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Introducing Ministries and Mission Interpreters (MMI)

We are grateful that you have accepted the challenge to become a Ministries and Mission Interpreter (MMI). This introduction presents an overview of the MMI training program and network.

Profile of an MMI

MMI was created to provide Disciples and UCC members who have a passion for global mission with the necessary tools and network to tell the story of our two denominations’ involvement in God’s mission through Global Ministries. Our ultimate goal is to see this training and network filter down through every Disciples region and UCC Conference, and to every local mission/outreach committee so that all of our congregations will be Global Mission Congregations. Thank you in advance for the contribution you will make in helping us meet this goal.

An MMI is a person who:

• has a passion for learning about God’s mission;
• tells the story of Global Ministries in our churches, Disciples regions and UCC conferences;
• encourages, motivates and trains others to be engaged in global mission;
• links the interest of an individual or congregation with resources and opportunities in global mission through Global Ministries;
• works within existing region and conference communication networks to share the story; and
• helps build the national MMI network by recruiting others.

An MMI can serve by:

• utilizing Global Ministries resources, DVDs and videos, websites and staff in continuing mission education in their context;
• inter-relating with region or conference staff, boards, and mission or outreach committees;
• making mission visible through staffing Global Ministries displays at key events, such as association/district meetings, conference annual meetings and regional assemblies;
• helping coordinate a missionary visit in the region or conference;
• presenting mission stories in individual conversations, small groups, worship or special programs;
• organizing a People-to-People mission pilgrimage with a local congregation or region/conference;
• sharing articles with church or region/conference websites, newsletters, or list serves; and
• finding ways to fit mission into conference/region ministry goals and structures.

During the course of this training, discerning your gifts, interests and available time will enable you to discover how you can best serve as an MMI in your context. You will create your own action plan which will likely include several of the highlighted points mentioned on this page. You may also create a key objective or two which uniquely fit your personality and talents. To learn about some of unique aspects of this exciting work, turn to Appendix A-1 for a sermon by Global Ministries Co-Executive David Vargas entitled, “The Challenge of Being an MMI”.
MODULE 1

*Purpose of the MMI Training Program and Network*

As you become a part of the network of Mission Interpreters that spans all of our Disciples regions and UCC conferences, we will move closer to becoming a Global Mission Church in all manifestations of our two denominations by accomplishing some of the following goals:

The MMI training program and network will…

- infuse **renewed energy** into our congregations. Involvement in global mission changes lives and can become a catalyst for the transformation/revitalization efforts of any congregation.
- improve the **information flow** from the world to our congregations and from our general ministries through our region and conference offices to our congregations. Many church members are unaware of all the things we are doing in mission around the world through Global Ministries.
- increase the **mission education** in our congregations. Church members will learn how we do mission today and grow in their understanding of a partnership mission model.
- facilitate **involvement** in global mission by connecting church members to specific Global Ministries’ programs and projects.
- reinforce the understanding of **stewardship** in our congregations. By telling the story, MMIs have the opportunity to put a face on what church members’ Disciples Mission Fund (DMF)/Our Church’s Wider Mission (OCWM) dollars are accomplishing around the globe.
- help each of our congregations to be **global mission congregations** as they take steps to create a plan of action.

**MMI Handbook**

This handbook is a resource to assist you in your work as a Ministries and Mission Interpreter. It is divided into eight modules (1-8) which contain the basic training content, and eight appendices (A-H) which provide supplemental materials that will support and illustrate the module curriculum. We want you to be effective, enthusiastic and thorough in your volunteer work as an MMI. We hope this collection of ideas, examples and suggestions will help you share God’s mission in our world in an exciting and dynamic way. We consider you an extension of our staff and look forward to walking with you through this process. Please don’t hesitate to contact us at any point along the way with suggestions to improve the training and this handbook.

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The Challenge of Being an MMI
By David A. Vargas

In the Spanish language that I learned since I was a child in Puerto Rico, there are two words that we utilize to translate what the word challenge means in English: sometimes, we use the word "reto"; but in some other instances, we use the word "desafío."

If you check your Spanish/English dictionary, you will find that there is not really much difference in the definition of these two words, ... but in our daily use of these terms (at least in our Puerto Rican context) we have developed a distinction.

It is true that both "reto" and "desafío" means challenge; that is, facing a situation that may demand our engagement in a contest or fight; a situation that may demand an explanation from us; or a situation that may demand or require total use of our abilities and resources.

