



Structural Racism



Forgiveness and reconciliation forge hope for South Africa

Born into the privileged class of South Africa, Rothea (Thea) Kornelius grew up in the capital city, Pretoria. Despite apartheid, which demanded segregation of races, her parents taught her not to judge people on color alone.

“He needed those more than I did,” said Thea’s father one day, explaining why he gave his shoes to another man on his way home from work. Sometimes black men would ring their doorbell, hungry and desperate for food. Thea’s mother would make sandwiches and take them to the door.

Two days after turning 18, Thea voted in the national referendum to end apartheid and point South Africa toward a democratic society. “The first time I put my name on a ballot, I could vote for a better South Africa. I believed I could do something right, even though things had been so wrong up to that point,” says Thea.

Thea moved to the United States, where an inclination to social justice led her to enroll at Dubuque Theological Seminary. While a student there, Thea participated in the Peacemaking Program’s Travel Study Seminar to South Africa. She found that 20+ years after the end of apartheid, little has changed in the shantytowns that surround the cities’ affluent sections. The sense of separation that apartheid demanded remains strong.

“Blacks live in shacks or wooden boxes, there is no running water or toilets and many don’t have access to electricity. The children don’t even know to wash their hands before eating. Seeing the hurt of the past as well as the present, one would tend to believe that animosity and hate would be at the forefront, but instead forgiveness and hope prevail,” says Thea.

This peaceful witness inspired Thea to share this experience in her relationships and ministry. She returned with a commitment to build bridges that cross lines of race and culture in her community and in the churches she will lead. The Peace & Global Witness Offering inspires faith and equips and connects Presbyterians to respond to cultures of

violence, including our own. During a time when we are more aware of racial tensions and violence, the work of peace and reconciliation is all the more crucial.

“There is something in the human spirit I can’t explain, other than there is some divine inspiration in all of us. Today there are people of all colors and faith traditions, working together for a better future for the whole community. Despite my guilt as a white South African, I’m immensely thankful for the ability of the human soul to look in love and forgiveness at the divine image of God in another human being. We must be willing to speak to the wounds of the past, to look in love at another brother or sister in Christ and ask how to become part of a continuous healing process, not just in South Africa, but every nation.”

The Peace & Global Witness Offering is used to expand global witness while maintaining Presbyterians’ longstanding commitment of working toward peacemaking and reconciliation, especially in cultures of violence. Congregations and presbyteries keep 25 percent of receipts for peace and witness ministries of their choice and send 50 percent to the Presbyterian Mission Agency.

Please give generously to the Peace & Global Witness Offering to transform cultures of violence into communities of peace.