

C = G + V + P, by Bill and Mary Ruth L2090308
Psalm 22:23-31 and John 13:1-15
Elon Community Church, United Church of Christ, 8 March, 2009

Bill: We are Mary and Bill Ruth, members of Elon Community Church since 1993. We met at Elon College in 1962 in the marching band. I worked for Travelers Insurance Company in Hartford, Connecticut for twenty-two years, and then for eleven years at an Alamance Community College adult literacy program. Mary, in 1991, became the Executive Director for Allied Churches of Alamance County and then for seven years at Elon College/University as Director of Alumni and Parent Relations. Six years ago, we decided to take early retirements in order to serve as Partners in Service Volunteers for the United Church of Christ.

Mary: Our assignments are at church-related non-profit agencies within the United States and usually last about nine months. We have served at Menaul School (a Presbyterian school for Native Americans), where I worked in the alumni office and Bill tutored; Blowing Rock Conference Center, UCC, where I did historical research and Bill painted; Heifer Ranch in Arkansas, where Bill worked as a tour guide and I worked in reservations; Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta, an African American Seminary, where I worked with alumni email and Bill worked on their database; Montreat conference center near Asheville, North Carolina, where I worked on their database and Bill did a facilities study; and at the United Church of Christ headquarters in Cleveland, Ohio, where Bill worked in database cleanup and I created a best practices computer manual.

Mary: At ITC the staff morale was at a low point because of financial worries and job insecurity. With my supervisor's endorsement, an in-house weekly email to all staff members was established. The content was a different short story copied from ITC pamphlets already in print. It was amazing to learn of the great things being done all the time at ITC. Putting that information out on email helped staff see the good news—they felt better about themselves and consequently served students and fellow staff more positively. This was a win-win situation. It was great fun to get good feedback from staff members and then actually see and feel the morale improve at ITC week by week.

Bill: At Heifer Ranch, I served as an educational facilitator to lead guided tours as well as overnight global village events. One memorable moment was when we gathered small groups of sixth graders for a lesson on sustainability and the environment. One way to open dialogue was to get students into groups of six or so and they were to discover among themselves just what they had in common. Some groups would say, "We are all wearing a t shirt," and others would say, "Everyone in our group recycles." A particularly moving reply came when one group said, "We all believe in God." What a great start for world peace when we identify our commonalities. We both agree that in our 'doing' for others, we also receive unexpected blessings that add much joy to our lives.

Mary: We feel called by God and know in our hearts that this is what we should be doing with our lives at this time. It's truly a joy and a blessing to be full time volunteers for our UCC

denomination. We say we are “REFIRED,” not just retired. The REFIRED comes from the February, 2006 issue of *These Days* that contained a story about Moses, who was not a young man when God appeared to him in a burning bush. How appropriate that the call came through fire, for God was REFIRING this older shepherd who is now a role model for retirees. His burning heart lit a fire for all. So too, God has REFIRED us with energy and a passion to serve others which lets us currently strike the word ‘retirement’ from our vocabulary, and replace it with the word ‘refirement’. As long as fire burns in our hearts (and our health holds up!), we are committed to rendering service in volunteer ministry around the USA through the United Church of Christ Partners in Service program.

Bill: God’s call comes in many forms. Sometimes I say that God tells Mary what to do and she tells me. But really, for me it was this Partners in Service pamphlet tacked to the ECC bulletin board sometime in 2001. I like tangible messages and this did the trick. Once I read it and learned more about this volunteer program, I became a ‘believer’ in volunteer ministry! That it is a ‘calling’ for me. The rest is history.

Dan Kuhn: Thanks so much for explaining the “refired” that I see on your email signature! It is great to learn how ECC’s desire to share information on the bulletin board with members and friends actually led you to full time mission service. I see the bowl and basin on the partners in service pamphlet. Please share with us what that means to you and this volunteer program.

Bill: Jesus came to serve and performed menial tasks. It is a symbol of humble servanthood. Volunteers in ministry are called to serve others. In our volunteer ministry we often have opportunities to perform menial tasks such as painting, washing dishes, and endless hours of computer data entry. We do these things because we want to follow Jesus who set the example with His service to others. At the places we serve, ‘someone has to do it’ so why not us?

Dan: I can’t help but realize how The Bowl and Basin symbol also speaks to us here at ECC. ECC is blessed to have members participating in acts of humble servanthood everyday. It strikes me that many sitting in the pews are serving others right here in this community just as you are serving at places elsewhere. Many ECC folks are following Christ’s model by visiting the sick, tutoring the Burmese refugee boys, transporting some to appointments, preparing bereavement meals, and welcoming strangers. As pastor, I’ve rarely seen such a high level of unselfish giving of time and talent in the performance of so many acts of love for God’s creation. Now, I’m hoping you’ll help me and others understand better today’s sermon title, $C = G + V + P$.

