

CRIBB<S> NOTE – JANUARY 11, 2009

We are pleased to welcome to the pulpit the Rev. Peter Laarman, executive director of Progressive Christians Uniting. PCU was co-founded by the Rev. Dr. George Regas and Professor John Cobb. Its mission is to “inspire and equip individuals and communities for courageous leadership in the 21st century.” Peter has served as pastor of the historic Judson Memorial Church in New York and attends All Saints Episcopal Church in Pasadena. Thank you, Peter, for taking time to come by San Marino Congregational UCC to bring a Word from God. Our prayer is that the Holy Spirit will be upon you and that you find your time with us meaningful and inspirational. Welcome!

Peter is with us during a period when Arthur Ryoma, my son, and I are traveling in Ghana, West Africa. Today, we are attending the installation of our dear friend and brother the Rev. Francis Amenu as the new moderator of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ghana. The EPC is an international partner of the Global Ministries of the United Church of Christ, USA and Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

Francis hosted a group of 31 educators, students, clergy and lay leaders from the UCC and DOC in 1992. Later, when he came to the United States to complete his theological education at the Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis, Indiana, we were fortunate to support his studies.

This is an important traveling opportunity for Arthur and me. While we share in the joy of new ministerial responsibilities for Francis, this trip also allows us to explore the beauty of a great nation. Additionally, it provides us a chance to see the wretched spaces where our African ancestors were captured and stored in dungeons as they awaited the horrific voyages to unknown, hostile, and distant lands in conjunction with the peculiar institution of the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

Kana, my wife, and I went to the “slave castles” along the coast in Elmina, Ghana, during our 1992 study tour. As we walked through the narrow quarters that were filled to capacity with human beings of all ages and genders from various cultures and nations, we could not help but sense the terror they experienced and the cruelty imposed upon them there and later aboard the cargo vessels that transported them across the ocean. It was not lost on us that the facilities within the slave castles were used for religious services to worship God also served to put captured human beings on display to barter for sexual exploits.

In deep and mysterious ways, Ghana holds a sacred place in my soul. The people are gentle yet strong. Their beauty is captivating and welcomes friendly response. The society is communal and practices an advanced understanding of nationhood that serves to render the diversity of ethnicities and histories to an allegiance to the whole country. In many ways, Ghana symbolizes the potential for global cooperation that is unfamiliar even within the United States.

We ask you to pray with and for us and our international partners. Just like the United States, the peoples of Ghana are entering an era of newly elected leadership. Also, they face economic challenges although they are experiencing a special period of development and positive international relations in Asia, Europe, Africa, South America, and North America.

Our sisters and brothers of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ghana are strong in their faith. They celebrate God’s goodness and mercy and the precious gift of Jesus Christ. They inspire and encourage all of us to share in the exuberance of worship through a commitment to serve the peoples of God.

Thus, it is at that juncture we are joined with Progressive Christians Uniting in discovering effective ways to make the Gospel of Jesus Christ relevant in the communities we serve.

I must remind you of the importance of water. It is a scarce commodity in Ghana. Even as efforts are underway to improve conditions that make safe, clean water more available, it remains a dangerous source of disease and death because of contamination. But, water is more important because of it represents the healing power of God’s grace. So, as you pray for the EPC continue to offer encouragement for positive change that will correct the sins that created unbearable, intolerable human tragedies that plague God’s earth and people.

-Pastor
Art Cribbs