

ZAMBIA ZIMBABWE MOZAMBIQUE USA
MISSION NETWORK

ZZMUSA NETWORK

NEWS

FEBRUARY 2021



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CONVENERS' CORNER



The year 2020 has been characterized by many as a year to build our faith in the Lord. Ending the year has not been easy for all circles of life. The education sector had been hit left, right and centre. Many students have studied at home with less or no supervision. Some children and women have sexually been harassed, abused and young girls raped. Crimes have risen and many have gone into prisons as a way to punish them. These facilities have now been congested to a level that one cannot believe. They are now called collection services, but much needs to be done, as a lot of evil still happens.

The church has much to do to reach as many people in society as we can. Last year, I was privileged to visit the prisons. It was very touching and made me realize that life is a journey and has real issues. Prisons are places of punishment. They are associated with extreme stigma, isolation, partial death, no social recognition, detachment from loved ones and are used as a way to make one repent. I never knew that people could stay up all night without any sleep and later go for hard working the following morning. Life keeps going on in such a circle.

The life in prison to me is a way that makes things worse. People need to be talked to for them to realize the wrongs done. Many are just condemned as the worst. How will one be reintegrated back into society? Many who are in prisons feel depressed and powerless and have no sense of seeing light again. They see life as tough going without hope for the future.

I still feel, the church must be doing something for the prisoners. The word must be fully preached and give hope to those who have lost hope. It should not be a word to condemn or speak evil of the men and women who are convicted. In fact, where is the church in such situations? People would rather hear the message of love, repentance and give hope to them.

While during Covid-19, everyone has been so scared. I have been wondering how our friends in the prisons have had the social distance, washing of hands when a cell for 10 people had to house 100 people. No one thought of them as they are also created in the image of God. It is my prayer that going forward, we will be thinking of such places and not just condemn. We never know how or why such people are in the prisons. They might be better than the one preaching the Gospel of love, but yet is full of hatred. They might be better than the one who smiles, but does not mean it in their heart. It is not only poverty of food, but of the word of God too.

I still wonder, if being in prison brings transformation to a person. I believe God has his own way to transform an individual. In times such like Covid-19, with a big crisis, let us think of everyone including the prisoners, the people who are disabled and everyone whom we can reach with the Word of God. Love and assurance of faith.

Has the church done much for our friends who are disadvantaged, in prisons and those who have lost hope? Covid-19 is a lesson to the church to reaffirm our stand in the Lord. Have faith, consider everyone and provide if possible. Let God alone help us think, reach the people in need and in prisons. The love of Christ for all is key to show the Gospel.

I hope 2021 will be a year to see the hand of God despite its challenges. It is all by God's grace that we live and are what we are. It is my sincere hope that the prisoners will be cared for as much as we think of others. They are also made in the image of God, and we see the love of God for everyone. It is my prayer that we can find a way to reintegrate them in the society, family circles and give them a sense of life that they deserve. One thing I know is that, if they are given a skill, receive the word of God and accept the sentence, out of prison will be a way to empower such people.

*Peace,
Sevatt Kabaghe*

THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UNKNOWN

*by Melissa Johnson,
PC(USA) Mission Co-Worker, CCAP Zambia
Health Education Facilitator*

On January 14th it was a year since we stepped back on Zambian soil after several

months of interpretation assignment, the death of my mom and the discovery of Charles' ascending aortic aneurism. We were so glad for 2019 to be in our rearview mirror and we thought that 2020 could only bring better times. Just as we were getting back into the groove of life in Lundazi we were called back to the U.S. in March because of the pandemic and here we are, 10 months later, realizing that 2020 wasn't the year we hoped it would be.