But a key difference between these two words in Spanish is that a "reto" is not the type of challenge that may involve a serious risk, threat, and great sacrifice, ... as may be the case with a "desafío". In other words, when we try to talk about challenges, it does not take us long to realize that, indeed, there are challenges and there are CHALLENGES. For a hen, for instance, to lay an egg means to face a situation which requires full use of her abilities and resources. For a hen, to lay an egg is certainly a challenge that I would describe in Spanish as a "reto". However, for a pig to produce bacon is much more that a "reto"; it is a challenge that demands a supreme sacrifice.

If we examine the Scriptures carefully, especially Jesus’ message, we will notice that the Gospel is full of challenges, ... but also of CHALLENGES. "Come to me all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28)... is a challenge, but it is the type of challenge that is just a "reto;" "Come, follow me and I will make you fishers of men (and women)" is a challenge that requires full use of our abilities and resources." (Matt. 4:19) ..., but one that is just a "reto." BUT to listen to Jesus saying, ... "You have heard that it was said, ‘eye for an eye, and tooth for tooth.’ but I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also ...," (Matt. 5:38) that is a "desafío," a challenge that requires ultimate sacrifice and transformation of who we are.

When we hear Jesus responding to the rich ruler who asked Him what he had to do to inherit eternal life, "You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me" (Matt 18:22), ... that, friends, is not a "reto." That is, in Spanish, a "D-E-S-A-F-I-O;" a challenge that requires a radical change in a person’s life.

Yes, it is true that Jesus did confront the religious and political establishment of 2000 years ago with challenges, ... but also with CHALLENGES! And today, as we reflect on the realities of world, and the mission of Global Ministries in midst of those realities, we have to acknowledge, once again, that Jesus’ demands for our lives continue to entail not only challenges, ... but also CHALLENGES!
As we reflect these days on our two Churches’ presence and witness in mission throughout the world, ... the one thing that we certainly do not lack is challenge.

A terrible tsunami in Southern Asia, and the need for shelter, food, water, medicines, represents, without any doubts, a tremendous challenge for both UCC and Disciples.
The need of financial resources to appoint a new missionary to accompany the churches in Colombia at a time when that country is experiencing political instability and a civil war were thousands of innocent have died, including many pastors and lay leaders, ... is certainly a challenge.
The need for volunteer "accompaniers" to walk the walk of our Christian, Jewish and Muslim brothers and sisters in Israel and Palestine ... is a challenge to which we ought to respond without much delay.
The invitation from our brothers and sisters in Angola to join them to help rebuild a nation destroyed as a result of 20 years of war ... is a challenge.
To strengthen our solidarity with the churches and the rest of our Christian family in Cuba, in spite of all the legal restrictions that exist, ... is a challenge.
Medicines and supplies for mission hospitals and clinics in the Congo, India, in Paraguay and Brazil;
the AIDS pandemic all over Africa;
and the urgent need for trained pastors, physicians, nurses, teachers, engineers... are, without any doubt, challenges that Global Ministries faces as we try to respond to Jesus call to..."timely and appropriately meeting God’s people and creation at the point of deepest need."

H-o-w-e-v-e-r, these are not the only challenges Global Ministries faces these days; and these are not even the most difficult ones, ... or the most challenging challenges we face today. Indeed, and using again my Spanish understanding of a challenge, those challenges that I have just mentioned are nothing else but "retos", simply "retos": that is, just situations and circumstances that may demand our engagement, or a response from us, or that may require full use of our abilities and resources, ... but not CHALLENGES that may face us with a real threat or that may demand from us a serious (SERIOUS) risk ... and sacrifice.

Believe it or not, for Global Ministries our most difficult challenges are not, in most instances, the realities and demands we face in that global community that exists beyond our national boundaries. Rather, the most difficult challenge we face these days is the indifference, negative attitudes, misunderstandings, lack of information, frustrations, barriers, and other realities we encounter as we try to interpret among our congregations and constituency groups what is our understanding of God’s call to "share life in Christ" to the ends of the earth; what we mean by "global sharing of resources"; and what we believe is a true "prophetic vision of a just, sustainable, and peaceful world order, joining with God’s concern for the poor and the oppressed."

These are our real tough challenges!

