

Joyce B. Myers-Brown
Missionary for Justice and Peace/
Misionera de Justicia y Paz

1. Getting to Know You/Aprendiendo a conocerte

Name/Nombre: Joyce Barbara Myers-Brown

A. Brown Recipient/A.B. honor: 1989

Career/Carerra: Missionary, UCC National Staff/Misionera; Parte del personal de la oficina nacional de la Iglesia Unida de Cristo

Color of Hair/Color de pelo: Dark brown/Moreno oscuro

Color of Eyes/Color de ojos: Hazel/Color de la avellana



Brothers and Sisters?/¿Hermanos y hermanas?
One older brother/Un hermano

Favorite School Subject/Asignatura escolar favorita:
Math/Matemáticas

Hobbies/Pasatiempos: Reading, travel; baseball spectator; photography/Leer, viajar, espectadora del béisbol, fotografía

When by myself, I enjoyed/Cuando estoy sola, disfruto:
Reading biographies, fiction, history/Leer biografías, ficción, historia

My friends and I enjoyed/Mis amigos y yo disfrutábamos:
Church, Pilgrim Fellowship/Iglesia; compañerismo

I looked up to/Admiré a: My paternal grandfather, Rev. Harry W. Myers; folks met through PF and summer PF conferences/Mi abuelo paterno, Harry W. Myers; gente que encontré por medio de PF y las conferencias de PF en los veranos

2. *The sign I use is "War is Not the Answer."*

"This is a Quaker sign. It is a basic message for Christians and all people that God is trying to help us learn," Joyce Myers-Brown said as she talked about protest marches in Atlanta, Georgia.¹ In the eighteen years since her retirement, she has continued to focus her ministry on issues of peace and justice. She engages in a weekly peace witness sponsored by Women's Action for New Directions (WAND).²

"I have tried to demonstrate once a week for the last four years," she said. "We started before the Iraq war. We get some nasty comments some times when demonstrating, but demonstrating is also rewarding."

3. *"I want you to go to Hartford Seminary."*

Joyce was close to her grandfather. "He was big into American history," she said. "Before I was old enough to know what it was all about, he took me to all the famous historical places in Philadelphia. Each week he had new books from the library on American history subjects. I was exposed to a lot of that and appreciated it."

The Reverend Harry W. Myers was also pastor of Pilgrim Congregational Church in Philadelphia. "We were a church family," she said.

I cannot remember not being in church. We were there whenever the church was open. The church was always a part of our life and we were always a part of the church's life.

I used to stand by the door with my grandfather as he greeted people leaving the church. My father said that the ministry in our family skipped a generation, although my father was chair of the diaconate and both he and my mother were very active in the church.

My grandfather never lived to know that I was going into ministry. He did know that I was going into overseas mission service. That was the call I felt when I was a teenager. My grandfather died the year I went to college. At that time I was thinking of social service.

My grandfather was ill in his last year and could not talk much, but he said, "I want you to go to Hartford Seminary." After that, I never thought about any other seminary. Hartford also had a church social service program at that time.

¹ Phone interview with the Reverend Joyce B. Myers-Brown. February 1, 2007.

² Visit <http://www.wand.org>.

Joyce was involved in Pilgrim Church throughout her youth. Her grandfather had been there since the church's foundation in 1897. As the community changed to ethnic Catholic, Pilgrim Church grew smaller. Joyce and her brother were the only two young people in the church by then.

As a teenager, Joyce started going to Pilgrim Fellowship at Frankford Congregational Church in their neighborhood. "I also had a boy friend in that PF," Joyce said.

4. *I could be both a math teacher and a missionary.*

When she was about fifteen, summer camp provided a significant experience. Summer camp was at Hartman Center, the only conference center in the state for the Congregational Christian side of the church.

Jack Blake, a missionary from Turkey, was at camp. He influenced Joyce's career design because he was both a math teacher and an ordained Congregational Christian minister. He taught math in Izmir, Turkey.

Here I was, and my favorite subject was math. I was thinking to become a math teacher. I found out that you could be a math teacher *and* a missionary. That was a whole new idea to me. I started learning a few Turkish words. All through high school, I thought I was going to be a math teacher and a missionary in Turkey. That changed after high school.

