# Reflection by Vicki McPhee

As planning was underway for DUCC 2026, it was suggested that we invite Deaconess Mable Kifiwabantu from the United Church of Zambia to be our speaker. Mable spoke to the World Assembly in Moshi, Tanzania in July 2025. She spoke forcefully on the topic of Gender Justice and was the only speaker to receive a standing ovation. We were excited to bring Mable to Canada to share her extensive experience and training in diakonia.

Once we extended the invitation to DUCC 2026, she was quick to accept, and we began the work of developing the theme times. We asked her to speak on her areas of expertise: transformational diakonia, gender justice and climate justice. We had video calls and many emails to plan out the three different sessions.

As of late June, everything was coming together nicely with the exception of hearing back from the Canadian Government about the status of her visitor's visa application. The application process was a marathon of questions, submitting forms, collecting letters of support, and being clear that all of Mable's expenses would be covered while in Canada. At one point, we had to provide the audited financial statements of the United Church of Canada.

Despite the reassurances that costs would be covered and her history of never over-staying a visa in other countries, in mid-July we were told that Mable's application was denied. According to the Government of Canada letter, she was denied a visitor's visa because: 1. There was not enough assurance that she wouldn't overstay her Visa and 2. She did not have enough resources to go back home.

With help from the United Church of Canada, I worked for a whole week, getting more letters, helping to fill out another application and corresponding with Mable to ensure the proper documents were all in good order. And then, we ran out of time. Apparently, visa applications from Zambia take a minimum of forty days to process. And, there was speculation that there were problems with people overstaying their visas when coming to Canada for the World Cup. And so, we stopped the application process and pivoted (don't we hate that word some days?) to host Mable digitally rather than in person.

I have spent a lot of time, these past fifteen years, exploring what it means to be self-determining and who has the ability to move freely. I have spent time in the West Bank, the State of Israel, in Egypt, Jordan, Zambia and the United States, learning about who does and who does not have the freedom to cross borders. That Canada denied entry to an employed, financially secure, married woman with children at home was a devastating blow to the planning team of DUCC— for our loss of having Mable attend our gathering in person AND to my understanding that Canada is a welcoming and kind place for all people.

Mable made videos and sent facilitation notes that were extraordinary. We made the theme time work. We would have much rather had her in Canada so she could receive another, well deserved standing ovation.

Vicki McPhee