

# MARCH 2009



## February 1<sup>st</sup> Letter from Becca Young, PCUSA Mission Co-Worker in Indonesia.

Friends,

As long as I've lived in Indonesia, I've been able to predict the questions every Indonesian will ask me: my age, my marital status, and my home country. The pattern never varies, but in the past couple of months, without exception, there's been an addendum. As soon as I say I'm from the United States, the questioner will grin, perhaps give a thumbs up sign, and say, if not sing out, "Obama!" Their enthusiasm is amazing. This inauguration has given them a new appreciation of America, especially since Obama spent four years in elementary school here, just around the corner from the seminary where I teach. But as we know, in spite of the celebration of the peaceful exchange of power that took place on January 20 in Washington, graver events stole a good bit of the day's thunder. The economic crisis continues to plague not just the United States but the world. The breaking of the peace treaty in Palestine, occurring just prior to the inauguration, reminded us that the challenges this new President faces are staggering. Indonesians likewise are not unaware of the gravity of the moment. The outpouring of concern for the people of Palestine and calls for a return to peace have come from every corner and have occasionally occurred in unexpected places.

A couple of months ago, I described my daily bus ride to work. Yesterday morning during that regular routine, a street musician named Cemong climbed aboard the bus and led us in a spontaneous worship service for peace in Palestine. He read from some poetry while a friend played the flute, then another man stood up and sang an Indonesian song about peace. Next Cemong asked that we each pray for peace silently according to our own religious persuasion. The entire bus sat in silence, heads bowed, as we trundled down the busy city street. He announced a day of music dedicated to peace in Palestine to be held at the Jakarta Arts Center and invited us to join.

One of the disaster groups I work with here in Indonesia—YAKKUM Emergency Unit, the disaster branch of the Christian Foundation for Public Health—has just arranged to send two nurses, Heri Widiarso and Bambang Kamiwarno, to Gaza. These two nurses also served YEU in the tsunami and in the Java earthquake of 2006. They will now participate as part of a medical response team that includes three doctors and two nurses from Muhammadiyah, a social Islamic organization, the second largest of its kind in Indonesia, with an estimated 29 million members. This interfaith medical team, with its goal of assisting the survivors of the recent violence in Gaza, provide a remarkable symbol of the possibility to overcome religious differences in the interest of the peace and welfare of a troubled people.



**Fariz N. Mehdawi, Palestinian Ambassador to Indonesia, with Becca at Jakarta Theological Seminary, January 22, 2009.**

Last Thursday, the students of my seminary on their own initiative organized an afternoon seminar to explore the roots of the Israel-Palestine conflict. The panel was composed of the Palestinian Ambassador to Indonesia

(who is a Muslim, although I'm told there have been Christian ones in the past), along with three religious experts on peace, one Protestant, one Catholic, and one Muslim.

I was asked to give the welcoming speech for the 300 people who crowded into our assembly hall. I spoke of how this crucial issue touches on so many of the values we hold dear: the desire for peace, the right to one's land, the ability to worship in the sacred places of one's faith, and the protection of innocent women and children. It is as though in this one conflict are concentrated and magnified all the common struggles of humankind. Precisely because those very values have been heightened in this ongoing conflict, no easy solution has yet been found. We gathered that day to better understand this human tragedy.

The Palestinian Ambassador, Mr. Fariz N. Mehdawi, spoke first. Learning that the majority of students could not understand English, he jokingly asked if he could speak in Arabic. Quite a number of our students raised their hands in approval, more than would have been able to understand him in English. He also offered to speak in Hebrew, which got a roar out of this seminary crowd, who study biblical (i.e., extinct) Hebrew as part of their required course load.

The core of the Ambassador's speech was a fact that was oft-repeated during the course of the afternoon: this conflict is not a religious but a political one. He noted that the worst situations in human history have arisen when a political leader or group used religion to justify their political position and actions. "Politics are at their worst when politicians use religion and religious people get used by politicians." Although he pointed no fingers, it's difficult not to be reminded by his statements that when we look back in time, neither Jews, Muslims, nor Christians can claim innocence on that score.

In the course of his presentation, he made a number of enlightening and encouraging statements. He regretted that a Jewish person was not there to represent their side of the story (Indonesia has very few Jews: the World Jewish Congress estimates there are 20 in the entire country of 240 million). He pointed out that the only religion that originated in Palestine is Christianity. Both Judaism and Islam are imports, implying that neither can or should claim precedence.

