

**“On the Occasion of the Visit of Mae Princila and Mae Teresa”**  
**Unitarian Universalists of the Cumberland Valley**  
**Boiling Springs, PA • December 6, 2009**  
**Rev. Judy Welles©; Priscilla Laws, Terri Smiley**

**Invitation to Worship**  
**Rev. Judy Welles**

*Why* have we made it our mission to transform lives and care for the world? *Why* do we think that’s important?

In thinking about how to cast the vision of our social justice efforts here at UUCV as an introduction to today’s service, it occurs to me that there is a natural human tendency — at least among compassionate people — to look at a situation and say to oneself “This could be better.” This observation is often followed by the next logical question, “What could I do to make it better?”

There is a process that we go through, and we go through it so swiftly that we are unaware of all the steps involved. But I think it’s a good idea to take apart this natural impulse to help, and question ourselves as religious people, to give us a religious and spiritual context for the efforts we willingly undertake to make things better.

In order to notice that something is wrong, we have to have a vision of what is right. This vision of life at its best, when everything works and justice prevails, could be referred to as the kingdom of heaven. You may recall Duane’s sermon earlier this Fall about how the early Christians envisioned the Kingdom of Heaven here and now, on this earth, in this lifetime. They believed that heaven isn’t a place we come to after a life of sorrow and suffering and a brutal, miserable death; it is or can be the place where we live now, if our lives are informed by love, caring, compassion.

So first we have the vision, and then there is the noticing. Something is wrong. We may notice that children are dirty and hungry, or that people of color are treated differently, or that some of us have rights that others don’t. Power is distributed unevenly, some people take advantage of others, some of us don’t have the right to full control of our own bodies. Some of us have opportunities to heal, while others sicken and die from neglect.

So we have a vision of how things might be, and we can see that they aren’t that way now. But what is it that moves us forward to take a step, and then another and another, to right the wrongs that we see around us?

I think that a big part of this impetus is the human desire to connect. Or perhaps better said, the human awareness that we are alike, that we are already connected. When we see and recognize the suffering of another, we will be more moved to reach out and help if we can see ourselves in that other person. It could be as simple as seeing a pregnant woman standing on a crowded subway car, and remembering how you felt when you were that pregnant, and getting up to give her your seat. She smiles at you, you smile at her, and for a moment you are connected.

Or to take a much broader view, just imagine how it must feel to Priscilla that a hundred girls in Africa call her “mother,” and that an African child bears her name. The world gets smaller, and as it does, hearts get bigger. We occupy each other’s dreams, and we don’t forget.

I often speak from this pulpit about how the role of the church — this religious community — is to help us become our best selves, to give us opportunities to reach deep inside and bring out the very best we have. Working for justice within the context of congregational life allows us to discover strengths and passions we never knew we had. We connect with our wisest and most humane instincts — with the very core of who we are — and that is what religion is all about: to connect with the most whole and perfect part of our individual selves, to connect with the “me” that is in every “you,” and through those connections, to connect with that greater Self that includes each of us in its encompassing embrace.

Everywhere in the world, at this very moment, someone is dreaming, someone is crying, someone is laughing, someone is dying. Come by here, Lord. Kum ba yah.

### **First Reading**

“To Educate a Girl”  
Kofi Annan, 2004<sup>1</sup>

Every boy and girl around the world has a right to expect that we will do all we can to ensure that they will enjoy their right to an education. But in most countries, girls are the most disadvantaged when it comes to school. As this year’s State of the World’s Children reports, millions of young girls never attend school at all, millions more never complete their education, and countless numbers never receive the quality education that is their right. These millions of girls slip easily to the margins of our societies – less healthy than they could be, less skilled, with fewer choices in their lives and less hope for the future. As they grow into women, they are ill-prepared to participate fully in the political, social and economic development of their communities. They – and their children in turn – are at higher risk of poverty, HIV/AIDS, sexual exploitation, violence and abuse.

Conversely, to educate a girl is to educate a whole family. And what is true of families is also true of communities and, ultimately, whole countries. Study after study has taught us that there is no tool for development more effective than the education of girls. No other policy is as likely to raise economic productivity, lower infant and maternal mortality, improve nutrition and promote health – including helping to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS. No other policy is as powerful in increasing the chances of education for the next generation.