*The Johnson Family (L-R Brien, Melissa, Charles and Meagan)
Photo by Melissa Johnson*

During these 10 months so much has changed for us - for the good, the bad and the still unknown and unfolding. The good has been the purchase of our new home in Atlanta, the opportunity to be closer to our family, joining a new faith community here, and the technology that allows us to stay connected with our friends and co-workers in Zambia. The bad was Charles' hospitalization and scary bout with pneumonia and sepsis (thankfully not COVID). The unknown is still unfolding. As many of you know, Charles accepted the voluntary separation package offered by PC(USA). Realizing that he will not be returning to his role in Zambia has been more difficult than we anticipated. But with this unknown and unfolding change in our lives,

there is still the good. We have been able to become involved with the creation of the Georgia Coalition of the Poor People's Campaign and worked to motivate voters to get out and vote in the Georgia run-off election.

For those of you who don't know me or what I've been doing in Zambia, I'm including a link to a short Youtube video moment for mission. <https://youtu.be/P7q7sf3axUU>

Please feel free to share with your friends, family and church. After watching, if you have questions or want more information, please feel free to shoot me an email: Melissa.johnson@pcusa.org.

On Sunday, January 31st, we boarded a plane to return to Zambia - not to work, but so that Charles can collect his belongings and we can bring our two dogs, Gus and Woodrow, back to Atlanta (they have been alone for way too long). While we are there we will mainly stay in voluntary quarantine and won't be able to see most of our friends -- which will be really hard. We covet your prayers for our safe travel and for the understanding of our friends in Zambia who will be disappointed that while we will be close, we still won't really be with them. Here's to hoping and praying that 2021 will be the year we hoped 2020 would be. Thank you for your prayers and please know I will be praying for you all - for all your good, bad and unknowns.

THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION WORK GROUP UPDATE

by Janet Schlenker

The Theological Education Work Group has begun in earnest its efforts to communicate

with our PC(USA) seminaries and to discover to what extent these institutions are promoting global awareness, or engagement, or if there is an expressed interest in doing so. As referenced in the last newsletter update, our team members are just beginning to hold conversations with appropriate seminary personnel. We are learning a lot! This is a process which is going to take considerable time. We have not yet begun to be in touch with our identified theological institutions in Zambia, Zimbabwe and Mozambique. Both Covid-19 and undependable electronic communication make this especially challenging. Nevertheless, we remain hopeful and excited about the possibility of promoting meaningful and mutually enriching relationships among Presbyterian-related seminaries and theological institutions on both continents.

JUSTO MWALE UNIV: PREPARING PASTORS BUT ALSO SCHOLARS

by Dr. Dustin Ellington, Assoc. Prof. of New Testament at JMU and PC(USA) Mission Co-Worker in Zambia, currently on study leave at Fuller Theological Seminary

People usually think of Justo Mwale University as an important institution for preparing Reformed and Presbyterian pastors. Indeed, JMU has trained many pastors for seven countries throughout Southern Africa. However, as one of the most established theological schools between Kenya and South Africa, Justo Mwale also plays a key role in training people who go on to train pastors in other theological schools, and by helping these and other African scholars to think biblically and theologically about realities on the ground in Africa.

For instance, Rev. Bannet Muwowo, a recent graduate of the JMU masters program, is now the principal at Chasefu Theological College in the Eastern Province of Zambia and teaches biblical studies to future Ministers of the Word and Sacrament in the CCAP. Rev. Agnes Nyirenda Nyondo, who graduated a few years ago from our BTh program, is a new lecturer at the University of Livingstonia's School of Theology, Ekwendeni campus, Malawi. We also have graduates teaching in theological schools in Zimbabwe and Mozambique.



Rev. Agnes Nyirenda Nyondo, JMU graduate with Prof. Marty Soards, Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary and guest professor at JMU [Photo by Dustin Ellington]

One way that I am currently continuing to contribute to future scholars for the church in Africa, even from the USA, is through writing. One of my current study leave projects is a paper that focuses on what I have learned in the last ten years at JMU about developing a model of teaching that trains students for biblical interpretation that is simultaneously contextual (arising from and being true to the African context) and also allows the Bible to have its own voice (by using literary context of passages and all the evidence we can find from the Bible itself).

