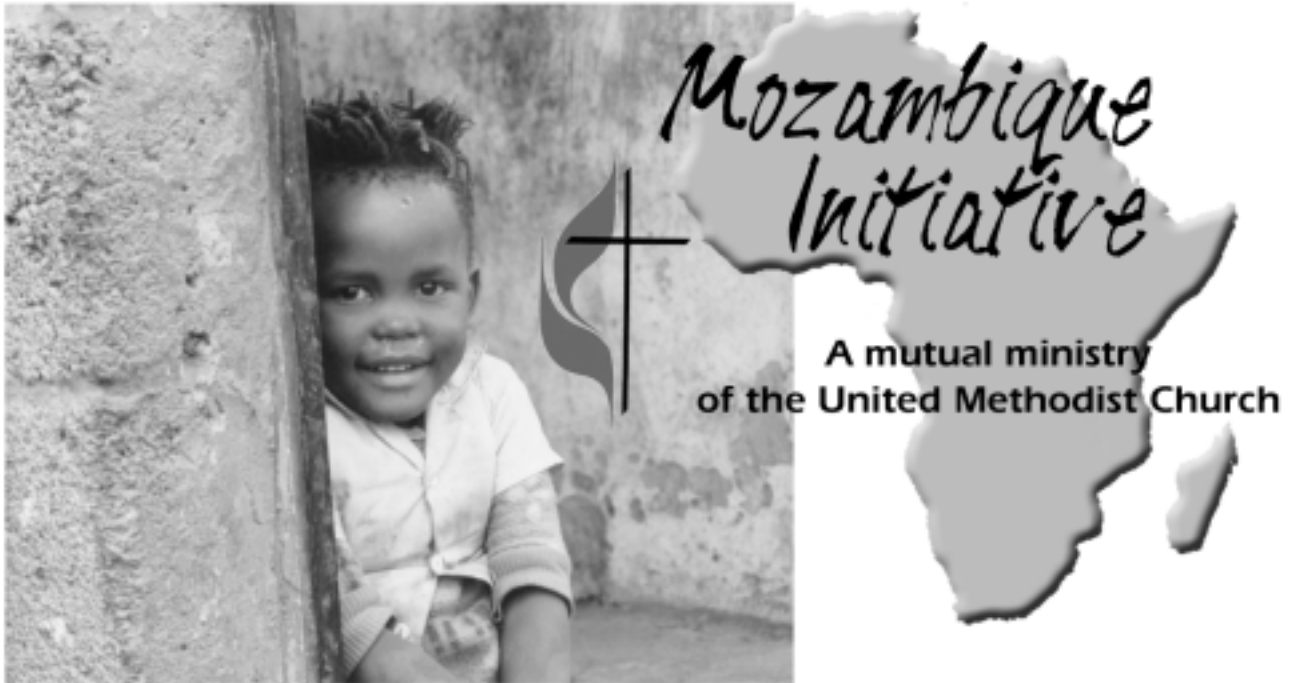


Ken Lutgen, Jr.



## Mozambique and Missouri

There is seductiveness around the affluence of our society that causes many to believe the whole world lives just as we do. We assume if people would just work as hard as we work, they would have the same lifestyle we enjoy. Then an invitation comes, something happens and God breaks through our assumptions, even our resistance to change and we answer the call to participate in God's mission. How many of us have witnessed (or heard another witness) after going on a Mission Itineration or Volunteer in Mission trip, that my life will never be the same, I have been changed? Changed we are by this mission experience, for the power of God's mission is transformational. Our Bishop Ann B. Sherer came back from an extensive itineration to Mozambique and shared that the experience was transformational. Because of this experience, she knew her life would never be the same. She then challenged the Missouri Conferences to make a difference in Mozambique.

A couple of bishops, the son of missionaries, and an old bureaucrat took up the challenge. We cautioned ourselves, not wanting to fall into the mission trap of just planning and implementing another project for the Church outside the United States. So often in the passion of the experience we go and start a project that is not completed because of our lack of commitment or is completed but not supported financially and thus, is

not sustainable. How could we make a difference, in a way that was of mutual benefit for both conferences?

