



Women in International Mission

Global Ministries

A common witness of the Division of Overseas Ministries, Christian Church (disciples of Christ) and Wider Church Ministries, a covenanted ministry of the United Church of Christ

A Lifetime of Mission

Edited by Ana Gobledale



“What do you want to be when you grow up?” We can all remember being asked this as children and asking it of children and youth we know. The follow-up questions are usually, “Do you want to be a teacher? doctor? nurse? social worker? engineer? Or maybe a firefighter?” What about “missionary”?

Are we asking our children and youth, “Do you want to be an international missionary when you grow up?” My dream of adventure as a youth was to move from Chicago to North Dakota and teach in a one-room schoolhouse; no one ever suggested international possibilities and church-sponsored programs until I met my husband, Tod, who was headed to Africa. Yet, Violet Vaca, long-term missionary in Ecuador and Paraguay, writes that “I’ve always been interested in the church and its mission, so it seemed a natural that I would end up in some kind of full-time service.” As you read Violet’s story, ask yourself if you are helping our children and youth consider a possible “natural” direction for their lives to be full-time mission service to our church.

Violet Vaca, with her husband Victor, serve the Ecumenical Foundation for Integral Development, Training, and Education (FEDICE), an organization responsible for the coordination of educational, health, agriculture, community development projects, and programs for the indigenous population in rural communities of Ecuador. Violet is the coordinator of FEDICE’s women’s programs. Her favorite psalm is 103.

*What do you want to be when you grow up?...
What about missionary?*



Violet Vaca

From Minnesota to Paraguay to Ecuador

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless God’s holy name.

—Psalm 103:1

I’m originally from Minnesota, where I grew up on a farm. My family has always belonged to the Evangelical Covenant Church of America, originally a Swedish immigrant church. I have always been interested in the church and its mission, so it seemed a natural that I would end up in some kind of full-time service. 52 years ago, I ventured to Paraguay to serve as a missionary teacher with the Covenant Church. Mine has been a lifetime of mission. I met Vic in Ecuador and we married. Together we have lived and worked in Paraguay as missionaries, initially under the Disciples’ Division of Overseas Ministries and now, Global Ministries.

Our work has been development work with the Indian communities, and that includes everything in the book! In the area north of Quito, the churches with which we are associated are primarily independent churches, and to the south our work is mainly among Catholics. Here are some stories from our work.

Stories of Courage, Life, and Death

God works vindication and justice for all who are oppressed.

—Psalm 103:6

Women want small industries and a better life for themselves and their children. In the Cotopaxi Province, FEDICE assists with 18 husbandry projects—cross-breeding to improve breeds of guinea pigs, rabbits, chickens, sheep, pigs, and cattle. We are involved in agricultural projects, too—corn, green onions, potatoes, and quinoa (a native Andean plant). All these projects are managed by responsible Indian women, mostly illiterate.

One can't help but admire their grit and courage in the face of many odds. Much of their history is a very long sad story, but today, for the first time in all of Latin America, there is an Indian woman in the president's cabinet, and she is the foreign relations person. Wonderful! Unheard of in a land where machismo has reigned. What happens down the road remains to be seen. I wish her well.

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and do not forget all God's benefits.

—Psalm 103:2

They come by the hundreds, trudging up the windswept hill in the swirling dust and dirt. The new water system for Huaycopungo is to be inaugurated—3 huge reservoirs encircled with wire fencing. The 3-hour church service includes the U.S.A. church work group members who have worked and supported the project. After every contributor has been recognized, we all march down again for the speeches and cultural events. Next week the water system in Tocagon will be inaugurated. Over 5,000 people will benefit from these new water systems, five in all. Good sweet clean water is hard to come by these days, so we trust there will be fewer water-borne diseases. Water for life—along the way!

As a father has compassion for his children, so God has compassion for those who fear God.

