

Women in international mission

An Interview with Reverend Susan Valiquette, Inanda, South Africa

by Ana Gobledale

Mpume N., recently located me through a Google search. Mpume and her sister attended Inanda Seminary, just outside Durban, South Africa, in 1984 when my husband Tod and I served there—me as chaplain and Tod as math teacher.

Inanda Seminary was situated on racially unclassified church-owned land, which enabled blacks, whites, so-called coloureds and Indians to work and live together throughout the years of apartheid, when races were legally separated. Inanda Seminary was my first call after ordination, and our first child, Thandiwe, was born there. Inanda will always remain an important stopping point in the journey of my life.

Numerous missionaries have impacted Inanda students, more familiarly known as “Inanda Girls,” since the secondary school’s inception in the 1800’s. Bringing me up to date with her life, Mpume explained that her decision to work in non-profit organizations serving the community has been significantly influenced by what she saw and learned from Tod and me 20 years ago. Today, it is Susan Valiquette’s turn to serve at Inanda through Global Ministries.

As you read Susan’s reflections, celebrate the presence and witness of the many church workers and their families walking in partnership with Inanda Seminary for 135 years! Many things have changed in our world since 1869, but the joy of watching young girls mature into young women remains the same.

Ana

Ana Gobledale served our church in South Africa and Zimbabwe, from 1984–2000. Currently, she serves Global Ministries with her husband, Tod, as chaplain of Churches of Christ Theological College in Melbourne, Australia.



Susan, what’s your church background?

My family lived in Beavercreek, Ohio, and we attended Memorial United Church of Christ in Dayton where I was baptized and confirmed. In high school, I joined Hawker United Church of Christ which had an active youth fellowship program. Rev. Steve Daniels (now serving St. John’s UCC in Dover, Ohio) had a tremendous impact on me as a teenager, and my faith was nurtured through his pastoral leadership.

During a youth fellowship retreat, my sophomore year, I experienced my first calling to ministry. When I told Rev. Daniels, I thought maybe God was calling me to ministry, he responded, “I knew you were going to tell me this some day. Keep praying and listening to God; God will continue to affirm your call.”

What person influenced you as a child, and helped lead you to your commitment to the church and to mission?

My grandmother, Hope Anderson, was a strong pillar of Memorial UCC. Although she could not sing well, she taught every child at church to sing, “They will know we are Christians by our love.” She didn’t just teach the song; she lived it. She taught me and others that being a Christian is not just about going to church; being a Christian is about being in mission everyday. My grandmother read her Bible and devotionals everyday, listened to Christian radio, and spent her time helping others in need in her neighborhood. She lived her faith. I watched her give her life to the work of the church and helping others. She was the most giving person that I have ever met. I am still trying to emulate her. The middle name of my second child is Hope—hoping that my grandmother’s legacy will live on in her.

*What does the Lord require of you,
but to love kindness,
seek justice, and walk humbly with your God.
—Micah 6:8*

This is Susan's favourite Bible verse. Consequently, she and her husband, Scott, named their first son, Micah.

Share any significant events in your faith journey that will help women of the church to better understand your call to mission.

While attending United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities, I participated in two international study trips – to Nicaragua and Israel. Both of these opportunities changed my theology and strengthened my understanding of mission. In addition, through the former UCC Homeland Ministries, I volunteered at Jubilee Partners, an intentional Christian community that welcomes and resettles refugees. I spent the summer teaching English as a second language to Bosnian children as well as witnessing the faith and mission of the Partners of Jubilee. I also visited West Africa which further opened my eyes to see beyond my own culture and worldview. Although my passion for mission grew through my overseas experiences, I did not desire to be a missionary as a single person. I met Scott Couper, my future husband, at Jubilee Partners. We shared a common passion for mission, and I knew mission would be in our future together.

What did you do before you joined the mission staff of Global Ministries?

After Seminary, I was called as Minister for Congregational Life at First Congregational Church United Church of Christ in Battle Creek, Michigan. I am extremely grateful for the Battle Creek congregation who gave me my first opportunity to serve as an ordained minister. Scott and I married. Upon his graduation from Chicago Theological Seminary and ordination, we sought missionary appointments in Africa through Global Ministries.

What are the most rewarding and challenging aspects of your work?