The Ambassador insisted that people from either extreme—those who want a pure Jewish state or a pure Islamic one—are misguided and will never achieve their goals. There must be compromise, he declared. These last 60 years of violence in Palestine are an aberration; for centuries prior to that time, Jews, Muslims, and Christians had lived together peacefully in the land. He ended his talk by saying, "Palestine is traditionally a land of tolerance, peace and diversity. Until we return to that, God will not be happy because God is the God of love."

Yours, Becca

To see more of Becca's letters go to

[www.pcusa.org/missionconnections/profiles/youngr.htm](http://www.pcusa.org/missionconnections/profiles/youngr.htm)





## Amanda Craft: New PCUSA Mission Co-Worker in Guatemala.

Amanda was appointed in January 2009 to serve in Guatemala in the area of women’s leadership development (the position that Ellen Dozier previously held). Amanda works primarily with “sinodicas,” the name given to organizations of Presbyterian women in the church. While Amanda serves as advisor to the sinodicas of all the presbyteries, her primary focus is on leadership development and Christian education. This is not Amanda’s first appointment by the PCUSA to serve in Guatemala. She was a Young Adult Volunteer in Guatemala from 1999 to 2000. Amanda has spent most of her working life serving the PCUSA.

Prior to her appointment to Guatemala, Amanda served for eight years on the national staff of the General Assembly Council as associate for education and advocacy of the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program. In that position, she worked largely with young adults, but also had responsibilities for interpreting the work of the church in peacemaking and interpreting the issues the church addressed in this area. Amanda served as a young adult intern in the International Volunteers office in 2000-2001. She is married to Omar Alexander Chan Giron and they are expecting their first child. Birthdays: Amanda (March 6) & Omar (February 5). For more information go to [www.pcusa.org/missionconnections/profiles/crafta.htm](http://www.pcusa.org/missionconnections/profiles/crafta.htm). And her number is E200334.



### PCUSA Presbyterian Disaster Assistance Weeks

Presbyterian Disaster Assistance is building upon the success of last year’s “Father & Son” week, and adding a “Family week.”

**Who:** June 14-20 Family Week; June 21-27 Father & Son Week

**What:** Hurricanes Katrina and Rita Relief work

**Where:** Olive Tree Presbyterian Volunteer village, New Orleans

**How:** Minimum age is 14 and the cost is \$20 per night per person (includes meals and lodging). Call 866-732-6121 to register or for more information. Also read about it at

[www.pcusa.org/pda/response/usa/gulfcoast/index-gulfcoast.htm](http://www.pcusa.org/pda/response/usa/gulfcoast/index-gulfcoast.htm).

At this site is also information about youth weeks.



### PCUSA Monthly Hunger Fasts

Were you aware that a number of denominational staff and divisions are participating in a once a month fast? That they are using this time to be in prayer for hungry places in this world, to seek spiritual discernment, and to learn about world conditions. You can join them and join with Presbyterians around the country in these monthly 40-hour fasts to help discern ways to respond to the Global Food Crisis. The fasts typically take place on the first weekend of every month, beginning on Friday evening and ending with Communion or a communal meal on Sunday. A different country and issue is highlighted each month and at the [www.pcusa.org/hunger](http://www.pcusa.org/hunger) website you can find prayers, liturgy, and fact sheets. February focused on India, Feb 27-March 1 on the Sudan, and April 3-5 will focus on Sierre Leone/Liberia.

## One Great Hour of Sharing Offering



One Great Hour of Sharing Offering is coming! The OGHS offering is a denomination wide offering that is usually received on Easter or Palm Sunday and is split between the Presbyterian Hunger Program, the Presbyterian Disaster Assistance Program, and the Self Development of People Program. This year marks the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the offering that began as American Christians recognized the need to respond to the worldwide devastation caused by World War II. The theme is “Where is Your Treasure?” For more information or to order materials go to [www.pcusa.org/oghs](http://www.pcusa.org/oghs).

## Wondering Where to Recycle your Compact Florescent Light Bulbs?

You can now drop off unbroken expired CFLs at NC Interfaith Power & Light’s Asheville office. Interfaith Power & Light is a program of the North Carolina Council of Churches. The Asheville office is located at St. Mary’s Episcopal Church; 30 Macon Avenue—Suite 4. Drop-Off Hours MTWF 9:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. and Thursday 9:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m. Before you go, call 828-252-1794.