At JMU and in many African theological schools, there's a longing for biblical interpretation that's truly African, that

allows the Scripture to mean what it means to African communities, instead of relying too much on interpretations from foreign lands. This is important for the postcolonial situation and for developing a theology that addresses the African setting.

At the same time, when anyone says, "The Bible means whatever it means to our community," we also need to be careful. Our JMU Prof. D.T. Banda, in his PhD dissertation, spoke of the problem of "taming" interpretation "within the culture of the interpreter". Banda claims that one can be a "prisoner" of how one's own culture sees. He affirms that "culture must itself be converted".

Moreover, if the Bible means whatever it means to our community, Chasefu's Rev. Muwowo says in his masters thesis that "it would lead to the temptation of using scriptures for self-gain and putting the reader to be in control of the meaning of the text." He has also warned that the pervasiveness of poverty can take control of how we understand the Bible. Many people want to find the prosperity gospel in the Bible.



Rev. Bannet Muwowo (L), JMU graduate and Dr. Dustin Ellington [Photo by Dustin Ellington]

So, the question becomes: How do we encourage interpretations which are truly African, or truly contextual, speaking to the situation on the ground, while also allowing Scripture to have its own voice and speak words which we do not expect or anticipate? How do we allow Scripture to surprise us and challenge us instead of only saying what our community wants to hear it say? We need both so that biblical interpretation can be truly prophetic and transformational.

My paper focuses on developing a model of approaching the Bible and teaching interpretation that empowers students to ask open and in-depth questions both of passages from the Bible and of their own contexts of ministry, and then invites students to hold the text and their contexts in deepening conversation with one another. The approach helps students take in more evidence from the text, seeing relationships between parts and wholes within Scripture. And it helps them ask questions that foster a deep identification between the biblical text and their own context, so we see ourselves and our community in and through the Bible.

Here in Pasadena where I'm currently on study leave, when Fuller Theological Seminary's New Testament department learned about the different writing projects I'm working on this year, this paper was the one they asked me to present to their faculty and graduate students. As they read the paper and as we discussed it, they said that while it was written for Africa, they wanted to find ways for their own students to read it, because it deals with analogous issues which they, too, are facing: How do they encourage their diverse student body to read the Bible in a way that's sensitive to and values their particular communities while also being

faithful to what the biblical text actually says? How can they do both at the same time?

They recommended it to the Dean's Cabinet of Fuller Seminary, who planned a plenary conversation for their faculty as a whole. Those in attendance affirmed that this is the sort of conversation which seminaries everywhere need - yes, in Africa, but certainly beyond Africa. Students need experiences of seeing what's really there in the biblical text, of really observing how it witnesses to Jesus Christ and the gospel, and they need space to have honest and deep conversation between Scripture and their cultural backgrounds and diverse communities. These experiences help believers to weave an identity that is genuinely Christian while also being genuinely African or genuinely appropriate to any other particular culture. This process seems crucial for thinking through what it means to live life with Scripture and preach the gospel faithfully.

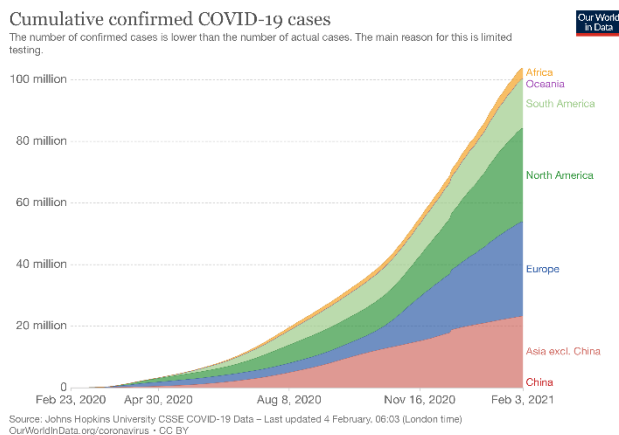
My hope is that, after its publication in South Africa, the essay can become helpful to future scholars in Africa who will be shaping their students' approach to interpreting the Bible. Please join me in praying not only for Justo Mwale University's work of preparing pastors, but also for its work of preparing scholars who will themselves go on to equip future pastors for Africa.