### **Mae Princila’s Reflections** **Priscilla Laws**

How did our bursary project to educate girls in Mozambique get started? Basically, it began with my longing to live under African skies with my path

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations Report on the State of the World’s Children, 2004

“marked by the stars in the southern hemisphere” — at least for a while. When I graduated from college in 1961, I turned down a teaching job in rural Tanzania. There was no Peace Corps yet and I was afraid to go alone. In the Fall of 2003 Peter Bechtel and Ruth MKhwanazi Bechtel visited Dickinson College and gave a series of lectures about their work in Mozambique. I was amazed to learn about how the emerging concepts of human scale sustainable development guided their work. (As many of you know Peter and Ruth are the son and daughter-in-law of UUCV members — Joan and Dan Bechtel.)

In July 2004, I attended a physics education conference in South Africa, after which I traveled north to Mozambique to become acquainted with Peter and Ruth’s sustainable development projects to see if I could get involved in any of them.

I learned about Ruth’s work with Oxfam to help rural communities build regional schools and about a small bursary project she had established on her own for young girls. Ruth was passionate about the promotion of girls’ education because, as one of 8 children from a poor family in Swaziland, she finished high school, attended college, and did graduate work thanks to bursary funds. This has not only improved Ruth’s life but the lives of many Southern Africans who have been touched by her sustainable development work. So I returned to Carlisle with the idea that helping girls stay in school beyond 5<sup>th</sup> grade was going to be my mission!

In early December, a few months after my visit to Mozambique, I was contacted by Karen and Bill Butt, Canadian overseas personnel sponsored by the United Church of Canada. Karen and Bill were working with the Christian Council of Mozambique in the Province of Zambézia. Karen, a former elementary school art teacher, had spent two years establishing AIDS Prevention Clubs for Girls, known as PEDRA. The PEDRA girls learn about AIDS through the arts including handicrafts, speechmaking, drama, singing and dancing.

Karen discovered that 25 loyal PEDRA club girls from rural villages had just finished the top grades in their local elementary schools. In order to attend upper primary school and high school, these girls would have to move to a residence in Namarrói near the regional school there. Although Karen could borrow money temporarily from the Christian Council for school uniforms, residence fees and transportation to Namarrói, she needed \$10,000 by middle February to pay for the 2005 bursary expenses.

I swallowed hard and went to Judy and Duane feeling both incredibly excited and very panicked. Our ministers were so supportive that we managed to get the approvals necessary to start raising funds from UUCV members and friends from near and far by middle January. So our UUCV Mozambique Bursary Project was born and is now entering its sixth year. The program has grown more than five fold from 25 girls in 2005 to an anticipated 133 girls in 2010.

By living in residences called “lars” in Molumbo, Namarrói, or Quelimane, most of our 2010 Bursary girls can attend 8<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grades. In addition, 10 girls who just finished 10<sup>th</sup> grade plan to enroll in a 1-year

elementary school teaching program, while another girl is slated to finish a 3-year agricultural program.

The phenomenal growth of our bursary program is due to several factors including annual increases in UUCV donations and supplemental financial help from the United Church of Canada. Also, the average cost of a bursary has gone down from \$300 to \$225 due to Christian Council efficiencies in management and the Mozambique governments' addition of higher grades in Molumbo in conjunction with increases in the residential capacity of a rudimentary low cost girls' lar that had already been established there.

During each review trip I have been touched by the gratitude expressed by the girls. When Terri and I arrived in the remote village of Molumbo on our review visit this past October, we were greeted with songs and one of the girls read and presented a citation handwritten in Portuguese. Some translated highlights include:

"Message of the Laristas on the occasion of the visit of Senhora Princila, the mother and friend of the bursary girls... We...were very pleased when we received the news of your trip to Mozambique... At this moment we want to express our gratitude for everything that Mae Princila does, especially for this lar. We have been witnesses with our own eyes, having seen twelve girls already teachers, thanks to your effort to find financial means for bursaries for girls... Mae Princila, please feel at home in this lar as if it was your own home... We wish for you a good stay in Mozambique... May you and your companion have a safe trip on your return... We wish you a long life, Mae Princila."

So this fall when Terri and I traveled to Mozambique, my heart was once again filled with joy. Terri's experience, being her first, was even more powerful. We had an auspicious beginning. Just as we arrived at the

CCM headquarters in Quelimane to begin our review, Terri remarked that she hoped she would hear some singing during the coming week. I just laughed as a group of PEDRA girls were assembling on the porch to greet us in proper African style.

