

Global Justice

Christian Commonality at the Asian Rural Institute

by Anna Crews

If you are a young adult in The United Methodist Church, prayerfully consider becoming a Global Justice Volunteer, Mission Intern, US-2, or Summer Intern. Also, think about traveling and working with United Methodist Volunteers In Mission (UMVIM). And talk to your pastor about ways you might become involved in ministry in your own community. Make a difference!

As a seminary student finishing my first year at Claremont School of Theology, I wanted to spend the summer in mission. I wanted to connect with Christians on a global sphere, learn how God is working in other countries, and lend a helping hand and a willing heart. So I decided to participate in the Global Justice Volunteer program through the General Board of Global Ministries. Fully expecting to be sent to a Third-World country, I was astonished to discover that I'd been assigned to Japan.

Christians in Japan

Japan's Christian community includes less than 1 percent of the population. Yet, despite small numbers, Christians in Japan are welcoming, affirming, ecumenical, and politically and globally aware. They work on social-justice issues and oppose a growing nationalism and military buildup.

Although Japan has a very close-knit, connectional culture, sometimes this means that whole classes of people are denied full inclusion in the community. Exclusion can present itself in a variety of ways: difficulty getting a job, ability to live only in certain areas, domestic violence, and inability to marry freely among other classes of society.

Accordingly, Japan's Christians are ministering in homeless communities, setting up feeding programs, organizing prison ministries, and supporting shelters for women and children who are leaving situations of domestic abuse. They are also working to encourage more youth and college-age membership to support the Christian church in Japan for the next generation.

The World Shrank; God Grew

My assignment in Japan was to the Asian Rural Institute (ARI), an agricultural school in Nishinasuno that is a unique Christian ministry. Participants from developing countries who are leaders in nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) come to this small farm for 10 months to learn leadership skills and techniques for sustainable agriculture. Many different countries were represented during my time there: Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Cambodia,

Kenya, Liberia, Ghana, India, Haiti, the Philippines, Uganda, and Zambia. Days start at 6:30 A.M. with exercises and farmwork. They end near sunset.

I learned firsthand about organic farming through working with the crops and vegetables section in the mornings and evenings and in the kitchen during the day. Harvesting, transplanting, weeding, pruning, and cooking filled many hours of my time. Other participants were equally busy in classes on farming and community visioning and in work with livestock. It was the opportunity of a lifetime to see many people from



Members of the 2001 summer class of Global Justice Volunteers traveled to Japan, Costa Rica, Armenia, Brazil, Hong Kong, or Russia.

Volunteers



Top: Students of the Asian Rural Institute learn better ways to raise food for their communities. **Above:** Global Justice Volunteer Terrell Starr, in the fields of Russia.

all over the globe working and enjoying communal life in the peace and love of God.

When I left for ARI, I was prepared to embrace and value the uniqueness and differences I would find in the people I'd meet. When I got to Nishinasuno, I found instead a commonality that was deeper and more real than I could ever have imagined. Through friends from countries struggling in poverty and trouble, I gained a different perspective. I heard stories of hunger where there was no food to be found and stories of war that had gone on for years, stealing the lives of numerous loved ones. Many new friends had dreams of peace and of provisions enough for all. It was in their hopes and dreams that I found our commonality most real.

The most powerful lesson of the summer, however, was this: The world shrank and God grew! It seems that the more I learn about

who God is and what God is doing, the more I realize how little I really know about God in the first place! My understanding of God's love for me and my growing love for God, God's love for the world, and the impact of Christ in the hearts of Christians in Japan has been deepened in wonderful ways. I am so thankful!

Get Involved!

I strongly encourage young adult seminary students to get involved in these or other United Methodist summer mission programs. Doing so gave me a fantastic venue for practical application of theological concepts and beliefs that I had been working to articulate in seminary. Taking a summer and living on faith in a new and challenging manner has broadened my perspective and understanding in ways that I could never have imagined.

Anna Crews is in her second year at Claremont School of Theology, where she is working toward ordination.

Changing the World One House at a Time

by Trinity Peacock-Broyles

Doña María del Pilar Jiménez Fedulo had tears in her eyes as she stood with her hand on her granddaughter's shoulder. She looked into my face and said from her heart: "This is the best Mother's Day gift I've ever received. You've restored my faith in humanity." I, too, felt tears well up in my eyes. Before I shared what she had said with the 12 members of my work team, I said a silent prayer of thanks for having the opportunity to build houses with Habitat for Humanity in Costa Rica.

From May 28 to August 15, 2001, I worked as a Global Justice Volunteer (GJV) for The United Methodist Church. GJVs are young adults between the ages of 18 and 25 who serve in mission for 2 to 6 months. We accept the instructions in Micah 6:8 "to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God," while serving in mission with people, not to them.

Last spring and summer, 15 GJVs worked in Armenia, Brazil, Costa Rica, Hong Kong, Japan, and Russia. Some of us served with UMCOR's Noah's Ark, providing livestock to starving families. Others worked with street children and orphans. Those in Hong Kong were in partnership with migrant women, assisting in their legal battles. And a Global Justice Volunteer in Japan worked in a community

agricultural training center. My own assignment was to the Cartago Affiliate of Habitat para Humanidad, Costa Rica.

Doña Pilar asked me why I had given two and a half months of my summer without receiving anything in return. I explained to her that, although my rewards are not monetary, they are much more valuable.

I had the wonderful experience of living with a host family; of being accepted into a new culture, complete with soccer matches and "Tico" slang; and of seeing five houses go from the ground to the roof in one week. I was invited to dinner by different Habitat families throughout my stay and was cooked special vegetarian fare. Whenever I return, I know I will have at least 10 houses with open doors and loving homeowners to make me feel welcome.

As a Global Justice Volunteer, I had a special purpose to my journey. I was not in Costa Rica only to work with partner families in construction of their houses. I was focused on the higher goal of justice. I had the great fortune to help plan—and then participate in—the Jimmy Carter "World Leaders Build." I saw hundreds of volunteers, both local and international, come together with Costa Rican dignitaries, Habitat families, and construction supervi-



Trinity Peacock-Broyles in Costa Rica with Habitat for Humanity.

Children in Armenia worked with Global Justice Volunteer Lamberto Linaban from the Philippines to produce the art on this page.

sors to help five families build their houses in one week. Habitat does not give charity; it gives opportunity. Each homeowner is required to contribute 40 hours of sweat equity in building the home and must pay back a no-interest loan.

As the daughter of two ministers, I have had a clear idea of justice and social action. I have always felt that it is important to put my faith in action. In Costa Rica, I raised my voice against injustice when I picked up a hammer and a shovel and worked to eliminate poverty housing

in one small city. I saw a tangible difference in the lives of five families who now, after the "blitz-build," have a safe shelter for their children. I fully agree with Habitat founder Millard Fuller when he states: "All of God's people should have at

least a simple, decent place to live." I urge you to look up Habitat for Humanity to see how you, too, can take part in changing the world, one house at a time.

Trinity Peacock-Broyles is a junior at Smith College, spending her first semester at the University of Havana in Cuba and her second semester in LaPaz, Bolivia.