SOUTHERN AFRICA FACES A SURGE IN COVID-19

by Doug Tilton

After recording comparatively low rates of Covid-19 infection throughout most of 2020,

Southern Africa has experienced dramatically increased caseloads in the wake of the holiday season.



Graph from <https://ourworldindata.org/>

In Zambia, Zimbabwe and Mozambique, the total number of confirmed cases of Covid-19 infection more than doubled during January 2021. Deaths also increased concomitantly, more than tripling in Zimbabwe.

Country	Total confirmed cases		Deaths	
	Dec 31	Jan 31	Dec 31	Jan 31
Mozambique	18,642	38,654	166	367
Zambia	20,725	54,217	388	763
Zimbabwe	13,867	33,388	363	1,217
United States	20.06m	26.19m	345,955	441,324

The spike in infections appears to have been driven in part by increased social interaction over the festive season and also by the emergence of a new coronavirus variant, 501Y.V2, first identified in South Africa in November. The variant is reportedly significantly more contagious than the earlier strain.

Mozambique’s Health Minister, Dr. Armindo Tiago, said that 501Y.V2 had been detected in Mozambique since November 2020, while health officials announced on December 30th that the new strain had also been isolated in Zambia. Health authorities in Zimbabwe, where three government ministers have succumbed to Covid-19, assume that the more contagious strain is also behind the rapid spread of Covid-19 there.

Zambia’s Health Minister reported that the new infections were more transmissible, more widely spread geographically and generally more severe, with more people requiring hospitalisation and oxygen therapy. Other nations are reporting similar effects. In Zimbabwe, hospitals reached full capacity and patients were turned away. Mpilio Hospital in Bulawayo reported that more than 200 staff members, three quarters of whom were nurses and student nurses, had tested positive for Covid-19 by December 31st.

In fact, limited access to testing, particularly in rural areas, may mean that many cases are going undiagnosed. Even in urban areas, testing can be a challenge. In Zimbabwe, doctors often require you to be tested before they will see you, but few people can afford the US\$60 to US\$100 that private clinics charge for testing (the equivalent of roughly Z\$6000). While testing is available through the public health system in Mozambique, it can take a long time to get results, prompting those who can afford to do so to turn to expensive—and less accurate—rapid tests available from private clinics for about US\$60.

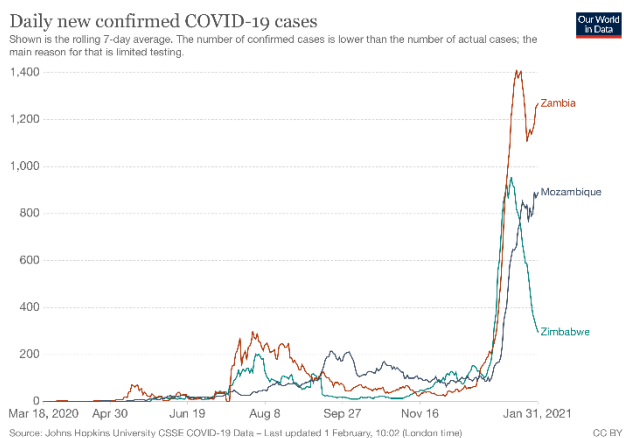
Government and church responses

The government of Zimbabwe announced a new 30-day lockdown on January 2nd, which was subsequently extended for two more weeks. All gatherings—including weddings and church services—have been banned, except for funerals, which are limited to 30 mourners. Restaurants, bars, gyms and liquor stores are closed. Only essential services— pharmacies, supermarkets, hospitals — may be open between 8am and 3 pm. Face masks, hand sanitizing, social distancing and temperature checks are mandated.

