

World Mission Celebration
Plenary Presentation – Thursday, 22 October 2009
“Going Deeper: The Power of Presbyterian Mission in Jesus’ Way”
Hunter Farrell

I. Introduction

Bienvenidos! Karibu! Soyez les bienvenus! Welcome to the Family Reunion! You’re related to every single person in this room We’re here to celebrate the faithfulness of the God who has touched us in our brokenness and healed us, has gathered us into a new community and sent us out into a broken world to be part of God’s amazing mission.

Take a look around you—look how many Presbyterians are passionate about God’s mission! Lis, I can’t believe so many people came! Don’t they know that Sojourner Magazine editor Jim Wallis is speaking tonight at the convention center? (Ushers-- seal the exits, please!!). No seriously, to see Presbyterians renewing friendships with folks they haven’t seen in years—and to gather to engage in prayerful reflection and discussion about God’s mission has really been moving!

I was standing by one of our Latin American partners as she looked out over a bunch of you here in the lobby—her comment was: “Nunca he visto a gringos abrazarse tanto!” “I’ve never seen gringos hug each other so much!”

Look around you! Let’s get sense of who’s here:

- For the past three days, hundreds of Presbyterians have been meeting in dozens of our mission networks to pray together, to listen to global partners, to share best practices (and note some “worst practices” to avoid!), and to coordinate their work and relationships in countries around the world (STAND-APPLAUSE to WELCOME)...
- Volunteers from Cincinnati Presbytery and beyond...
- We celebrate the partners: Validated Mission Support Groups leaders and staff, representatives from all the Presbyterian mission organizations that signed on to the “Dallas Invitation to Expanding Partnership in God’s Mission (Presbyterian Women, Presbyterian Peace Fellowship, the Witherspoon Society, Young Adult Volunteers, presbytery partnerships, mission networks), and finally, Presbyterians who care passionately about God’s mission in the world...
- International partners – from partner churches, agencies and organizations...
- About 45 mission co-workers and ten international peacemakers are here-- each gave a month to share stories of how God is at work around the world – and they shared it with thousands of Presbyterians in 152 presbyteries across the church!
- World Mission staff (Lis Valle, Ellen Sherby, your team, all World Mission staff...)

So we’re here to celebrate our faithful God who continues to send people out who proclaim the Good News of God’s Realm to be agents of proclamation and liberation in a world of need.

II. Time of Change in Mission

Time of massive change in the way we Presbyterians engage in God's mission around world. To be a faithful Presbyterian back in the 60's you wrote a check and prayed. This year, missiologist Robert Priest estimates that more than 2 million American Christians will cross U.S. borders to participate in a short-term mission trip. Changes in communication, international travel and technology make connecting to global partners easier and less expensive and this has opened the doors to one of the biggest on-going people-exchanges in history. The level of activity is mind-boggling!

In our own Presbyterian Church (USA), I am convinced that more Presbyterians are deeply engaged in world mission than ever before in the history of our church, praise God! And by exposing ourselves to our global partners' faith and to their understanding of God's mission, we open ourselves up for some powerful transformation. How many of us haven't begun to experience this deep personal change opened up to us by our global partners like Mark's experience in the following skit. In our skit, Mark is preparing himself for a short-term mission experience as he prays, and Veronica has, for the purposes of our skit, accepted to play the role of God's voice:

SKIT: "The New Face of Mission in Africa" (Veronica Muchiri and Mark Adams)

But sisters and brothers in Christ, the need for transformation of our churches is so great:

- We Americans spend more money on ourselves today than ever before in our history, yet studies show we're more obese, less healthy, and less happy;
- Our shopping malls have become sumptuous temples and multimillion dollar industries create needs we didn't know we had so we will consume more;
- We are one of the wealthiest nations in the world and yet our lack of care for the earth places in jeopardy its very survival.
- This great nation of ours has at the same time more billionaires than at any time in our history... and a frighteningly large and growing number of children who don't get enough to eat each day.

Yet we are Branches of the Same Vine with sisters and brothers in Christ around the world.

II. The Call to "go deeper" in God's mission in way that transforms our global activity into global discipleship.

- a. Call to Go Deeper into root causes of poverty and injustice, "for Jesus' sake". Much STM work focuses exclusively on surface symptoms of human suffering.

Do you remember the "Live Aid" benefit concerts in 1984 and 1985, horrendous images of famine-stricken Ethiopians were beamed into living rooms around the world.

Thousands of starving children, their bellies distended by famine, stared blankly into the

eyes of the public. More than one million Ethiopians died due to the lack of food. More than \$100 million was raised for direct famine relief and we all felt better that we had done something to fight hunger in Ethiopia.

But after the famine was over, disturbing facts surfaced. Throughout the 80's, there was more than enough food in Ethiopia to feed all of the people, despite the ongoing civil war. But a corrupt, Communist regime refused to allow desperately needed food aid to reach the rebellious Tigray, Eritrea and Wollo regions. The government manipulated the media and international aid organizations in an effort to punish dissent, channel donated food to feed its own army and hide the real causes of the famine. The end result was precisely the opposite of what most well-intentioned donors had hoped for. Renowned British social researcher Alex de Waal later said, "*The humanitarian effort prolonged the war, and with it, human suffering.*" Unless we work with partners to identify and address the root causes of poverty and injustice, our compassion simply is not enough and can, in fact, worsen the situation.

Our partners are calling for us to go deeper and address with them the root causes of poverty and injustice.

- b. Call to Go Deeper in proclaiming the good news of God's love in Jesus Christ. Our partners around the world are often surprised at how secular our American Christianity has become. As you observe many of our STM groups, there is an awkwardness about praying for a person in need, about sharing one's faith...because we often do not give testimony to our faith in our secular context.

Our partners are calling to us to go deeper, to open our hearts to God's Spirit as we freely and respectfully share the difference Christ has made for us, how God touched us in our place of greatest brokenness, changed us, and invited us to be agents of change in the world. Our partners

- c. Call to Go Deeper into partnership between PCUSA mission initiators and Presbyterian World Mission. Why is it that we work better in partnership better with our partners around the world than we do with each other? The Dallas Consultation opened up remarkable opportunities to expand our partnership with each other. And we'll be exploring those possibilities in the Dallas track of conference workshops over the next 2 days. The purpose is to craft benchmarks to strengthen our mission faithfulness. Presbyterian World Mission is committed to inspiring, equipping and connecting Presbyterians to be more effective in God's mission. Here is some of what we are doing today:

- This week's roll-out of Mission Crossroads web page.
- Enhanced support for mission networks—now 39 and counting!
- Accompaniment of mission practitioners who need help in engaging effectively with partners whether in microfinance, education, health, or deep issues of partnership.

The challenge to our Church is profound: Are we prepared to transform our global activity into global discipleship in a way that connects global mission with local mission with our day to day lifestyle? Are we ready to treat our global partners as our sisters and brothers, which, in Christ, they are?

If we're ready, we need to be prepared that God would transform our Church in ways we never anticipated.

Call to prayer – 15 minutes