5. *"Ah, it's a fit."*

"I did not really know what I was going to do or how I was going to do it," Joyce said, "but the call was there."

Several church-related experiences contributed to the unfolding of her call. The summer she graduated from high school, she went to Puerto Rico as part of a work camp.

That was a profound experience. Ten young people from the States and ten from Puerto Rico were together for about six weeks. Among other things, we visited folks up in the mountains where social workers from a church hospital were visiting.

I saw some of the sad conditions in which folks were living. I saw how representatives from the church, in this case a church hospital, were able to make a difference in their lives.

The next several summers, Joyce worked in New York, California, Ohio, and Michigan with the Migrant Ministry. "I even thought about this as a

career, but found I couldn't take the emotional wrench of separating with persons I'd grown close to as they moved on to [work] the next crop."³

She described her call as a growing call. "The direction and sharpening of my sense of vocation was growing over these years," she said.

She said she does not relate to born-again experiences in the sense that her faith grew throughout her childhood and youth and into adulthood. In her lifetime, however, she has had "lightning bolt experiences." She said, "I use that term respectfully."

The first such experience was in knowing that she should go to Angola. "Then a point came in my first year at Hartford Seminary. I just knew a definite sense of calling from God."



Another that came years later, she said, "was when I knew at age fifty that I should marry Ed Brown. Ed [the Reverend Edward M. Brown] and I were so like-minded in the things that we were committed to and involved in that when we let people know we were getting married, Reuben Sheares said, 'Ah, it's a fit.'"⁴

6. "I came that they might have life, and have it abundantly" (NRSV).

John 10:10 has long been one of Joyce's favorite verses. "I view God as a God of love who cares about all people everywhere without distinction. I think of that in terms of abundant life in every sense," she said.

"The call of all of us in any faith is to make God's love and concern for all people known. Our call is to work to remove any barriers and systems that hinder people from having fullness of life – spiritually and in terms of their total life. Each of us finds our place to do this."

7. *Waiting*

Joyce graduated summa cum laude from Elon University in North Carolina in 1959. In 1963, she received a Master of Divinity degree from Hartford Seminary. On May 5, 1963, she was both ordained in the United Church of Christ by the Philadelphia Association of the Pennsylvania Southeast Conference of the United Church of Christ and commissioned to

³ From "Joyce Myers (-Brown): Frontiers of the New Creation." INFORM-HER. May, 1983. South Central Conference of the United Church of Christ.

⁴ The Rev. Reuben Sheares was director of the Office for Church Life and Leadership, a part of the UCC, when Joyce was associated with OCLL.

missionary service by the United Church Board for World Ministries [UCBWM].

She said that both formal education and a variety of work experiences helped to prepare her for ministry. She had been appointed by the then UCBWM in 1961. Because of the political situation, she could not yet go to Angola. The Board agreed to send her to Wisconsin for a semester of language study.

By early 1962, the Portuguese still were not letting missionaries into Angola. She chose to return to seminary and finish a Bachelor of Divinity. In seminary, she was working on a Master of Social Work [MSW] with a certificate in church social service. This degree was given in connection with the nearby University of Connecticut. MSW students would have a year of theology and then start the two-year program with some seminars at Hartford.

One semester in the school of social work was enough to tell me that social work was not for me. It was too "mechanical" or "deterministic." It was not the way I understood that you worked with people. I knew that I wanted to switch to fulltime, ordained ministry.

While at Hartford, Joyce worked with the YWCA organizing girls' clubs in a housing project area. All of these things prepared her for service later. "That is how I became connected with Angola," she said. "The pastor and family of the local Congregational church had been missionaries in Angola. That minister served the Y housing project where I also did some field work. A student from Angola was also at the seminary the first semester."

8. Angola

Joyce served twelve years in Angola. Beginning in 1963, she did language study in Portugal and then served with the Evangelical Congregational Church of Angola in Africa in partnership with the United Church Board for World Ministries. The first term of five years she was involved in leadership training at Bailundo Mission. From 1969 until escalation of the war forced her evacuation in 1975, she taught in theological education at Emmanuel Seminary in Dondi.

At Bailundo, she helped with a variety of programs held in the main church center, which used to be called a mission station. Conferences included a week-long pastor seminar or retreat and those for Sunday school teachers and women's leaders.