Mining, manufacturing and agriculture is allowed to continue, but other formal and informal sector activities are suspended. The opening of schools for the new academic year was postponed. While airports remained open – with incoming travelers required to present a

recent negative Covid-19 test—land borders were greatly restricted, initially causing chaos.

The lockdown seems to have slowed infections. From 14 Jan, when Zimbabwe’s daily infection rate peaked at 956, the numbers fell back sharply to below 300 infections per day—unlike in Zambia and Mozambique where dramatically increased daily infection rates in January were largely sustained through the end of the month.



Graph from <https://ourworldindata.org/>

However, the new restrictions have imposed a heavy burden on Zimbabwe’s people, particularly on the heels of the festive season. “People spend a lot during the festive season, and then they need to work to make ends meet,” said Rev. Thompson Nota, Administrator of the Presbytery of Zimbabwe of the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa. “Introducing the lockdown meant people could not go back to work.” Residents of the community around Rev. Nota’s congregation in Kuwadzana—a suburb of the capital, Harare—can move around the immediate area, but cannot even go to the city center.

While legislators in the United States debate the magnitude of an economic stimulus package to alleviate the impact of the pandemic, the government of Zimbabwe has had little capacity to provide relief. Although Zimbabwe announced a Z\$18 billion Economic Recovery and Stimulus package in April 2020 that was to include Z\$600 in social support grants for 1 million people over three months, there is little

evidence that any of the funds were disbursed. One third of the funds were meant to have been injected into the agricultural sector, but farmers [complained](#) in October that they had received nothing.

Rev. Nota observed that the church had limited capacity to respond to the economic crisis. “Only one or two congregations have really been able to help the community,” he explained. “Kuwadzana has had a food distribution program. We give a bag of maize meal, a small packet of sugar and a head of cabbage, but we can’t do it too often. Furthermore, four generations can be living under one roof with maybe 20 household members. It is really five families, but we can’t afford to provide five food parcels.”

“We have mango trees in our church yard,” he continued, “and we have had to minister to the community by giving out mangos. People were not coming for mangos to supplement their diets, but simply for something to eat.”

Meanwhile, Zambia’s government has eschewed a strict lockdown. At the beginning of February, Health Minister Dr. Jonas Chanda [told](#) parliament that Zambia will need to find a way to remain economically active, even in a pandemic. “For how long can you lock down a country? What if the pandemic takes ten years, can you have the country locked down for ten years?” Dr Chanda asked. Instead, Zambia has opted for promoting strict adherence to health guidelines—use of masks, social distancing, temperature checks, etc.—and for increased supply of oxygen to hospitals.

Mozambique announced new Covid-19 mitigation measures applicable for 21 days beginning January 15th, but extended these for 30 days and added additional restrictions from February 5th. Schools and places of worship have been closed. Trading hours have been restricted, and a 9 pm – 4 am curfew is being imposed in Maputo.

Rev. Valente Tseco, the President of the Igreja Presbiteriana de Moçambique (IPM), observed that government restrictions can only do so much. With respect to funerals, for instance, the government requires burial to take place within 24 hours. Families are not allowed to observe traditions of washing the body and holding a vigil throughout the night before the burial. The coffin must remain closed and go directly into the grave. Services are limited to ten minutes, and the police ensure that no more than ten mourners attend. “But when the mourners return home,” Rev. Tseco said, “there may be hundreds of people waiting for them to comfort and support them. There is no social distancing. There must be a meal, but who prepares it and under what conditions?”

Rev. Nota agreed that it is a challenge for the church to help people to appreciate and respect the need for more precautions, and often it is the pastors who are placed at most risk. “If someone is sick, they expect the minister to come,” he remarked. “If a person dies, the family expects the body to come home and lie in state and for the minister to participate in the vigil. Because of the testing situation, it is hard to know if someone has passed away from Covid-19 or not.”