Terri has been so enthusiastic about the entire trip that it gives me great pleasure to have her share her impressions with you after a brief musical message from one of our local sponsors.

**Second Reading**

*"Border Lines"*  
Alberto Rios

A weight carried by two  
Weighs only half as much  
The world on a map looks like the  
drawing of a cow  
In a butcher's shop, all those lines  
showing  
Where to cut.

That drawing of the cow is also a  
jigsaw puzzle,  
Showing just as much how very well  
All the strange parts fit together.

Which way we look at the drawing  
Makes all the difference.  
We seem to live in a world of maps.

But in truth we live in a world made  
Not of paper and ink but of people.  
Those lines are our lives. Together,

Let us turn the map until we see  
clearly:  
The border is what joins us,  
Not what separates us.

### **Mae Teresa's Reflections**

Have you heard the story about the American traveler who went on a photo safari in Africa? A typical American traveler — always in a hurry, always out of time, and always traveling with lots of stuff. African porters carried her belongings for three days across the savannah, fording rivers and climbing mountains. They rose early, they walked fast, and they set camp late. But on the fourth morning, when the traveler rose with the sun, as usual, ready to go — she found the porters sitting and resting. They would not move. She was agitated and upset. “Why are you sitting down?” she said. “We’re wasting time.” It was quiet. No one responded. Finally, the head porter replied, “Bwana, we are waiting for our souls to catch up with our bodies.”

That’s the way I felt after flying 9,000 miles across the Atlantic, journeying by truck deep into the interior of Mozambique for 6 days, and then repeating the transatlantic flight in reverse: When I got home, swimming in images of Mozambique, I, too, was waiting for my soul to catch up with my body.

It should not be physically possible to get from western Africa to Pennsylvania in less than 2 days... because mentally and emotionally it is impossible. “The shock is too much. The contrast is too raw.”<sup>2</sup> And I agree. But alas, in my 21<sup>st</sup> century world, quick transitions are required, and I had to be back in the saddle at home and work as if I had never left.

At home, folks asked me what I brought back from my trip. Images, I’d have to say. Images of the northern Mozambique landscape — my first exposure to a savannah ecosystem. Images of a rural African culture — where illiterate women with bundled babies on their backs, cultivate the hard crusted earth with homemade hoes. But foremost, images upon images of young black girls — thriving in the promise that through education they will create their own economic future. This morning I’d like to share some of these images with you... the landscape, the culture, and most importantly, the Bursary Girls.

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<sup>2</sup> Scribbling the Cat, Alexandra Fuller

## The Landscape

Looking out the window of the small double cab truck, a mural of Mozambique unraveled before my eyes. You know, how you see a country depends on whether you are driving through it or living in it. How you see it also can depend on whether or not you can leave if you want to. I had that luxury. Mozambique — to me — is a land of breathtaking beauty and savage poverty. The region where we traveled is a savannah — a grassland ecosystem, defined by small and widely placed trees that do not close into a canopy. There are a many rivers, but water from rainfall is only available seasonally — that is, IF drought doesn't interfere.

The occasional granite mountain juts up out of the relatively flat landscape. The deep red hue of the earth provides a backdrop for a mostly brown, grey, and green color palette. Then suddenly, against this muted background, bright red poinsettia bushes or orange bougainvillea flowers command attention... startlingly beautiful.

## The Culture

Agriculture and herding have been the economic foundation of rural Mozambique since ancient times.

Arabs were the first to create trade routes across the African continent, and their influence is still apparent. Portuguese explorers arrived in 1505, creating trading posts and settlements. But over the next 500 years their influence apparently didn't extend too far into the countryside, because only 25% of the country speaks Portuguese. Swahili, Bantu, and numerous other indigenous languages prevail, although students must master Portuguese in order to graduate from high school.

We were told that the country is about 25% Muslim and 25% Christian, but the majority are animists — believing that spirits occupy all things. Most of the population are subsistence farmers. In theory they are "peasants," but in practice they are brilliantly versed in the skill of surviving.

Mozambique became independent from Portugal in 1975, and almost immediately plunged into a devastating civil war. From 1975 to 1992, the country suffered 1 million military and civilian deaths. The savagery was epic: a prime example of man's inhumanity to man, evidenced by torture, rape, murder — every possible insult and injury against humankind and nature. 6 million Mozambicans — over 25% of the population — were dislocated. 1 million land mines were left behind, which continue to affect the safety of walking in the countryside. The war touched every family, and the country is still recovering.

