

A letter to my supporting churches  
Eugene, Oregon - 20 May 2009

Dear friends,

Usually I write to you from some far corner of the world, but today and for the last few weeks I've been home in Eugene trying to catch up on a backlog of stories to be written and photos to be edited. I confess I enjoy working in the field much more, but if I don't do the corresponding desk work, no one ever will meet the fascinating folks I have the privilege to encounter. So I'm wrapping up work on Brazil, the Congo, Southern Sudan, Malawi, Syria and Central America. (I said I was behind!) Next week I nonetheless head off again, this time to South Africa to document how the Methodist Church there is offering hospitality to Zimbabwean migrants within a very xenophobic environment. I'll also work on a story there about ministry with children living with HIV and AIDS.

In between the hours staring at the computer screen, and glancing longingly out the window at spring, I'm doing some interpretative work. I led a weekend retreat for a United Methodist Men's group in southern Oregon. This coming weekend I'm the keynote speaker for the annual youth convocation of the Pacific Northwest Annual Conference. In June I'll speak about mission at the Rocky Mountain Annual Conference session in Colorado, and shortly after that teach a course on Sudan at a Conference School of Mission in Washington State. In July I'll lead a photography workshop in Ohio for communicators from United Methodist conferences in Africa.

I've also done a bit of talking—including stops in New York, Baltimore, and Washington, DC—about a new book on Darfur that I coauthored with a colleague. "Where Mercy Fails: Darfur's Struggle to Survive" is available at your local independent bookstore or through online sellers.

During the summer I'll be working on a variety of stories here in the U.S. for *Response* magazine, and then at the end of the summer will travel a bit to work on a series of portraits of how faith communities around the globe are responding to the challenge of HIV and AIDS.

Amidst all this work I manage to see Lyda occasionally, either here in Oregon or in New York, where she continues her work as a mission interpreter for the northeastern jurisdiction. Both kids are currently living at home with me, which means no shortage of local drama. And out the window of my office, between me and the springtime, is my new deck, unfinished from last summer, reminding me that I've got to find time to nail some more boards.

In response to queries from several of you with more dynamic websites, one project I've got on my list is to develop a flash-based introduction to my work that can be embedded in your congregation's website. Stay tuned.

Having too much to do is a wonderful testimony to the wonderful and intriguing world in which we live, and the myriad ways in which the church is involved in mission. Thanks to your congregation for all that you do in mission locally and in faraway places. And thanks for affording me the painful privilege of serving the church by telling the redemptive stories of God's liberating spirit at work in so many places, bringing wholeness, reconciliation, and justice.

Peace,

Paul

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