write: "We welcomed five students from Myanmar into the Asia Pacific Graduate School of Theological Studies for the 2008-09 academic year. . . . As 2008 draws to a close we will be making our third journey to Myanmar to lecture in theological schools and to encourage our alumni who are serving as pastors, missionaries, church administrators, seminary professors, and seminary deans and presidents."

- The **JINISHIAN MEMORIAL PROGRAM** has scheduled two **STUDY TOURS** to **ARMENIA** in 2009. The tentative dates: May 10–21 and September.13–24. Cost: \$2,500, not including air transportation. Deadline for applying for the May trip: February 15, 2009. For information visit <http://www.pcusa.org/jinishian/studytour.htm>

- Last summer Janet Guyer, PC(USA) AIDS consultant in **SOUTHERN AFRICA**, facilitated the second curriculum development workshop for the Network for African Congregational Theology (NetACT). The purpose of this network of 11 theological institutions in sub-Saharan Africa is to provide leaders a theological approach to addressing HIV/AIDS, poverty, and other issues. Donations to help fund a similar 2009 workshop can be made to ECO 862706 (specify gifts for the 2009 NetACT workshop).

- Members of the Forman Christian College community in **PAKISTAN** are grieving the murder of one of their professors. Read a statement by Forman at <http://www.pcusa.org/worldwide/pakistan/forman.htm>

- **PRAYER REQUEST**. Kistone Mhango, who has served as the head of Malawi's Ekwendini's community health department, was in a vehicle accident, and has paralysis from the waist down. Please pray for him, his family, and the community.—Martha Sommers

- **QUOTE OF THE MONTH**. Our impression of today's **CAMBODIA** is one of great vitality and hope. Cambodia's population is predominately young, and this is evident in the rapidly

growing churches we visited. While still a small minority, the Christian Church is making a great impact on Cambodian society.—From a letter by Tim and Yuko Boyle. To read more:

http://www.pcusa.org/missionconnections/letters/boylet/boylet_0812.htm

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<http://www.pcusa.org/worldwide/newsletter>