There is no tool for development more effective than the empowerment of women.”
– Kofi Annan, former Secretary-General of the United Nations

After 27 years of devastating civil war, women and children now comprise 70% of the population in Angola’s ravaged cities. Every day they struggle to overcome the obstacles of extreme poverty, malnutrition, disease and hunger in a country where basic services like hospitals and schools are lacking.

Over the past 10 years, several grassroots groups have started rebuilding and restoring the infrastructure that Angolans need to become self-sufficient. One such effort is the Dille/Dunbar Fund for Schools for Angolan Young Women, established by siblings Thomas Dille and Nancy Dunbar and their spouses. Tom and Nancy grew up in Angola as the children of missionaries, the late Carl and Lois Dille.

Since 1998 four schools have been built and are recognized by the Angolan government, which has provided some support for them, as “model schools” of Angola.

The Dille/Dunbar schools fund works with Global Ministries’ partner the Evangelical Congregational Church in Angola (IECA) to build government-approved schools in cities and former rural mission sites. Literacy, nutrition, health, sewing, agriculture, human rights, and small business operation are taught in all schools, and, when electricity is available, computer training is included.

For more information on how to support the Dille/Dunbar Fund for Schools for Angolan Young Women, visit www.globalministries.org or call the Global Ministries Resource Development office at 317-713-2555.
Improving the Lives of Children

Two denominations in India are working to improve the quality of life for their country’s children, particularly girls. In India, girls are less likely to be taught to read, receive less health and nutritional care, and have little to no education. Sometimes, due to infanticide, girls are even denied life itself. In some regions those who survive childhood are often not allowed to complete an education, but are married off early to spend the rest of their lives working at home. Dalit girls – members of the “untouchable” caste – are further exploited, often facing sexual abuse by upper caste patrons and village priests.

The Church of Southern India (CSI), a Global Ministries partner, is establishing one residential education center in each of its 20 dioceses to help provide a safe, nurturing environment for some of India’s girls. The Church’s objective is that “a deprived girl child should be able to experience the joy of being born a girl – no matter what her position or class is – in a peaceful, just and humane environment.” To that end, the education centers will provide a safe living environment, education, and training in life skills for the girls selected to participate in the program.

Meanwhile, another UCC partner, the Church of Northern India (CNI), advocate for protecting the rights of children. Children in India, especially the Dalit, are often victims of violence from many sources including their own family members. They have no option but to start working with their parents at an early age. If Dalit children go to school, they are often kept apart from the other children.

CNI is creating a program intended to raise awareness of the problem and advocate for protecting the rights of children. The program will also promote ecumenism, development opportunities and cultural understanding for children.

Sheltering the Vulnerable

Life is difficult for almost everyone living in Zambia. Contributing factors include: the very high poverty rate, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the growing number of children without parents, malnutrition, drought, political oppression and corruption.

For women and girls, life is even more challenging. Many women, widows, and orphans are victims of violence in and outside the home. The country’s laws enforce male power, authority, and dominance over women and children, making it extremely difficult for a woman to improve her own legal, social and economic status without the help of a man. The breakdown of the extended family has also left many women and children with no security and much needed social support.

The YWCA, a Global Ministries partner, is working to replace that safety net by supporting The Shelter (also called Laweni House) where women and children can escape violent situations. The Shelter provides at least 150 clients with day-to-day needs such as food and clothing as well as counseling, information, and referrals to organizations that offer assistance. At The Shelter, children are cared for while women make decisions, without male interference, about their own future. Support groups further bolster women’s self-esteem and dignity to help them move forward in their new, hopefully violence-free lives.
Empowering Women

Arauca, Colombia, is a land being torn apart – by two guerrilla groups locked in a 40-year civil war, and by the military aid sent by the United States. Devastation comes from all sides – from the guerrilla groups comes rape, death, destruction of community-organized economic projects, and forced flight of thousands of peasants. United States military aid has caused even more loss of life, forced displacement, and mass imprisonment of community leaders. The result, according to the Dawn of Women for Arauca Association, is “hunger, despair, and desolation in our countryside.”

The Association, which works to promote women’s rights and social justice in one of the most war-torn regions of Colombia, recently held a gathering calling for peace with justice to commemorate International Women’s Day which more than 200 women attended. The women denounced the atrocities, remembered women who have been killed or imprisoned, and expressed their deep commitment to continue working non-violently for peace with justice.