Because of the colonial situation, the director of the mission had to be a missionary and not an Angolan. In name, I was director of

Bailundo Mission even though I was this green kid barely arrived in this country. Because languages come easily to me [Joyce speaks five languages], I did not have a language problem with Portuguese or Umbundu, but I was really just beginning as a minister and as a missionary. The Reverend Eurico Sanguave, the Angolan "General Pastor," did all the work and taught me what I was supposed to be doing.

This center served about twenty pastoral centers going out from that. Each pastoral center had many village churches, dozens and dozens of local congregations. Like a conference minister, Joyce often also did visitation and preached in different centers and villages.

Dealing with the authorities was a big piece of it all and a big heartache during the colonial era. I saw people getting carted off by the secret police and by the authorities. We were not allowed to hold meetings without a permit from the "PIDE." We had to apply way in advance to get these permits. It was just a lot of tension under which we worked. People were often "taken away."

In my first year at Bailundo, about fifteen teachers or leaders who had been in concentration camps since 1961 were released. I remember when they came back to the mission. All those years, everybody walked on eggs. You had to be so careful what you said or preached.

An Angolan pastor or a missionary could preach on something like, "You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (John 8:32), and you could be in jail the next day. If you were a missionary, you would not be in jail, but people who heard you could be.

In the Methodist area up north, some did end up in prison. Early on in 1961 a lot of things went on. This brutality and atmosphere lasted all those years that I was there, from 1964, when I arrived, until independence in 1975. The people of Angola suffered greatly.

9. Angola Revisited

At the invitation of the Evangelical Congregational Church of Angola, Joyce returned to Angola twenty years later. This extended visit of solidarity and concern was an experience that would influence her future. She saw the ongoing terror of landmines and other horrors of the war.

It was heartbreaking to see all the destruction and to know that everyone I knew and loved had lost family members, if they were

not dead themselves. It was painful to hear how people's lives had been upset as they fled the fighting.

I was shaken with everything I saw. Tilavita, the name of a pastor's daughter, means "fleeing from war." The family had been in one area when their daughter was born and had to flee to another when the war shifted. Then they had to flee again. At the same time it was thrilling to see the faith, the strength and the vibrancy of the folks. They comforted me and helped me accept it. People lived and believed that nothing "will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ" (Romans 8:38-39).

The Protestants were prosecuted by the Portuguese colonial Catholic government. The Catholic schools were favored. "The Protestants were always viewed as troublemakers, which we were in a sense," she said. "It was not racism as much as class-ism. The church on top of that suffered."

During the Civil war, when Joyce left in 1975, most of the partner church, the Evangelical Congregational Church, was in central Angola. When she returned in 1995, fighting had spread to almost all of the country. As laypeople were displaced with the war, they took their faith with them and started churches wherever they were scattered.

10. I was eager to talk.

After Joyce returned to the United States, she needed to talk, especially about Angola. "It was fresh with me," she said. "I was still raw from all the turmoil, so I was eager to talk."

Angola was in the news here because of the civil war breaking out. The United Church of Christ Office of Communications set up a media tour. It was connected with the churches in that Joyce would go to St. Louis, for instance, and meet with the newspapers, TV, radio, and the churches. It brought the truth before the secular public as well as the church public.

"You would go somewhere," she said, "and they would say, 'Oh, those Africans, they have a revolution and then they have a civil war.'"

"I would say, 'Just a minute. I seem to recall another young country that had a revolution and not so many years later had a bloody civil war.' I could tell the story of the country and of the church. 'The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church' [Tertullian] is surely true in Angola. "

11. Adopt-a-Minefield Program

She had to do something to help. She became involved with the United Nations. At that time, they were just beginning to talk about setting up

nationally the Adopt-a-Minefield program that was to become international. The people serving on the Board of the Atlanta chapter of the United Nations Association knew that Joyce was passionate about the issue. [The Atlanta chapter's Adopt-a-Minefield, a landmine clearing effort, has raised more money than any other chapter in the country.]

The first village that we cleared in about 1999 suffered a terrible flood shortly after that. That ground was the only high ground plus mine-free ground for dropping relief supplies. We learned that our work had helped make that village safe both from the mines and from the flood.

