



Presbyterian Mission
World Mission

Regional Liaison for East Central Africa

Position: Regional liaison for East Central Africa

Location: Malawi, Kenya, Rwanda and Zambia

Ecumenical Partners: Church of Central Africa Presbyterian, Presbyterian Church of East Africa, Presbyterian Church of Rwanda

Mission Co-Worker: Paula Cooper

About Paula Cooper's ministry: As regional liaison for East Central Africa, Paula facilitates PC(USA) relationships with partner churches and institutions in Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, and Zambia, where the church is growing rapidly and pastoral training and leadership development are of major concern. Paula also provides support for PC(USA) mission personnel and Young Adult Volunteers (YAVs) in the region. She assists PC(USA) congregations and presbyteries that are or that want to be in a relationship with partners in East Central Africa. This includes working with PC(USA) mission groups to help plan itineraries that promote healthy partnerships between Presbyterians in the United States and Christians in Africa.

Regional context: PC(USA) international church partners in East Central Africa are thriving denominations with vibrant holistic ministries. The Church of Central Africa Presbyterian in Malawi and Zambia has a membership of more than three million congregants. The Presbyterian Church of East Africa in Kenya has over four million members. The Presbyterian Church of Rwanda has grown to 400,000 members across the country.

Despite minimal budgets, each of these churches has multiple departments through which holistic ministry takes place — especially in education, health, and development. The denominations work hand in hand with national governments to address issues of poverty and disease and improve quality of life through the hundreds of schools they support; the hospitals and clinics they maintain; and the micro-enterprise and agricultural programs they implement.



The denominations continue to grow through the emphasis they place on evangelism and on training theological students and lay leadership. All of the denominations struggle to find funds to send students to theological institutions, and pastors — traveling by bicycle — are challenged with congregations consisting of prayer houses in multiple geographic locations. Responsibility for preaching and visitation often falls to laity. Members of Women's Guilds, Men's Guilds and Christian Youth Fellowship often step up to perform essential functions.

The genesis of these dynamic churches can be found in the missionary work of the Church of Scotland, Free Church of Scotland, Reformed Church of South Africa and German Bethel Mission that started in 1875 and continued until the countries threw off colonialism in the 1960's.

About Paula Cooper: When Paula Cooper began seminary at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary (PTS) in 2006 at the age of 50, she didn't fit the profile of the typical matriculating student. Paula's decades of life experience that had brought her to this stage of her journey had also endowed her with a unique perspective on what it means to follow God and serve alongside her brothers and sisters in Christ.

Paula served in a variety of ministries in her home church, Holy Trinity-Bethlehem Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia — as ruling elder, youth director, Christian education chairperson, and worship committee chairperson, among others. She also worked in the “urban mission field” of the Logan community of Philadelphia as the executive director of Youth Project and as a community organizer for Logan Olney Support Services. In addition, she attended meetings for community stakeholders of Logan sponsored by the Department of Human Services’ Equal Partners in Change (EPIC). Paula’s work with Youth Project, Logan Olney Support Services, and EPIC, all programs committed to walking alongside the residents of the Logan community as they strive to better their quality of life through education, advocacy and truancy prevention, prefigured her mission work in Africa in its focus on relationship-building and listening to community stakeholders’ voices. Paula’s time working in this urban setting was indeed formative. In seminary, her academic concentration was urban ministry, and she earned a Graduate Certificate in Urban Ministry through PTS’s Metro-Urban Institute.

Seminary opened many doors for Paula, including the opportunity for her to fulfill her childhood dreams. “I used to lay on my bed at night as a child and dream of visiting the Holy Land and the Motherland — Israel and Africa,” Paula shared. Working with her professor and peers at the Zeitah Excavation site in Israel for six weeks in 2007 deepened Paula’s faith, allowing her to experience the landscape and artifacts of ancient Israel firsthand.

That same summer, Paula had the opportunity to visit Zambia for two weeks to attend a conference concerning the Church’s responsibility in addressing HIV/AIDS in the region. Seven years later, she was called by God to return to Zambia in a different capacity. In 2017, she was named by Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York City as a Phillip Talbot Global Mission Fellow, a position that took her back to Zambia to serve with Theological Education by Extension in Zambia (TEEZ). In training Zambian church leaders in her work with TEEZ, Paula found herself being transformed along with those she was training. Accompanying her Zambian brothers and sisters as they discovered how God can use them, she came to understand more deeply how God can use her.

In her work as regional liaison for East Central Africa, Paula emphasizes the necessity of “collaboration between God’s people and their gifts for ministry.” She strives to support and equip fellow mission co-workers, international partners and U.S. congregations as they “educate and galvanize church members in addressing issues that interfere with God’s desire for people ‘to have life and have it more abundantly.’”

Paula received her Bachelor of Arts at Eastern University in St. Davids, Pennsylvania, and her Master of Divinity and Master of Sacred Theology at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. In addition to her work in mission, she was a hospice chaplain, and from 2014 to 2017, she served as designated pastor of Curby Memorial Presbyterian Church in St. Louis, Missouri. Paula’s Christian journey was shaped and deepened as an active member of Holy Trinity-Bethlehem Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, where she was under the care of the Philadelphia Presbytery. She is now a member of the Giddings-Lovejoy Presbytery of St. Louis.

Position Start Date: 10/1/2018

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