“We are having many more Covid-19 funerals this year,” he said. “It is a challenge for both ministers and members. The government says that funerals must be limited to 30 mourners, but I have seen funerals with more than 500 in attendance.”

As in the United States, churches are using platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp to minister to and encourage members. For instance, the Presbytery of Zimbabwe has created a rota for pastors to offer prayers via WhatsApp and a service each Sunday morning and Thursday evening. “WhatsApp groups are limited to 257 members, so I’ve created three so far and may need to make five,” Rev. Nota reported. “Our youth like Facebook because it allows more face-to-face engagement, so we do

live preaching on Sundays, too, and are planning praise and worship services.”

Vaccines

Vaccines are not currently available in Southern Africa, but Zambia, Zimbabwe and Mozambique are all expected to receive vaccines through the global [COVAX](#) initiative. Coordinated by the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (GAVI), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) in association with other public, private and philanthropic sector partners, COVAX is one of the three pillars of a joint WHO-European Commission initiative to ensure equitable access to Covid-19 diagnostics, treatment and vaccines.

COVAX’s initial aim is to provide protection for frontline health care workers and vulnerable or high-risk individuals worldwide by distributing more than 2 billion doses of vaccine by the end of 2021. Roughly 80% of these are expected to be made available to 92 low-income countries, most at no cost. The initial [list](#) of distribution targets published on February 3rd show allocations of the AstraZeneca vaccine for Mozambique (2.4 million doses), Zambia (1.4 million) and Zimbabwe (1.15 million).

This is a mammoth undertaking, the success of which will depend on many factors, including: the availability of both vaccines and finance, the integrity of distribution networks, the impact of bilateral deals between wealthy nations and manufacturers, the effectiveness of existing vaccines against emerging variants, and popular acceptance of vaccination. If the United States’ recent decision to resume participation in WHO is accompanied by renewed political and financial support for the agency and for the COVAX initiative, this could provide a huge boost to its efforts.

Even so, the roll out of vaccines will take time. Dr. Richard Miti, co-convener of ZZMUSA’s Health Concerns Working Group, said that the Zambian

government expects that vaccines will only be available at the end of March. Moreover, while industrialized countries have bought more than enough doses to vaccinate their entire populations, African nations have only secured enough vaccines for roughly one-third of their people.

Another big concern is whether people will be willing to be vaccinated. Social media is awash with misinformation about Covid-19 and vaccines. Messages often portray vaccination as part of a global conspiracy or a demonic plot to harm people—and, in Southern Africa, African people in particular.

Churches have a key role to play in combatting misinformation. “People may trust ministers more than health workers,” Dr. Miti observed, acknowledging the importance of the church’s voice.

Rev. Nota indicated that the Presbytery of Zimbabwe is using Facebook to provide education on Covid-19, with messages that will also be shared via WhatsApp. “We have invited health experts to do videos on Covid-19 and on issues related to funerals,” he said.

ZZMUSA NETWORK VIRTUAL PLANNING MEETING REPORT

by Curtis Field

On February 6, the ZZMUSA Mission Network held its first virtual planning meeting in anticipation of a ZZMUSA Conference being organized by the Network for late 2021 or early 2022. Participants posed many questions, and, in response, explored ideas regarding the form that mission might take as we move into a new era for the church.



Some participants in ZZMUSA planning meeting Feb 6 2021

But first, church leaders from Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Mozambique described the realities of their ministries and lives in this unique time. The challenges and trials of the COVID 19 pandemic informed all of the reports presented. In 2020, Africa experienced unusually low numbers of COVID 19 cases, far below what the WHO had predicted. The pandemic was slowed down by the introduction of strong measures, such as lockdowns, before the pandemic hit in full force. In recent months, COVID cases have risen sharply, especially in South Africa. Attention now has turned to vaccination as the best means of defeating the virus. The World Health Organization (WHO) has promised that Africa will receive nearly 90 million COVID 19 vaccine doses from its COVAX program in February 2021. Our partners in Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Mozambique exhorted Presbyterians in the U.S. to advocate in support of the WHO’s initiative.

