

Mending the World: United Church of Canada and Angola Partners Conference

which took place virtually on August 12, 2020

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My work as programs coordinator For South East Asia and Southern Africa partnerships at the United Church of Canada, enables me to travel to Asia and Africa frequently. This is part of my job to strengthen relationships and partnerships on behalf of the United Church of Canada. I Manage 23 global partner relationships in 6 countries which include Angola, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Malawi, India and the Philippines.

The United Church affirms a vision of an intercultural church that is welcoming, relational, adaptive, justice-seeking, intentional, and mission-centred. The church affirms that right relations are at the heart of God's mission, and that global partnerships are opportunities for expressions of relationships that are respectful, equitable, just and mutually accountable.

My first and last trip of 2020 was at the end of February, 2020 when I traveled to participate in a round table partners annual meeting hosted by the All Africa Conference of Churches which was held in Nairobi, Kenya. Upon return to Toronto the country went on a lock down and almost all air travel was suspended. I have since not travelled out of the country or out of the city of Toronto. Like many other people, I have been working from home.

This new scenario induced by the covid19 brought with it several challenges. At the General Council office of the United Church of Canada, we had to find ways of still fulfilling our mandate of staying in touch with our global partners to strengthen our partnership as we seek justice and dignity for all even in the context of covid19 related restrictions.

We came up with a plan to start virtual visits to our partners. We also invited others from North America to come along on these virtual visits.

On August 12, 2020, in our first virtual trip was to Angola. The focus was to listen to our partners from Angola on how they were taking part in the agenda of 'Mending the World'.

37 seats were booked by colleagues from the United Church of Christ in the USA, Disciples of Christ and the United Church of Canada. The participants included members of the Angola Memorial Scholarship Fund. The airline was called Zoom platform.

In his opening devotion Rev Marco Cable the Africa Executive of Global Ministries shared his thoughts on mending the world from a bible text from Revelation 22. He emphasized that

- ✓ Caring for plants has been therapeutic; Aloe Vera has healing properties that heal burns, digestive problems and others.
- ✓ Africa has plants for medicinal purposes
- ✓ Healing of the nation not to the selected few, but to the nation
- ✓ A symbol of beginning of a new life
- ✓ Yearn for healing; God is in the plant business and the leaves of the plants are for healing the world.

In his Keynote address Luis Samacumbi indicated that If the Church, in Angola and worldwide, continued to be as it was before COVID-19, then the experience would be worthless and the world will be less prepared and more fragile for future events of a local or international dimension.

He further gave practical suggestions on how the Church can contribute to mending the world. He said it would include things such as; the church renewing itself spiritually, increase its spiritual and social relevance, be more itinerant than sedentary as a Church, creating a more effective structure and be a more proactive and less reactive Church.

He appealed for the need and the ability to renew, adapt, change quickly and succeed in an environment of rapid, ambiguous and turbulent changes.

Rev. Andre Eurico Cangovi the General Secretary of IECA based his reflection on *Revelation 21:1-3*, "The struggle will not end, until the dwelling of God is with men and women." He emphasized that the struggle for freedom to mend the world is continuing until this very day.

The Evangelical Church in Angola is aware of the changing dynamics and serious impacts of Covid-19. Therefore, they see themselves in a time of reaffirming their Vision and Mission statements towards: A United, Christian, Multicultural, Inclusive and Prophetic Church, committed to promote a just Angola society, unfolding Biblical principles and Christian Ethical

values. Through preaching, witnessing Christ to all, upholding and uplifting the rights of the most needy, and working for the satisfaction of social, political and spiritual needs of all mankind.

Rev Cangovi also shared about the Eight Pillars of the church for such a time as this. These include; to be a Church in Mission and Witness Jesus to all, to Promote Education both Formal, Informal and Theological, High Education, Research and Extension, Organisational and Institutional Capacity Building at all levels, Church Sustainability, Good management of Human Resources, Church Sustainability, and all these to be under-girded by Good management of Human Resources

The director of the Department of Social Assistance, Studies and Projects (DASEP) Alcides Onésimo Nunda said 'For this reason, the Church, as a prophetic and protective voice for the voiceless, must be prepared to respond with concrete actions and reduce the vulnerability of families without any racial or religious discrimination, in the context of corrupt government systems and dictators. For mending the world in post-COVID-19 era we need to strategize a plan from now'. He said this plan will include; [Emergency response](#), [Rehabilitation](#), [Mitigation of calamities or disasters](#) and [Preparation](#)

Jean Burgess of the Angola Memorial Scholarship Fund also gave an update on how the fund was helping with grants empowering many to access education and contribute to national development in Angola. AMSF effectively supported the Council of Christian Churches of Angola Scholarship Program, the IECA Women's Association Education Projects and the Etta Snow Domestic Sciences School. They were able to give a matching grant for the construction of a chapel school, as part of the Quessua Educational Outreach Program.

In the past 50 years, close to 4 million dollars in scholarship monies, and grants for primary, grass roots and entrepreneurial education have been donated by North American church groups and by individuals, all touched and inspired by the education efforts of Angolan partner churches and the courage and determination of young Angolan students.

AMSF was founded in response to the education support needs of young Angolan refugees displaced by war in Angola, and out of the love and solidarity, felt by the Gilchrist family for their Angolan colleagues and friends.

The participants to the online gathering felt very happy to have such an opportunity to listen to stories of joy and struggle from the Angolan partners.