Rewarding... I am a pastor with school holidays, so I don't work Christmas and Easter—the two highest



Susan currently serves as Chaplain of Inanda Seminary where she leads morning chapel services each school day and Sundays and teaches religious education and confirmation. "The most important aspect of my ministry is pastoral care and counseling," she writes.

holy days! In addition, not many pastors can say that they have 100% attendance on a Sunday morning. I can! Attending worship is compulsory at Inanda Seminary. On a more serious note...

Rewarding and challenging... the most rewarding is also the most challenging. I enjoy the pastoral care and counseling. It is very rewarding to watch a young person grow and mature through her high school years. The students all live at the school so I am able to meet with students any time of the day and work with students with more serious problems over several years. I have had the privilege of participating in the lives of the 2004 graduates from grade 8 until they graduated in grade 12. However, while I love the one-on-one pastoral care relationships, the problems are sometimes very serious: AIDS, abuse, rape, death, pregnancy, and family or peer disputes. At times, it is necessary for me to refer my students to a psychologist for professional help.

What spiritual disciplines strengthen you in your work and daily life?

I think I have learned the hard way that I need to be fed. I experienced a very low point during my ministry at Inanda Seminary when some of my friends moved away and the school was really struggling. I realized that I needed to make some changes so that my spirit could be fed and I could have access to new friends. Because Scott and I both lead worship at separate places on Sunday mornings, we decided to



attend a contemporary family worship service together with our children on Sunday evenings at Berea Congregational Church in Durban. We have committed ourselves to this practice even when we are both tired at the end of a Sunday. This church family has been a great source of love and support for me, and I am being fed spiritually.

Share a story from your current work or life situation to describe a time you met God face-to-face.

Late in the evening on 6 July 2000, my sister-in-law phoned to say that something was wrong with my father. No one knew what had happened, but my brother was driving to his house to meet the paramedics. I immediately knew my father was dead. I can't explain how I knew, but I did. I wept and cried and wailed. Soon the phone rang again to confirm my intuition. My father was 63, physically healthy, relatively young and only one year into retirement. He fell from a ladder, hit his head on concrete, and because he lived alone was not found until the following day. My father's death was extremely difficult for me to accept. It was unexpected. It was tragic. I had not seen him for a year. I knew that the grieving process

Inanda Seminary, a boarding school for girls in grades 7 – 12, was established in 1869 by American missionaries (Congregationalist). While Inanda continues to receive financial and personnel assistance from Global Ministries, it is an independent institution of our partner church, the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa (UCCSA).

was going to be long and painful. I had to face God directly and the pain directly. I was forced to follow the same advice that I give the students at Inanda Seminary: the only way to deal with a problem is to go through it; you can't go around it or under it. My family and I flew to the United States for a very tearful reunion and to begin the grieving process.

Questions for Reflection

1. Sing Susan's favourite hymn, "Here I Am Lord" (Chalice Hymnal #452). When have you heard God calling in the night, and how have you responded?
2. What grief is close to your heart? What would be most hard for you if you were far away from your loved ones at the time of a death or tragedy?
3. Who in your church, like Susan's grandmother, helps young people realize being a Christian is "being in mission every day"?

Prayer Opportunities

1. Pray for Susan and Scott Valiquette, their children Micah and Madeline, and the Inanda Girls with whom Susan works.
2. Pray for girls and young women around the world facing oppression and sexism and for their mentors and guides.
3. Pray for all the education ministries undertaken by missionaries serving Global Ministries.

CONNECT TO WOMEN IN INTERNATIONAL MINISTRY THROUGH GLOBAL MINISTRIES

Throughout God's world women are caring for their families, for their church, for their communities, and for all of God's creation. They/we are standing up in the face of injustice, moaning with sighs greater than words in the face of devastation and disaster, and celebrating the ever constant presence of God in our midst. The international and USA-based staff at Global Ministries* and Wider Church Ministries tries to listen to our sisters around the world and to walk beside our sisters as companions in the faith.

Global Ministries and Wider Church Ministries can help you hear the voices of our international sisters and identify ways to walk with them. The program Global Mission Partners can connect your conference with a woman serving overseas. People-to-People Pilgrimages can help you plan an international mission trip to one of our partners. Our web site can connect you with stories and articles about women's concerns around the world (<www.globalministries.org> or go through the UCC home page).