

At the 10:30 am Pentecost service on May 23, 2010, The Rev. Cornel Barnett delivered the following sermon based on Acts 2:1-4.

Happy Birthday!

“Celebrating the Holy Spirit in the World”

The flames of the Holy Spirit filled the room where the disciples gathered and energized and inspired them to go out and continue the good work of Jesus. So began the church. Today is traditionally known as the birthday of the church.

The Holy Spirit also unleashed the gospel in many languages symbolizing the spirit's spread to all the world. The church hasn't stopped doing that. As of July 2009 the Presbyterian Church (USA) had 314 missionaries serving in approximately 60 countries. They are medical personnel, agricultural workers, educators, engineers, pastors, etc.

Our mission is to communicate the gospel and to work respectfully with all religions as we together make the world a better place. Our mission is in the Congress and in the grassroots. It's in humble huts and in high class homes. It supports HIV/AIDS work in Africa and eye care in Afghanistan. Today we celebrate our reach in the world.

We glimpse the spirit's activity by hearing seven members of the church read excerpts from the *Mission Yearbook for Prayer and Study 2010* and light candles honoring our sisters and brothers all over the world. The missions covered here are supported by our denomination.

1. Our first stop is Africa, south of the African Mediterranean countries. Our focus is Ethiopia.

Gilo, a very isolated Presbyterian School, was closed for two years because of ethnic tensions between the Nuer and the Anuak, complicated by 380,000 Sudanese refugees, rebel excursions and military reprisals. Thousands of people were killed, and tens of thousands fled the area. Soldiers used the school's murals of the human body and the solar system as target practice. The well was vandalized. All the large animals, including elephants and giraffes, were slaughtered to feed the roving armies. But the school has been reopened by the local church. From the efforts of dedicated teachers new hope flows. They teach 117 children inside stifling classrooms and outside under tattered trees. They teach music by making lutes from cooking oil tins from the UN refugee camps. They teach art by having students sculpt giraffes and elephants from mud. In this hostile place they embody the power of God's undying love.

We light this candle for the churches and people of Ethiopia and all the churches and people in Africa.

2. It is strange but the *Mission Yearbook for Prayer and Study* has Europe stretching from Ireland in the west to Russia in the east and Norway in the northwest to Spain in the southwest and Afghanistan in the southeast. The focus in this broad sweep of countries is Afghanistan.

The recent history of Afghanistan has been marked by warfare, chaos, and religious extremism, but the International Assistance Mission (IAM) has never closed its doors. For over four decades this Christian humanitarian organization has served the Afghan people as they work toward the reconstruction and development of their homeland. Of about 400 Christian workers in this Muslim land, one quarter of them are IAM workers. Virtually every Afghan receiving eye care or even wearing glasses is a beneficiary of the organization's Noor Eye Care clinic.

We light this candle for Afghanistan and all the countries in Europe.

3. Latin America and the Caribbean include the countries from Mexico to the bottom of South America and all the Caribbean countries. The focus today is the Caribbean Islands,

Step into a church in the Caribbean and you will hear prayers for children and youth: for elementary school children traumatized by violence, for adolescent girls lured into the sex trade, for teens tempted by drugs and alcohol and for young adults who cannot find work. With small grants and lots of people power, the Caribbean and North American Council for Mission helps churches in the region to reach out to youth. Jamaican youth join Grenadian youth in a gospel sharing mission. Trinidadian young people produce their own Christian TV program. Recreational opportunities are provided for inner city children. Young people from the US and the Caribbean engage in reflection and manual work together in a mutual ministry youth partnership program.

We light this candle for Latin America and the Caribbean.

4. We travel now to Asia and the Pacific which includes the countries between Pakistan in the west, the Marshal Islands in the east, Mongolia in the north and New Zealand in the south. Our focus is Myanmar (Burma).

The Rev. Dr. Will Browne, executive director, Medical Benevolence Foundation, writes that the church in Myanmar (Burma) has responded with an ecumenical spirit since the Nargis cyclone. The Myanmar Council of Churches (MCC) has facilitated the distribution of funds from organizations through which Presbyterian Disaster Assistance provides aid. A rat invasion is accompanying the blossoming of the bamboo, which occurs every forty-eight years. The rats eat all the crops and seed, and in some areas only rats are left for people to eat. Leaders in the MCC and the Presbyterian Church of Myanmar believe it will take at least three years to get people back to the level where they were before — one of subsistence poverty.

We light this candle for the churches and people of Burma and all the churches and people in the region of Asia and the Pacific.

5. All the North African countries and the traditional Middle East countries are designated as the Middle East region. Our focus today is Iran.

The Board of Presbyterian Mission to Persians was formed in the 1930s and missionaries began ministry with Assyrians, Armenians, Jews and Muslims. Presbyterian missionaries subsequently introduced modern projects in medicine and education. At the time of the Islamic Revolution around 1979 the Presbyterian Church of Iran had about 3,000 members. After the Revolution many Iranian Christians emigrated to the US, Europe and Asia. Today there are seven active Presbyterian churches in Tehran and Oroomiyeh. Under the Islamic Republic of Iran, Christians are free to worship and observe their religious ceremonies in their churches and houses of worship, but their freedom to tell others about the gospel is limited.

We light this candle for the churches and people of Iran and the Middle East region.

6. All eyes are on South Africa as it prepares to host the Soccer World Cup from June 11 to July 11. What about the country and the church?

In 1994 South Africa held its first democratic national elections, ending centuries of white minority rule and decades of institutionalized racial segregation known as apartheid. Since then South Africa's 45 million people have struggled to address the legacies of apartheid: poverty, inequality and racial division. In addition, the nation is at the epicenter of the HIV and AIDS pandemic with an estimated 5.5 million people — 18.9 percent of the adult population — living with HIV. The Presbyterian Church (USA)'s South African partners are grappling with these challenges. The South African Council of Churches, a fellowship of 27 denominations, fights for care and compassion for all affected by HIV and AIDS, supports poverty eradication initiatives and promotes justice, reconciliation and healing. Cornel assures us that South Africa is one of the most beautiful countries in the world with lovely people and the best rugby.

We light this candle for South Africa and for a successful Soccer World Cup.

7. Our final focus is the Presbyterian Church in the United States.

The General Assembly Mission Council (GAMC) of the Presbyterian Church (USA) approved this month a budget of \$82,097,234 for 2011. "Our role is changing from doing mission on behalf of the church to inspiring, equipping and connecting the church for mission and ministry," said Linda Valentine, GAMC executive director. The Presbyterian Church (USA) serves more than 2 million members in mission and ministry in approximately 10,000 congregations throughout the United States and around the world. National offices are located in Louisville, Kentucky. Every mission supported by the Presbyterian Church (USA) is Redwoods Presbyterian Church's mission. The 314 missionaries in 60 countries are our missionaries. The denomination's work in Congress, in the UN, in theological schools, the ministries of the four special offerings and disaster assistance is *our* work. Let us celebrate our mission and ministry in the world!

We light this candle for the Presbyterian Church (USA), for all the churches in the US, and the country as a whole.