Ironically, one of the most difficult challenges we encounter is how to link the local ministries of our congregations to the global ministry of our two denominations; how to facilitate the liberation of a local congregation from its isolation (or insularism) in order to really become a
global mission church; and how to develop among our congregations the necessary trust to even open their doors and heart to allow that global church that exists beyond our national boundaries to also minister to us as an important and vital part of our own faith journey in the United States and Canada.

Today, those are the most serious challenges for the Disciples and UCC Global Ministries. Those are our true "desafios" for this hour (not just "retos," but "desafios"); that is, CHALLENGES that may require a risk within that safety zone we have built around us, and a transformation of who we are as Disciples and as United Church of Christ.

Responding to such "desafios" can not consist of simply sharing alarming statistics and showing impressive/moving photos of undernourished children to describe poverty and misery in Haiti, in Cambodia, in Mozambique, etc., ... but that response must also consist of inspiring and engaging our congregations and constituency groups in a discernment and educational process leading toward an understanding that there is a relation between that poverty and misery experienced in most of the world and the comfort that we enjoy in our homes and even in our churches in North America.

Responding to such "desafios" is more than merely sharing information about the effects caused by war between nations and human beings, ... or writing resolutions communicating our "official" position on an international conflict, and then distributing those resolutions among our congregations as a so-called educational resource.

Facing and responding to such "desafios" requires from us the ability, willingness and commitment to create awareness among our Disciples and UCC family that, in order to really learn and be engaged in prophetic mission, ... there are still many things we need to unlearn and be disengaged from. And that unlearning and disengaging process is probably the most challenging of all the challenges each of us faces as we try to become good and effective global mission and ministry interpreters.

As Disciples and UCC, the challenge (in this case, the "desafio") we face today is not only to be able to communicate that there is violence, oppression, war and death in so many areas of the world, ... but to become aware and to trust that not all of that is connected to what happened on September 11, 2001 in New York City, Washington and Pennsylvania, but to many other deeper problems and evils that are destroying our humanity.

The challenge ("desafio") is not only to communicate that exploitation of women and children is a reality in the sweatshops and "maquiladoras" of Mexico, Central America, the Phillippines, etc., ... but to understand that many of those abusive enterprises are owned by US corporations, and that the shirt or the pair of shoes that I can afford to buy and wear may be the product of a crime against humanity, a serious violation rights.

The challenge ("desafio") is to be able to confess that people are hungry, thirsty, sick and homeless in most of the nations of this planet, not necessarily because they are irresponsible stewards, non-Christians or persons lacking imagination and creativity, ... but perhaps because we have too much, because we control their resources, and we benefit from their cheap labor.
The challenge ("desafío") is not how to convince our constituency about the need for scholarships, books, theological education for pastoral candidates and lay leaders in our partner churches throughout the world, ... but to learn (or re-learn) from many of those partners that to be a Christian still entails the possibility of the supreme sacrifice as has been the case so far for more than 70 pastors in Colombia, that the Cross is not just a decoration for the altar ... but the prize of our vocation.

So, .... here we are as part of a process to discern what Critical Presence really means for each programmatic and administrative aspect of our Global Ministries work. When we talk about Critical Presence as defined by our Board in April 2004 — "to be timely and appropriately meeting God’s people and creation at the point of deepest need: spiritually, physically, emotionally and/or economically" — our first tendency (and probably the easiest way) is to interpret that definition only in terms of how we relate to the rest of the world. And that is precisely the wrong approach.

Friends, brothers, sisters, extended family and volunteer staff of Global Ministries, ... one of the places on earth where God’s people and creation are in need of the unique Critical Presence that Global Ministries can offer "at the point of deepest need" ... is here: our own yard, our own congregations, our own conferences and regions, our own seminaries, our own national structures. In the same way that we commission men and women, youth and adults, to leave their families and their land in order to go to remote places to serve in capacity building and healthcare ministries where people are experiencing brokenness and despair, you are called to be mission and ministry interpreters within the Church.

You are called, on behalf of Global Ministries, to be present ("presente") at a very critical place and moment in our two churches’ journey: a critical place and moment where the challenge will not be just another "reto"... but rather a "desafío," because the demand is for a radical and perhaps risky/daring transformation of our local faith communities’ understanding and approach to mission; a moment and place where perhaps "something’s got to give."

And ... please, do not forget ... that the challenge that a hen faces is not the same challenge that a pig faces. If that is all you remember about this reflection, ... it’s ok; that’s enough.