The leaders addressed the crowd with inspiring words of empowerment. “Mothers, daughters, sisters, aunts, friends, indigenous and black women... you have cultivated this ground with your blood and sacrifice. We will continue to sow this land so that one day in the not-too-distant future, the fruit of our dreams will rise up from this ground. The Dawn of Women for Arauca Association works to build the just world that we long for so deeply. A world in which all of us will have a dignified life. A world in which we can dream. A world in which we can live.”

Scott Nicholson served as a short-term volunteer with the Social Organizations of Arauca, Colombia, consulting on projects for and in rural communities.

The Right to Speak Out

Mayumi worked at a school uniform company before she came to Doshisha University in Kyoto, Japan. Her other co-workers in the factory were mostly young women, who, like her, were preparing to enter university. Their boss, a 29-year-old married man, regularly sexually harassed many of the women.

One of Mayumi’s co-workers was too afraid and too intimidated by her boss to protest. One day, before closing time, the boss asked her to work overtime. The young woman felt she could not refuse. That night he raped her, and then raped her two more times before the month was over. Her parents only found out when their daughter showed signs of severe emotional distress.

Five years later, Mayumi gave a presentation for her university course on Japanese Women’s Lives taught by Global Ministries missionary Casilda Luzares. Her friend was still in a psychiatric hospital, and Mayumi’s anger and distress were still palpable.

Mayumi’s presentation stressed how important it is for women to be informed about sexual harassment and sexual violence. She also addressed her own experiences with discrimination, being raised with the expectation that she would become a wife and mother only. Instead, she has decided to become a teacher.

“I plan to become a part of the solution,” Mayumi said. “I have to keep studying about and be sensitive to women’s issues, and teach my students about this.”

Casilda Luzares, Global Ministries missionary, is an English professor at Doshisha University in Japan, Kyoto Conference.
In Haiti, people have every reason to despair. Almost everyone is very poor, nearly half the population is functionally illiterate, and violence, including abductions, continues to rise. During the five-day Disciples Woman-to-Woman Worldwide trip, 12 women from the United States and Canada saw the spirit of God working among these people, giving hope where sometimes little seemed possible, and reminding them of Jesus’ abiding love.

The Woman-to-Woman group spent much of their time with leaders of the National Spiritual Council of Haitian Churches (CONASPEH), an organization established 20 years ago that now represents 5,800 churches around Haiti. CONASPEH runs a seminary in Port au Prince, an adult literacy program, a grade school, a high school, and a medical ministry that reaches out to neglected and isolated people in rural provinces.

The men, women and children the group encountered strive mightily to survive in a country that has faced enormous problems. They – and we – believe that with education, persistence and a continued reliance on God’s love, this tiny island country will once again find hope and promise for its future.

Wanda Bryant Wills is Executive Director of Communication Ministries for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

Joanne, a 46-year-old Australian woman, first felt called to ministry when she was 16 years old. Raised in the Reformed Church (now the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia), which doesn’t allow women to be ordained, Joanne still followed her call by attending the Reformed Theological College. “I naïvely thought I would find a place for myself and that my path would become clear,” she said.

It turned out to be more complicated. During her training, she met and married a fellow student. Following the birth of their first child, Joanne “moved clearly into the role of mother and minister’s wife. I would be a support to my husband in ministry.”

Joanne continued to serve her church and explore her faith and theology, eventually enrolling in Churches of Christ Theological College (CCTC), part of a denomination that does ordain women and a United Church of Christ international partner. Here, Joanne was encouraged by women in pastoral leadership. When she earned her degree in 2004, her denomination still did not ordain women.

Her supportive home congregation allowed her to preach, but shortly after, a letter to church leadership “opened up the proverbial ‘can of worms,’” she said. Joanne has not preached at a church since. She has found comfort in WiMIN, a group for women in ministry that meets monthly at the seminary. Joanne said, “Sometimes I have felt particularly sad because of my situation, but mostly I feel encouraged to persist in my ministry and to explore possibilities.”