After a time and process of discernment, we realized that to sustain whatever projects we undertook, we needed to first put our emphasis on building relationships. So, we first committed to strengthen our relationship to God through prayer and then to spend the time in building relationships among the churches and United Methodist people of Mozambique and Missouri. What evolved was a process that has come to be known as the Mozambique Initiative. It involved not only a commitment to get to know one another, to plan together, but to meet around the table where we could come to build a common vision.

The Mozambique Initiative is structured in such a way that the emphasis is on building relationships.

Because we have spent the time and

done the hard work of getting to know one another, it is out of these relationships we are able to plan together and then accomplish common ministry objectives. As a result, through the Initiative, hundreds of persons have gone from Missouri to Mozambique involving themselves in everything from convocations to serving as volunteers in mission teams. Whenever we meet in Missouri as the Initiative, we make sure representatives from Mozambique are present. In addition, opportunities are ongoing for persons from Mozambique to itinerate to Missouri.

Nowhere outside of Mozambique in Africa today do all United Methodist pastors receive at least a minimum salary. Children in parsonages do not go to bed hungry.

Over the years:

- church buildings and parsonages have been constructed;
- bicycles and other forms of transportation purchased;
- wells have been dug and well-drilling rigs provided to equip the church to meet the critical need for clean water;
- retired pastors have received a stipend;
- students have been provided educations;
- a hospital has been equipped and mission centers have been provided resources.

Offering plates have been filled in all the involved conferences to carry out the mutual objectives of our common mission. We have prayed for each other and received one another into our churches and homes. We rejoice that our pastors in Mozambique all receive a salary. Nowhere outside of Mozambique in Africa today do all United Methodist pastors receive at least a minimum salary. Children in parsonages do not go to bed hungry. Money has never been an obstacle to our going, receiving, doing together; for when we have been about the Mission, God has helped us provide from our abundance.

We were challenged by our bishops to make a difference. It goes to prove we all desire to make a meaningful difference when faced with the great need of our neighbors. When we enter into a relationship with that neighbor, we soon long for them to have the opportunities they deserve and to reach the potential God holds for their lives. God's mission can bring us to the awareness that we are called to do more than provide resources. We are called to be peace makers. The Mission can even organize us to lobby our leaders for ways to bring about that peace, which will allow a country to develop the infrastructure it needs to provide for health and education and hope in the future of its entire people.

Unfortunately, the present mission structures of the Church no longer effectively serve this emerging mission reality. Those involved in the Mozambique Initiative believed if we moved beyond the limitations imposed by these structures and used the new technology available to us, harnessing it with the relatively untapped volunteer commitment present in our churches, that we could build a mission structure that would make a difference. The technology available today enables a rural church in Missouri to enter into relationship through ongoing communication with a church in the bush of Mozambique. The

Initiative employs two full time coordinators. One works here in Missouri communicating with the churches and the other performs a similar role in Mozambique. Our churches have entered into a covenant that binds them together in prayer, in coming to know each other, in knowing the context of each ministry and in coming to understand the spiritual journey we are all taking. It is more than exchanging names and raising money for a particular need. The Initiative provides the opportunity for each of us to make a real difference in the ways that serve our dream of making a difference and building a lasting peace.

We can confess in Missouri that we have been changed, even transformed, but not at the expense of those we have been called to serve. In Mozambique they can proclaim that the bonds of poverty are being lifted as opportunities are being provided to partner with others and to share in God's abundance. The Initiative has been more than the exchange of persons and the completion of projects. It has been transformational in that lives have been linked as we have shared the vision of being Kingdom Builders. Our Bishop challenged us to enter a ten-year relationship with Mozambique, but the fruit born has gone way beyond a yearly commitment or the completion of a project. The result is today we understand as United Methodists that it is not as important where we reside, in Missouri or Mozambique, as it is that we have become one in the faith and united in God's Mission. □

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# Africa— God's Blessing



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