



MISSION CONNECTIONS

A program of Presbyterian World Mission • pcusa.org/missionconnections

Summer 2021



Waiting on the Lord

Paula Cooper
*Regional Liaison serving
in East Central Africa*

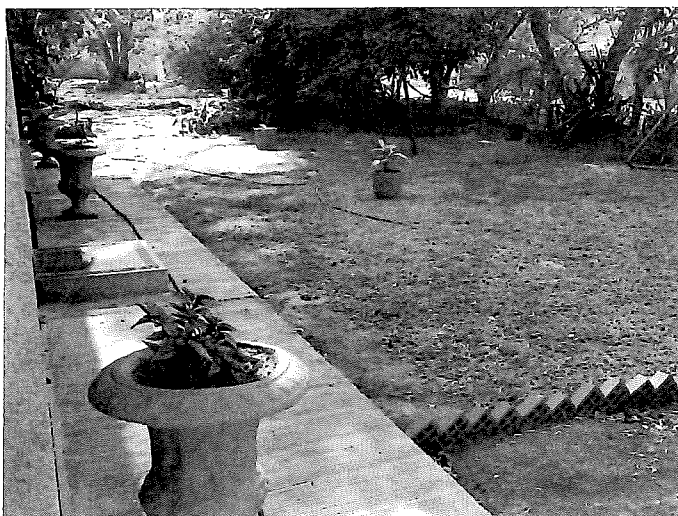
Isaiah 40:31 "But those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint." (NRSV)

Dear friends,

While I'm in my waiting zone, I've been listening to several contemporary gospel artists. Listening to Christian and Gospel music is one of my spiritual disciplines. One song that has reached the top of my list is called "Wait on You," by Elevation Worship and Maverick City, from their *Worship Old Church Basement Album*. The song is based on the above Scripture. This song has invigorated my soul and has intensified my faith in God and His promises during this season of waiting.

I think we can all relate to waiting – that's all we've been doing these past 16 months. The gardener and I continue to work on the landscape around the house. God has entrusted me with eight plants in the front of the house and nine in the back. I've named them after my siblings and their children. A colleague and I have been exercising on ZOOM. I walk around the outside of the house, trying to reach my "steps" goal. I don't get out much due to the 3rd wave of the virus related to the Delta variant that has hit Zambia. I try to only go out for essential items. Restaurants are only open for take-away. I celebrated a birthday in early July and went to a lodge about an hour away. We are still under a no work-related travel ban. Although my travel is personal and local, I continue to check in on some of our East Central Africa partners in Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, and, of course, Zambia – where I live – via email, WhatsApp, and ZOOM.

We recently hosted our 2nd pastors' prayer gathering on ZOOM, and we called it "Coming in the Arms of God." This past month, we held it on three different occasions. The pastors shared how overwhelming the condition was in their respective churches and communities. They talked about their concerns for their congregations and communities related to the 3rd wave; and how the virus doesn't appear to be diminishing. Then there's the isolation from one another.

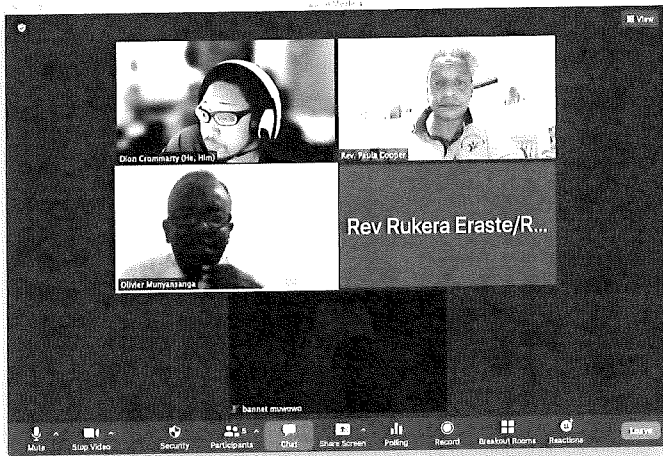


Beloved plants

The pandemic has affected their economies. Lockdowns and curfews are enforced in some of the counties within their countries. Schools and churches are closed. Businesses have gone under. Many church members have lost their jobs. Since the churches have been closed, it's been hard for pastors to receive a salary; thus, food insecurity affects not only their congregations and them. Many of their church members and colleagues have caught the virus. Their countries started to receive the vaccines in March and, again, in June/July; however, just like many other countries, the people are either afraid or believe the myths they hear on social media. The challenges related to the vaccines are immeasurable. They shared that the hospitals are understaffed, under-resourced, and overwhelmed; some don't even have the resources to conduct COVID tests. Many can't get to a health facility that may have the vaccinations or testing due to lack of transportation

or funds for transportation. Some of the pastors at the prayer gathering have officiated funerals of church members, friends, and a few family members. Too many people attend these funerals, which puts everyone at risk.

The pastors shared that they're conducting more worship services and Bible studies over WhatsApp, with very few on ZOOM. Many were concerned that the elderly do not have telephones or Internet and, therefore, cannot participate in the worship services and are left without spiritual connections. In addition, when they make calls to their members, it's heartbreaking to hear the children ask why the pastor won't let them come to church to sing in the choir or be together.



One of the Zoom prayer gatherings

Another thing that was conveyed clearly in the prayer gathering was that they know God to be faithful. As they participate in the Bible studies and try to encourage and inspire their family and church members, their own faith is deepening.

These pastors haven't given up on God. They're waiting on the Lord. They're trusting in God's promises. They're doing what they can in the meantime. They're waiting on the LORD.

The pastors shared various ways that they have been praising God in their homes; activities that they have been doing while waiting on God's deliverance from the pandemic; how they have been praying with their families; finding things to do to pass the time – playing games together, reading Scripture, or exercising—doing some chores or repairs around the house. Some are even planting seeds and keeping their gardens or tilling their farms. They talked about how grateful they were for the prayer platform, where they were able to hear others' challenges, pray and encourage one another.

At the end of the song "Wait on You," the lyrics say: "While I'm waiting, I'll be worshipping . . . I'll be praising . . ." It's about what you do while you wait. Why complain when you can praise. Instead of complaining, why don't we just start praising in the middle of the storm.

My friends, while we're in this waiting zone, my prayer is that we will praise God through our storms because God will renew our strengths!

I thank God for your prayers for our partners and me, your engagement, and your financial support.

May God continue to bless you!

Rev. Paula

Thank you for reading my letter!

Please consider supporting Presbyterian Mission through my ministry. I am grateful for your prayers, personal communication and financial support.

Gifts may be sent to:

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
P.O. Box 643700
Pittsburgh, PA 15264-3700

For more ways to engage in Presbyterian Mission, please email mission.support@pcusa.org.

Thank you for your faithful support.

On the memo line, please write:

"Cooper - E200539" (individual giving)

"Cooper - D507596" (congregational giving)

Give online: pcusa.org/paula-cooper