Mary This formula of $C=G+V+P$ came from an AARP magazine article and I’ve been most intrigued ever since. It is designed to be applied by people who want to help identify ways to be actively involved. But it seems to me that it can do much more by helping us put into practice our Christianity. Calling = Gifts + Values + Passion. C stands for our Calling from God. G stands for our God-given gifts. V stands for our Christian values, and P stands for passion for service. For me it is C means calling (what

does God want me to do?). G means God gave me gifts and skills such as organization, computer know-how, public speaking, writing emails, and positive energy. V means values instilled from a Christian upbringing, like loving God with all your heart and mind and soul, do unto others as you would have them do unto you, following the teachings of Jesus, being honest, and practicing generosity. P means Passion for communicating, making friends, being inclusive, and doing for others. I'm hoping each person here today will take a moment to identify his or her personal Calling by considering gifts, values and passions. If you already had a calling, maybe it is different today! And, I pray that God may then grant each person the courage and strength to live out that calling.

Dan: So, Elon Community Church in its way helped you to feel this calling?

Mary: Actually, Volunteer Ministry is my second calling. In 1991 God told me to do something outrageous! God told me to be the Executive Director at Allied Churches of Alamance County. Believe me, I had no experience with the homeless, hungry, and the poverty-stricken, but God guided me along, I learned a lot! Elon Community Church became my "rock." You, ECC, provided operating money, volunteers, board members, food, prayers, and even a shelter manager! When I worked at the university, ECC nurtured me, and for that I am most grateful. Then, when the timing was right according to God, and ECC had helped to prepare us, the call to volunteer ministry came. We can't help but notice that ECC has continued to be a witness to service to God in its service beyond itself. It sees as its concern a global mission. For instance, this church has settled Biak Kam, Far Tin Sung, and their children Joel and David, a refugee family from Burma. This is an astounding and outstanding commitment. ECC is one of a handful of churches nationwide able to do this successfully! Thank you! We really do think of ECC as a global mission church.

Dan: What is a global mission church? We do a lot already. We are a "5 for 5" church, which means we give to the five major offerings of the UCC, we give to Our Church's Wider Mission, One Great Hour of Sharing, the Christmas offering, Strengthen the Church, and Neighbors in Need. We work for Habitat for Humanity, Allied Churches, and Special Fridays. We already do a lot. How can we do even more?

Bill: Yes, speaking of "doing a lot" at ECC, I wanted to tell you that during our nine months of service at UCC headquarters in Cleveland, we frequently used ECC as our "sample" church in the computer database when meeting with colleagues. It was a treat to share with others all that ECC does and use ECC as a "local church" example while working in the national setting. I also wanted to mention that whenever there is a major disaster like a Tsunami or earthquake, you can be assured that the UCC is there through Church World Service and other entities to provide water and shelter tents and you are there quickly! Much is done by the UCC like facilitating clean up and rebuilding in areas where emergency teams have worked. Please know that your support for disaster relief is spent wisely. Much is accomplished with meager staff and much collaboration with other agencies.

Since you asked about being a Global Mission church I'd like to share what a church can do to become an "official" global mission church. While in Cleveland, Mary and I were

privileged to participate in a Mission and Ministries Interpreter training. We learned first hand that much is being done worldwide through the UCC and its partners overseas. What we also notice is that the people in the pews rarely know very much about such worldwide mission work being performed on their behalf.

First, why be a 'global mission church'? Because a global mission church is a vital church; churches equipped for mission are flexible and growing; a global mission church has strong local and global relationships; and because we know that mission efforts bring abundant blessings!

There are five steps in becoming a global mission church.

- 1) GATHER a team to coordinate the "be a global mission church" process.
- 2) LEARN about our United Church of Christ global mission heritage and current mission strategy.
- 3) EVALUATE your global mission involvement and discern your launching point.
- 4) CREATE your package of mission involvement from the checklist of ideas for action
- 5) COMMIT to a specific plan of action in partnership with Global Ministries.

Dan: The theological and Biblical underpinnings for global mission are that we are not a club that exists to serve our own needs and interests; we are a part of the body of Christ, existing to minister to the needs of God's world. Psalm 22 says, "all the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord." The Bowl and Basin are a universal Christian symbol. Acts of servanthood are done locally by us; Mary and Bill do acts of servanthood around the USA; and through our acts in refugee ministry, One Great Hour of Sharing and other offerings, we are serving the world.

Mary: We are blessed to be a part of this particular local congregation and we do what we do as "missionaries" or "volunteers" in partnership with Elon Community Church and are sent out to serve others by you at ECC.

Dan: Where are you going next?

BILL: We are going to Connecticut to serve at Silver Lake Conference Center, owned by the Connecticut Conference of the UCC in Sharon, Connecticut and will enjoy returning to the area to reconnect with family and friends. Connecticut is where Mary was born and raised. We lived in Hebron, Connecticut for twenty-five years while raising our family. In the early 1960's, Mary was a camper at Silver Lake. In the summer of 1965, Mary did an Elon College internship at Silver Lake for Religious Education under the advisorship of Rev Johnny Graves. In the 1980's, our children were campers at Silver Lake. And, each of us was a week-long camp counselor there in late 1980's. As usual, we volunteer full time and the agency provides our room and board. Our job descriptions are already in print. We will be welcoming groups, speaking at churches and giving some tours to alumni. Mary will be assisting with alumni relations and their capital campaign and I will be doing computer projects and some light maintenance. We will be doing things that the directors just don't have time to get done.