I have chaired the Atlanta chapter's Adopt-a-Minefield now for a decade. We have raised money to clear nine mine fields in Mozambique. They do not have the program in Angola yet as all those years the civil war was going on. It has been hard work, but I have gotten the United Church of Christ involved through the conference. That has helped a lot.

12. Connecting across Faiths

As she reflected about her life as a missionary, Joyce said, "A whole bunch of years float across my mind when I consider what has been most enjoyable about my lifework."

Most enjoyable were the experiences where I have connected with people across cultural, racial and interfaith aspects of the common understanding of something. Whether it was leading a retreat for women in some conference in the United Church of Christ or being in a pastors' retreat in Angola, we were of the same mind.

She has also enjoyed involvement with Church Women United, the Atlanta Interfaith Sisters, and the UNA.

In 1988-1989, Joyce and her husband served as co-pastor volunteers with the Reformed Church of France in Henin-Beaumont, France. While they were there, a friend from Alabama who was part of Grandmothers for Peace⁵ in the United States brought students to France. "My friend took a special trip up in northern France to meet with us -- connecting with people of faith across cultures," Joyce said.

Among the most difficult aspects of her work were the scary things happening in Angola during the colonial period. Even when she returned to Angola in 1995, fighting was still going on. "At night," she said, "there was always shooting although people took good care of me."

⁵ Visit <http://www.grandmothersforpeace.org/>

Of her years of weekly demonstrating for peace on 14th Street in Atlanta, she said, "It is so fulfilling to be doing something and saying something that you really care about and you think and hope will make a difference."

13. *Office for Church Life and Leadership*

After a year of touring the United States to speak about Angola, Joyce served as a missionary-in-residence at the headquarters of the United Church of Christ Board for World Ministries in New York City.

Then she served on staff with the Office for Church Life and Leadership [OCLL],⁶ moving to Atlanta for a ten-year assignment as Southern Regional Associate with OCLL. During this period, in 1987, Joyce and Ed were married.

While working with OCLL, she had opportunity to take a two-month study sabbatical to Central America and Mexico. For part of that sabbatical, she traveled with a group of eighteen United Church of Christ clergy and lay people from twelve states.

"El Salvador was just overwhelming," she wrote home. "All I could think of were the darkest days of fear and oppression and violence that I had known in Angola ... and the struggle for independence." She experienced "the palpable fear and terror when no one speaks without looking over their shoulder first."⁷

My years with OCLL were a rich experience. Among my special foci were the women's ministries and the joy of relating to women in many different conferences, but especially here in the southern region. I also was a liaison with the Council for Hispanic Ministries with wonderful relationships developing out of that. I also related to the churches of Puerto Rico.

I had the joy of being on the Women's Inter-Staff Team and the Coordinating Center for Women during the whole history as women claimed their voice within the UCC -- Marilyn Breitling, Yvonne Delk, Faith Johnson, Elinor Galusha and others -- wonderful women."

Joyce took a sabbatical from OCLL in 1988 and 1989. It was then that Ed and Joyce went to France. "Through the United Church Board for World Ministries, we served three churches of the Reformed Church of France. Most of the people were retired miners and widows," she said. "This was also a special time because it was the first time that Ed and I co-pastored."

⁶ This office provided resources and programs to support United Church of Christ ministers, lay leaders and congregations.

⁷ Joyce Myers (-Brown). "For Christ's Sake: A witness to the struggle for justice and peace in Latin America." COMMON LOT. Winter, 1985, 1, 10-11

Their ministry was cut short in August, 1989. When Joyce's father had a stroke, they returned home. "I had to decide whether to go back to OCLL or to sever the ties," she said. "That was a hard decision."

14. *And Now?*

Joyce wrote in "Frontiers of the New Creation,"⁸ "In one way or another my [entire] ministry has been on God's frontiers – frontiers of place or (and much harder to penetrate) of mind/heart." To be a "frontier crosser," she said, "is never easy, but it is always challenging and fulfilling."

"Even though I am not salaried now, I have found a full ministry and a great variety of experiences at home these last eighteen years," she said.

Her ministry of advocacy focuses on issues of peace and justice. Joyce and Ed are partners in demonstrating against war and working for peace and reconciliation. In 2004, Joyce received the Blessed are the Peacemakers Award from the World Council of Churches presented for the Adopt-a-Minefield work of the UNA of Atlanta.