ZZMUSA Network work groups brought updates on their work in examining theological education, health concerns, and communications. These three subjects will be major areas of concern at the Conference. The health concerns report focused once again on COVID, but broader issues were examined. The theological education team has started conversations

with Presbyterian seminaries in the U.S. to look at their ideas regarding the role of global perspectives in seminary education. The first such conversation took place in December with McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago. McCormick has increased its global presence over the years to the point where about 30% of its students are foreign nationals in the U.S. under the student visa program. McCormick is eager to establish stronger relationships with African seminaries and with PC(USA) mission workers. In the future, McCormick wishes to use advances in communications technology to reach more students internationally. On the subject of communications in general, our third area of concentration, the Network also looked at how communications technology advances can assist us in raising awareness of our work.

The final segment of the program looked at the results of a survey taken in advance by participants in the meeting. The survey addressed logistics for the upcoming ZZMUSA Conference. The Network members strongly favor two three-hour sessions to take place over two successive days (rather than two separate days in successive weeks) with both live and pre-recorded presentations. There is a strong desire for a significant worship component to the Conference. The members seem to slightly favor the conference taking place in Winter 2022, but a final decision has yet to be made.

In closing, the members of the ZZMUSA leadership group urged participants to become more deeply involved in the network, and in the upcoming Conference.

A recording of the conversation will be available in the near future, so that everyone can benefit from this outstanding time of support, care, and hope.

ZZMUSA NETWORK EMAIL LIST

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PC(USA) MISSION CO-WORKERS

Rev. Cheryl Barnes - Education Facilitator for CCAP in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe
cheryl.barnes@pcusa.org

Rev. Paula Cooper, Regional Liaison for East Central Africa
paula.cooper@pcusa.org

Rev. Dustin Ellington, Lecturer, New Testament, Justo Mwale University
dustin.ellington@pcusa.org

Sherri Ellington, Zambia YAV Site Coordinator
sherri.ellington@pcusa.org

Rev. Jeremy Garbat-Welch, Facilitator CCAP Chaplain Training Program
jeremy.garbat-welch@pcusa.org

Luta Garbat-Welch, Community Health Facilitator (CHE) CCAP Zambia and Nkhoma Synods
luta.garbat-welch@pcusa.org

Melissa Johnson, CCAP Zambia Health Education Facilitator
melissa.johnson@pcusa.org

Doug Tilton, Regional Liaison for Southern Africa and Interim Africa Area Co-Coordinator
douglas.tilton@pcusa.org

ZZMUSA COORDINATING LEADERSHIP TEAM

Co-Convener - **Rev. Dr. Thomas Sheffield** -
sheffieldtom@comcast.net

Co-Convener - **Rev. Sevatt Kabaghe** -
revskabaghe@gmail.com

Regional Liaison for Southern Africa and
Interim Africa Area Co-Coordinator, PC(USA) -
Douglas Tilton - douglas.tilton@pcusa.org

Regional Liaison for East Central Africa,
PC(USA) - **Rev. Paula Cooper** -
paula.cooper@pcusa.org

Health Concerns Committee, Co-Convener -
Rev. Kim Graber - kimjgraber@gmail.com

Health Concerns Committee, Co-Convener -
Dr. Richard Miti - rmmithi.rm@gmail.com

Newsletter Editor, Facebook Administrator -
Barbara Ringk - bringk@verizon.net

Theological Education Committee, Co-Convener
- **Rev. Janet Schlenker** - j.schlenker@outlook.com

Theological Education Committee, Co-Convener
- **Rev. Dr. Garikai Mufanebadza** -
mufanebadza@gmail.com

Dr. David Barstow - dave@drbarstow.com

Larry Bloomquist - larryb@mechreps.com

Curtis Field - family_field@earthlink.net