But the Mozambicans that I met seemed to rise above life's challenges through song and dance. Observing them, I couldn't help but be reminded of my western culture that enslaved the ancestors of these good people. White guilt strikes deep.

## The UUCV Bursary Girls

I carry in my heart images of the UUCV Bursary Girls: black young women who welcomed us with joyful song and dance and theatre everywhere we went.

These girls leave the safety of their families behind in rural villages, walk miles carrying meager belongings on their heads, to live in a lar (residence), do their own cooking, cleaning, pumping and carrying water, tending to vegetable gardens and livestock — all for an opportunity to continue in school beyond the 5<sup>th</sup> grade.

I carry in my heart an image of Elena, whose family works from dawn to dusk in the fields, and has no money for notebooks or school fees or transportation to a town with a secondary school. Our Bursary Program has made it possible for Elena to continue in school these last 4 years.

I carry in my heart an image of Estefania, who told us how thankful she is for the towels and sheets that the Bursary Program provided for girls in the dormitory. Estefania, who was delighted to have a toothbrush and toothpaste — items that do not exist in her home. Estefania, 15 years old, who appreciates cleanliness, and wants to be a nurse.

I carry in my heart an image of Rosita, who, when asked about her parents, responded in a barely audible voice that she didn't have any parents. Rosita, 18 years old, with no family to help support her, wants to be a teacher.

I carry in my heart an image of Estelle, an illiterate but bright and energetic mother, who helped organize a women's group that convinced the government to allow them to turn an old abandoned military barracks into a dormitory for rural girls from remote villages, where school ends after the primary grades.

I carry in my heart images of parents — over 50 men and women, who gave up an entire day of labor to walk or ride bicycles for miles in their best clothes in order to meet with us and humbly express their gratitude for our congregation's help — help that gives their daughters an opportunity to achieve what they never thought was possible. They, too, broke into song and dance to express their appreciation:

And finally, I carry images in my heart of the Sunday morning church service celebrated in a mud and thatch hut. The drumming, dancing, and singing was awesome — like nothing I had ever experienced! The small building was packed — standing room only — with men, women, and children. We 4 white folks lifted our voices together with the black congregation, ministering to one another in song... no matter if the words were in Bantu, Portuguese or English. I caught the contagious spirit of original gospel music at its finest! I was into it!

Well, that is, until THEY asked US to sing to THEM — by ourselves — which I was NOT prepared to do. But as we faced the congregation from our privileged position close to the altar and tentatively launched into several verses of "Kum ba Ya," they leaned forward in rapt attention, swaying with the rhythm

and unintelligible English words. Suddenly a woman with a big colorful African headscarf locked her eyes on mine began ululating – that ethereal long, wavering high-pitched sound that signifies joy and celebration in their culture.

I was overcome with the awareness that music had created a bridge between our radically different cultures. Indeed, we were all ONE.

I have since learned that the origin of “Kum ba Ya” — which means “come by here” — was probably a very early song from African-American slaves living on the Sea Islands of South Carolina and Georgia. Gullah, a version of the English language with strong West and Central African language influences, is still spoken today by the African American population in that area.

Ahhhh, so many images — the landscape, the culture, and our Bursary Girls... and so little time to relate them to all of you. I hope you can join us for the Mozambique luncheon after the service to share a typical African meal, see the video of the girls, and continue this conversation.

In closing, I’d like to answer Judy’s question: Why have we made it our mission to transform lives and care for the world?

Because we as Unitarian Universalists have a vision about what is right.

Because we recognize when something is wrong.

Because we are willing to share our resources to do something about it.

And because “walking the walk” for social justice through educating girls in Mozambique is THE most sustainable thing that we can offer to transform their lives.

Education is a gift that lasts a lifetime.

## **Benediction**

## Prayer Song from Ghana

Journeying god,  
pitch your tent with mine  
so that I may not become deterred  
by hardship, strangeness, doubt.  
Show me the movement I must make  
toward a wealth not dependent upon possessions,  
toward a wisdom not based on books,  
toward a strength not bolstered by might,  
toward a god not confined to heaven.  
Help me to find myself as I walk in other's shoes.