Tod and Ana Gobledale, Global Ministries missionaries, taught the CCTC preaching class, and Ana facilitated WiMIN for two years.
Even I Am Welcome Here

Nima had been coming to church for weeks. You’d think she had always been a Christian; she knew all the songs and read the Scripture half a syllable ahead of the others. But when communion Saturday came along, Nima, like all the other non-baptized worshippers, would quietly go outside just before the elements were served. In Nepal, everyone is welcome to attend the service, but communion is offered only to those who have been baptized. I would watch Nima go, and silently pray that she not feel rejected. I hoped it would not dampen her interest in Christ.

When I finally got up the courage to ask her, she surprised me with her answer.

“Are you kidding?” she said. “The church is the only place in this country where I, a woman, am truly welcome. Where I, rejected by my family for marrying out of my caste, am accepted. Even untouchables and lepers are allowed in! Here I find rich and poor, educated and illiterate, sitting together, singing together, sharing a Bible or a hymn book.”

One Saturday several months later, I missed church. Later that day, a friend told me I should have been there, because Nima had stayed for communion! She and her husband had been baptized earlier in the week. When I saw her the next day, Nima beamed at me. “I am a baptized Christian,” she said. “Now I stay in church the whole time. What a great privilege!”

Ellen Collins, along with her husband, Andrew are former Global Ministries missionaries who served with the United Mission to Nepal.

Small Loans Make a BIG Difference

Rita Rani Baroi was barely surviving. But then she was able to acquire a 2,000-taka loan to buy a calf, which, after two years, gave birth to another calf. She repaid the loan by selling milk. Another loan helped her start a grocery shop. Now her two children are going to school – and drinking milk from their own cow.

Sabrika Sabika Mondal was living in poverty until she received a 2,000-taka loan and started a rice-husking business. She paid back the loan according to the schedule and took a second 6,000-taka credit to start a mini-poultry, and small-scale cow rearing business, as well as a grocery shop. She now earns enough to pay off her loan, send the children to school, and have some savings.

Sareswait Baroi and her husband supported their three children through hard labor. When they received two micro-credit loans they were able to start sharecropping and raising goats. With 1,100 taka, Sareswait bought two goats; now she has six and was able to sell one for 1,200 taka. She and her husband have worked together to repay the loans, setting an example of gender equality in practice. They now have a secure income, their children are healthy and studying in school, and they face the future with confidence.

These success stories are the result of Community Development Projects administered by the Church of Bangladesh Social Development Program (CBSDP). The program aims to empower economically disadvantaged rural citizens in health, women’s rights and human rights and to provide vocational development opportunities for youth and adults, especially women. Through small loans of 2,000 to 6,000 taka (or $30 to $90 U.S.) the lives of women and their families are changing for the better.
Raising livestock, growing corn, feeding her family, Nozuko Toli’s aspirations aren’t lofty, but they are important, especially in her village, Amalinda, in the Eastern Cape of South Africa. Here, unemployment hovers around 80 percent. Toli, 28, from the Kei Region of the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa, is like many others in her area — farmers who, without additional work, cannot afford seed and fertilizers. Furthermore, the pesticides sold locally are harmful to the community and the very environment it depends on for its sustenance.

Today, however, Toli’s outlook is brighter due to the Asian Rural Institute (ARI), a 15-acre working farm in northern Japan. Toli is part of ARI’s nine-month training program that educates rural community leaders in sustainable organic agriculture techniques, leadership, and community development. Global Ministries, through One Great Hour of Sharing, provides financial assistance to ARI and this year’s grant is paying for Toli’s studies.

ARI’s philosophy and mission is “to build an environmentally healthy, just, and peaceful world, in which each person can live to his or her fullest potential. This mission is rooted in the love of Jesus Christ.” ARI has trained more than one thousand people since it was founded in 1973, through support from many Christian organizations.

When Toli’s ARI training is finished, she will return home able to help her community grow crops organically, using the resources available in the area while preserving the environment. By sharing her knowledge with others around her and through her church, Toli will be able to touch many lives by helping to put food in many stomachs.

Global Ministries is convinced that one way to advance peace in the Middle East is by amplifying the voices of Palestinian leaders who are promoting non-violence and increased support for basic human rights. The media and various political pressures often drown such voices out, especially Palestinian Christians. The military occupation also makes it difficult for non-violent advocates to travel, organize and speak openly.

