

Diakonia – Professional and Lay Leadership

One of the benefits of attending a regional or world DIAKONIA assembly is that you get to meet Diaconal Ministers who carry out their ministry differently than we do in the UCC. A small group of DUCCs (Sharilyn Upsdell, Linda Ervin, Lori Stewart and Eric Tusz-King) not only got to meet some of those Diaconal Ministers, but we also had the rare opportunity to watch their Diaconal Ministry being practiced. These four DUCCs and two of their spouses (Margaret Tusz-King and Ed Schiere) were hosted by Mable Sichali, a Diaconal Minister in the United Church of Zambia for five days prior to the Moshi Assembly.



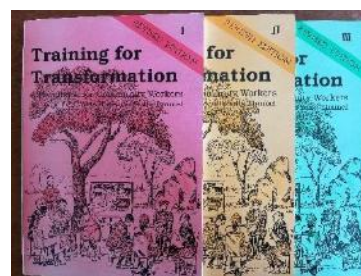
*Mable Sichali Right with
Colleague, Hazel*

We were introduced to various other Diaconal Ministers and their ministries. The foci of their ministries ranged from producing communion wafers to sell to congregations, sewing clothing, building housing for teachers, purchasing and developing a motel/retreat centre, growing peanuts and producing peanut butter, creating a financial co-operative (i.e. credit union) and 30-40 different smaller projects that the communities chose.

Each one of those projects was a collaboration with the local community (mostly, but not exclusively UCZ members), Diaconal Ministers, and the Department of Community Development and Social Justice. Choosing one of those ministries - the production of peanut butter, will illustrate the collaborative model that is used in all the ministries.

A community was selected by Mable and her colleagues in the Department of Community Development and Social Justice of the UCZ in collaboration with the general Secretary's and Presbytery Bishop's Offices. Then the key leaders (gate keepers) gathered and took part in a community mapping exercise to identify the strengths, challenges and goals for their community. Then several members of that group were selected to participate in a training program called, Training for Transformation.

That training program has been used for over forty years in southern Africa and it has its foundations in community development as developed by Paulo Freire, (see Pedagogy of the Oppressed) who was staff to the World Council of Churches. Although Training for Transformation is multi-faith and available in English, French and Spanish most participants are lay people whose primary reason to participate is to improve their community.



After the training the participants from the community gather and select the focus or foci of their work together. The group in Mazabuka chose to grow peanuts and after one year they were ready to produce and sell peanut butter with a tradename, Diakonia. A Diaconal Minister works with them throughout this period to address the challenges of developing a business with the support of Mable Sichali and Department of Community Development and Social Justice of the UCZ.

If the story only went that far it would be very good, but it gets better. The lay leaders and Diaconal Ministers in those community groups connect within Zambia and with other leaders in other African countries. Through this ongoing network they support each other to trade expertise and experience in whatever the focus is of the group. At the Moshi Assembly several Diaconal Ministers in other African countries learned about the Training for Transformation program and have asked to take the training and join the network. This diakonia in action and a great takeaway from a diaconal gathering!