Throughout her faith journey, we have heard Joyce's anguish over the divisions that separate and hurt the people of our world. We hear her yearning still "that they all may be one" (John 17:21).

From the long-distance experiencing of a reader of American history with her grandfather to experiencing the awful things that were the result of war in Angola, Joyce's compassion could not be blindfolded. She had to do something to make a difference.

From her presence in visits of solidarity and concern to organizing land mine removal to her faithful weekly carrying a "War Is Not the Answer" sign in protest, she has had to do whatever she could to change war to peace.

As she wrote in a letter home shortly before returning from her Latin America study trip, she is "committed more than ever to the struggle for justice and peace for Christ's sake."⁹

15. *So What About You?*

- Reread Joyce Myers-Brown's favorite verse, John 10:10. Joyce said that each of us can find a way to make known God's plan that everyone should know about God's love and concern for all.

⁸ From INFORM HER, a South Central Conference newsletter, May, 1983.

⁹ COMMON LOT, 11

What do you think "abundant life" means?

What ideas do you have about your way to show God's concern for all people?

- Joyce went to Angola the second time and made a mission visit to Central American countries. In both places, she met everyday kinds of people.

What do you think being a "Christian presence" in another country, even for a short time, means to those folks?

What message does it give them about God's concern?

- One mystery about ministry is that sometimes people who are called are overcome by compassion. Despite the strength of her compassion, part of Joyce's self-discovery was to learn early that she might be unable to survive emotionally doing Migrant Ministry.

What clues have you noticed about your emotional or compassionate limits? What do these limits tell you about the direction of your life?

When do you have to take a step back emotionally or find another way to do what you have chosen to do? When have you seen your heart win anyway in the struggle for justice or peace?

- Throughout Joyce's spiritual journey, her compassion always has found a form of action. She tried to reshape the form of her ministry so she could be more fully whom God means for her to be, but, always, her compassion won. It fueled her passion for bringing justice and peace.

What issues of peace or justice are you aware of in your town, this country and/or the world?

Are you passionate about any one issue?

What is some small but mighty way for you to make a difference in this issue?

- Sometimes advocacy means carrying a protest sign. Sometimes it means a partnership of learning with another person or in another country.

Look up the word "advocacy." Look up "partnership."

Why do you think churches in America and those in our world mission field are said to be in partnership?

Are you more interested in finding ways to work with social issues or to work one-by-one with individuals?

What would you say is the meaning of being an advocate for God? How about being a partner?

How do you see yourself now as being an advocate for God?

16. Family Church Project

Ask your pastor about the current schedule of missionaries visiting in your conference or region and invite a missionary to speak at your church.

For example, Tim Rose, serving as a missionary in France, will be in Connecticut Conference, 9/1/08 - 4/30/09. At the main menu of www.ucc.org, go to "Change the World" and to Global Ministries. Or go to www.globalministries.org. Then go to Get Involved, then Missionary Connections and List of Missionary Visits in UCC Conferences and Disciples Regions.

17. Still Curious?

Internet Resources:

- ✓ Youth Mission. At the main menu of www.ucc.org, go to "Change the World" and to Global Ministries, then Get Involved, then Youth Opportunities and Service Opportunities for Youth.
- ✓ Group Mission Trips for Youths. At the main menu of www.ucc.org, go to "Change the World" and to Global Ministries, then Get Involved, then Group Mission Trips, People-to-People Pilgrimages and International
- ✓ Read Matt Reed's story at Global Ministries, Missionaries, Angola, Serving the Church in Angola. Matt was a short-term volunteer in Angola in 2004.
- ✓ Read Donna Dudley's story, "Christmas Blessings from Portugal – On the Way to Angola," at Global Ministries, Missionaries, Stories, Africa, Angola.

Other Resources:

Bright Wings, Edited by Lori Hayes. A 60-page book of artwork by children and youths compiled by a former missionary. Call 800-537-3394 or contact your conference or regional office library to borrow a video.

Connecting Threads. A series of short videos about Global Ministries' partners in different parts of the world. Call 800-537-3394 or contact your conference or regional office library to borrow a video.

(Dallas (Dee) A. Brauninger. *Antoinette Brown Women: Finding Voice*, February, 2008)