To help, Global Ministries has worked closely with Jean Zaru, presiding clerk of the Ramallah Friends Meeting since the mid-1980s. For the past several years Global Ministries has assigned a person in mission to work directly with Jean. The only Palestinian Christian woman who heads a religious community, Jean offers a unique and critical voice on issues of human rights, the specific rights of women and children, and the environment, justice and religion.

Jean most recently spearheaded the rejuvenation of Palestine’s Quaker presence through a new ministry. Friends International Center in Ramallah is intended to promote a culture of peace and non-violence in the wider community. It offers a safe space for Palestinians, Israelis, and international visitors to meet together to pursue their common goals of building peace and international understanding.
As the war on terrorism continues, tension and violence intensifies in parts of southern Mindanao, Philippines. Christian, Muslim and tribal women are losing their husbands, fathers, brothers and sons. The military forces the men to perform war game maneuvers that are part of the Philippines’ overall and ongoing defense and security cooperation with the United States. These military maneuvers have been justified as a means of controlling Islamic extremists, despite opposition from various groups and individuals.

The massive militarization of the region has created dislocation of entire communities. Women belonging to the Moro ethnic group, along with other Muslim women, Christians, and non-governmental organizations, have stood united in their fight for justice and equality. They have fought for their rights to stay on their land and their ancestors’ land.

The Moro Women’s Center, supported by the United Church of Christ Philippines, is providing solutions for victimized inhabitants of this region to live their lives without disruption from the Philippine government and foreign interests. Thousands of Moros have protested against the military exercises and the United States’ intervention in the Philippines. In addition to being a steadfast advocate for the Moro people, the Moro Women’s Center is now a primary resource for training women in vital income-generating skills, has organized daycare centers in various communities, and provides relief programs to those who have been displaced due to military activities.

Child labor is prohibited in Egypt, but the law is not enforced. Twenty to 40 percent of Egypt’s children must work to help their families survive. They work for very low wages and are exposed to smoking, drug use, sexual harassment and abuse in the workplace.

A pilot program, “Working Children: The Weakest Laborers and Poorest Children,” aims to address this problem by teaching children their rights, encouraging workshop owners not to abuse the children they employ, and helping parents better protect their children.

The program, initiated by Global Ministries partner, the Middle East Council of Churches’ Peace and Human Rights Program and national member churches will be tested in three villages where industrial workshops heavily rely on child labor.

Field visits and surveys will be conducted and social workers will establish working plans for each village. Weekend events and teach-ins will promote the project, and trainers will work with the children. Experiences and results will be shared, and the project will be evaluated in consultation with the local workshops and the affected children. Organizers hope the pilot program will help build a network and provide a model for the protection of working children’s rights.
What You Should Know
About the Rights of Women and Girls

When every girl child can realize the many ways she can contribute and lead in her community, then societies will realize how they depend on the success and contribution of young women, so both can be strong and grow into the future.

• 81 million of the 130 million children without access to primary school are girls.
• Two-thirds of the 880 million illiterate adults in the world are women.
• 211 million children worldwide between age five and fourteen engage in some form of illegal, hazardous, or exploitative child labor.
• 10-30% of women trafficked for prostitution are under the age of 18.
• Where people are poor, over 70% are women.
• Over 60% of all new HIV/AIDS sufferers between the ages of 15-24 are girls.

(Facts from United Nations and UNICEF)

For more information:
• Global Ministries Rights of Women and Girls http://www.globalministries.org/women/
• United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality http://www.un.org/womenwatch/
• UNICEF http://www.unicef.org/
• The United Nations Girls’ Education Initiative http://www.ungei.org/

What Can You Do?

What can you as just one individual do to help Global Ministries provide more of the loving care and services reflected in this newsletter?

1. Give generously to your local congregation. If you’re not already tithing, pray and work toward tithing as part of your life as a steward of God’s gifts.
2. Give leadership in your congregation to work toward giving 10% or more to the Disciples Mission Fund or Our Church’s Wider Mission, as appropriate.
3. Give an extra gift directly to Global Ministries, through the office in Cleveland or Indianapolis. You can make an undesignated gift for use in any part of Global Ministries’ work, or you can designate the gift for a project that especially touches your heart.

Gifts from individuals and congregations are the most important source of the money in the work of Global Ministries.

When your congregation sends a portion of its offerings to the basic mission fund for your church, you are helping Global Ministries share God’s love around the world.

Photo: Paul Pitcher