

OPEN FORUM

Flipping through the pages of the latest edition (Feb/Mar/Apr 2008) of *Circuit Rider* magazine, which was dedicated to an overview of the worldwide issues confronting the 2008 General Conference, I was drawn to an article entitled, “Central Conference Pensions, A Matter of Justice.”

The article contained a number of stories of how retired clergy in many parts of Africa are struggling in retirement with little or no pension support. There is also a more comprehensive account of the situation at www.ccpi-umc.org. I had heard a little about the concern of overseas pensions being addressed at the previous General Conference, and assumed it had been adequately cared for. Apparently, that is not the case. These pastors somehow survive on “sporadic” pensions of \$20 per quarter in places where rice costs \$35 a month. In Zimbabwe, there is nothing available because the funds ran out last year.

I am at the stage of my life where I’m beginning to take a serious look at retirement. I have been blessed with the assurance that when I take that step I will receive an adequate pension which will enable my wife and me to live comfortably. As I read this article and looked at the website, I felt convicted by the Holy Spirit which was showing me that I could not just glance over this information, feel badly about it, perhaps offer a prayer for the welfare of those who serve in such places, and then check to see how things are with my account at the Board of Pensions. I have to do something more, and that leads me to two responses.

First, I need to make others aware of the problem. I didn’t know about it, and it is likely that many others do not either. We become focused on our own “concerns” such as gas costing \$3+ per gallon, but we keep on driving, perhaps supported by professional expense accounts, which would be unheard of in Africa even if they did have a car or motorbike with which to get around. We keep hearing about how bad our economy is and still can’t find a parking space at a crowded mall or Walmart. Meanwhile, these brother and sister servants in Christ

who face hardships we can’t even image here, are hard pressed to buy a bag of rice after thirty or more years of faithful service. We need to begin to appreciate how blessed we truly are and become more aware of how hard others have it in other places. It brings to my mind Jesus’ parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. The rich man didn’t cause harm to Lazarus, but is condemned because he was oblivious to Lazarus’ poverty while he enjoyed his life of affluence. How can I possibly ignore this concern, or assume it is not my problem, just because I was providentially born in a more prosperous nation?

Secondly, I need to do something tangible. I thought about sending a few dollars a month to the Central Conference Pension Initiative (CCPI) fund, but I know how I am. I’d remember it one month,

forget it the next, or maybe channel it into some local need that may arise. So instead of that I decided I would like to contribute anything I receive in the way of honoraria from funerals I conduct to the CCPI fund. That’s generally \$75 or \$100 on an average of every month or two, which is more than I would be writing a check for otherwise. So, I’m going to commit to doing that for at least the next twelve months and then reassess it at that time, though it looks like it will be a problem which will need support for a long time to come.

Some progress has been made. Most, if not all annual conferences now contribute the annual checks they formerly received from Cokesbury to this program, and many individuals and some churches have taken it on as a mission. It’s a problem that can be overcome if enough of us care and get involved. Now that you know, what might you do personally?

Dennis M. Henley

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You hardly noticed her. And that’s just the way she liked it!

FOR 13 YEARS AS MANAGING EDITOR, she orchestrated masterful compilations of articles from peers and partisans, practitioners and prognosticators culminating in scores of editions of *Circuit Rider* read by thousands.

She never wrote an editorial, or placed her photo in the magazine, yet her creativity and thoughtfulness in selecting themes, her masterful eye for detail, her attentiveness to the treasures of variety and balance in contributors, and her heart for the readers were brilliantly represented on every page.

Jill Reddig admires her own long-time pastors with a deep appreciation for the breadth and complexity and holy character of their work. In planning and preparing each issue of *CR* she applied that same passionate respect for her audience of tens of thousands, while perfecting the art of juggling late manuscripts with unrelenting deadlines, achieving fresh design aesthetics, and mollifying the publisher’s inexorable appeals for cost savings.

From her days as a Peace Corps volunteer deep in the interior of the Philippines to her quiet and exceedingly competent behind the scenes work at the Upper Room in editing *A Guide to Prayer*, followed by a 17-year publishing career with The United Methodist Publishing House (UMPH), Jill has mastered the art of being fully present wherever she is. She unfailingly embraces the people she serves and serves with. She has an exceptionally alert ear for the cadence and melodies that resonate with others, a deftness in redirecting the digressing writer, and the ability to elicit superior effort from her teams. With humility she consistently steps back so that others stand in the glow of the spotlight.

Jill has inexplicably decided to retire and invest her gifts in new ways. With awe and gratitude we thank her for incredibly rich contributions and pray that her next adventures in ministry will include many welcome surprises and great joy.

But Jill, in keeping with your high standards for accuracy, we must point out that in one respect you have fallen short of your goal. We’ve more than noticed your integrity, your devotion, your skill, and your faithfulness. Your presence and your gifts will be missed indeed.

— Neil M. Alexander, President and Publisher