They are using Home Depot’s free recycling program:  
[www6.homedepot.com/ecoptions/stage/pdf/cfl\\_recycle.pdf](http://www6.homedepot.com/ecoptions/stage/pdf/cfl_recycle.pdf).

Consider starting your own drop-off program at your Church using your local Home Depot. To find out what to do if a CFL breaks, visit

[www.energystar.gov/ia/partners/promotions/change\\_light/downloads/Fact\\_Sheet\\_Mercury.pdf](http://www.energystar.gov/ia/partners/promotions/change_light/downloads/Fact_Sheet_Mercury.pdf).

## Cell Our Cells and Raise Money for Barbara Nagy

You can raise money for Barbara Nagy by recycling old cell phones, ink jet cartridges, DVD movies and games, laptop/notebook computers, MP3 players, and digital cameras through Eco-Phones. How do you do it? When you have collected enough for a box, go to [www.ecophones.com](http://www.ecophones.com) and on the left side of the screen click on “Shipping.” The website will walk you through the process, but if you have any difficulty you can call them at 888-326-7466. When you click to make a mailing label, it will ask for your address (**put your own personal address in here**) and you can print off a free mailing label. Inside the box put a note saying to send the money to the Presbytery of Western North Carolina; 114 Silver Creek Road; Morganton, NC 28655; 828-438-4317. Call the number they have listed for Fed Ex and they will come to your house or church for free to pick up your box.

## UPCOMING CONFERENCES:

**“Entertaining Angels Unawares (Hebrew 13:2): Myths and Facts of Legal Christian Responses to Immigration”** is a symposium to be hosted in Valdese, NC by the American Waldensian Society, the Waldensian Presbyterian Church and the Town of Valdese in partnership with the Wake Forest Unity School of Divinity and the Religion Department of Davidson College. **The event will be Saturday March 21, 9:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m. at Historic Old Rock School in Valdese, NC.** There is a \$25 registration that includes lunch. Julia Thorne, Manager of Immigrations Issues in the PCUSA Department of Constitutional Services will be one of the speakers. For more information either contact Rev. Kevin Frederick at Waldensian Presbyterian Church (828-874-2531) or go to [www.waldensian.org/sympos\\_overview.php](http://www.waldensian.org/sympos_overview.php) to register online.

## “Embracing God’s Call to be Green”

**The Faith & the Environment Conference, July 7-11 at Montreat Conference Center.** This conference is sponsored by Presbyterians for Restoring Creation and Montreat Conference Center. For more information or to register, go to [www.montreat.org/current/2009-faith-and-environment](http://www.montreat.org/current/2009-faith-and-environment).



**Young Adult Ministries (YAM Jam) Conference May 27-30, 2009 at Austin Presbyterian Seminary.** YAM-Jam is an event for people seeking creative ways to be in ministry with young adults and college students in the PCUSA, and is sponsored by PACHEM and

the Office of Collegiate Ministries, PC(USA). Speakers include Carol Howard Merritt, Bruce Reyes-Chow, and Ted Wardlaw. The classic problem facing young adult ministry in the PCUSA is feeling isolated from the rest of the denomination. As our church adjusts to issues of culture and structural changes, YAM-Jam is a way to bring those who care about young adults together to share, learn, worship, and play. Visit [www.pachem.org/YAMJamConference/tabid/40218/Default.aspx](http://www.pachem.org/YAMJamConference/tabid/40218/Default.aspx) for conference information or to register online.



## **Big Tent Event!**

Do you know about the “**Big Tent Event**” **June 11-13 in Atlanta!** “Experience 10 different PCUSA partner conferences, occurring concurrently, with common

time set aside for all participants to sample workshops conducted by partner groups, be in worship together, enjoy meals together and attend a transforming Saturday night celebration.” Conferences include: New Immigrants Ministries Convocation, National Multicultural Church Conference, National Elders Conference, CPM/COM/Seminary Healthy Ministry Conference, Racial Ethnic Convocation, Stewardship Conference, Communicators Network, Peacemaking Conference, PHEWA Social Justice Biennial conference, and Evangelism and Church Growth Conference. For more information go to [www.pcusa.org/bigtent](http://www.pcusa.org/bigtent). For a flyer go to [www.pcusa.org/multicultural/bigtent.pdf](http://www.pcusa.org/multicultural/bigtent.pdf).