—Psalm 103:13

Unable to stand because of a serious hip problem, the 17-month-old cuddles in her father's arms. The family lives way out in the mountains—three bus changes to Quito. We work with doctors, hospitals, and donors to organize an operation. She goes home in her tiny cast, riding in a pickup truck, to return 2 1/2 months later for the cast to be removed. I will never forget the look on the father's face as he asks the surgeon if he can take the dirty cast home with him. "Okay," comes the reply. He stuffs it in a plastic bag probably to become a souvenir in the home. Several months later I visit the home—and there she is, running, walking, tumbling about like any two and a half-year-old. She is one of the fortunate ones. I feel satisfied that we could help a bit—along the way!

God is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

—Psalm 108:8

Vic and I drive up the mountainside on a sandy, rocky road. A young man stops us and asks if we can help his 17-year-old sister who has cancer in her leg. The Medical Caravan with church people from Missouri, Illinois, and Indiana is in the area, so Vic and the doctor accompany the young man to his home. Medically, the case appears hopeless. Victor talks and prays with the family, for it is evident that without divine intervention she will die.

They talk about God's will and that they should be ready to release her.

They seem at peace with this, and some minutes later, she does pass on.

Some 1,300 sick people from different Indian communities are served by the Medical Caravan. They also hold Christian education with children and youth and teach health education for the entire community. Medical assistance—along the way.

[God] satisfies you with good as long as you live . . .

—Psalm 103:5

Victor arrives home carrying a huge squash—a sign of gratitude. The Community of Guanando, comprised of many elderly Indian people, has been badly affected by the continuing ash and debris spewing out of Mt. Tungurahua which erupted several years ago. Many roofs were destroyed by the constant outpouring of ash. After several meetings together with the pastors and the Latin American Council of Churches, it was decided to proceed with the roof replacement project. Now with new roofs for their homes, the people are so grateful—sharing their crops that resist the volcanic eruptions. Another group of people helped—along the way!

Continuing in Mission

Violet's favorite English hymn, *Great is your faithfulness!*, speaks of her ministry since her retirement several years ago. "Morning by morning new mercies I see; all I have needed your hand has provided. Great is your faithfulness, God, unto me." (*Chalice Hymnal* #86; *The New Century Hymnal* #423) She writes, "At the moment I'm supposed to be retired whatever that means!" In July 2002, Violet and Victor were assigned by Global Ministries to FEDICE as long-term volunteers to continue their development work with the Indian communities.

Prayer Opportunities

- Violet Vaca and her work among the women of Ecuador.
- Victor Vaca and his work among the indigenous people of Ecuador.
- Our children and youth, future international missionaries!
- Eugene and Helen Braun, Global Ministries Associates serving in Quito, Ecuador, since Eugene's retirement as a UCC pastor.
- Joan Figueroa-Rivera and Angel Luis Rivera-Agosto, Global Ministries missionaries assigned to the Latin American Council of Churches (CLAI) based in Quito.



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. *When and how are you asking the children and youth in your church (and your own children), “Do you want to be an international missionary when you grow up?”*
2. *How are you helping the children and youth you know consider a possible “natural” direction for their lives to be full-time mission service to our church?*
3. *Mission “at home and abroad” often includes “everything in the book.” What varieties of mission are you involved in both in your local community and around the world?*
4. *Who in your congregation has dedicated their life to serving the church, either as a full-time church worker or as a volunteer?*

What can you learn from her or him?

International mission is alive for all ages in our church!

The UCC has a vibrant international ministry, shared with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and over 60 international partner churches.

Missionaries go from west to east, and from east to west. They are invited from the north to live and work in the south, and from the south to live and work in the north.

Young adults participate in the Global Mission Intern program, a faith-based alternative to Peace Corps. Are we encouraging our children and youth to consider serving God through international mission?

To learn more about your involvement in international mission through Global Ministries, explore the Web site at <http://globalministries.org>.

Ecuador and our global partnerships there are highlighted at <http://globalministries.org/lac/lac12.pdf>.