

*Sierra Leone Initiative,  
Reflections by Hildegard Sollenberger,  
SLI Chair, 2005 - 2010*

In 2004 Bishop Irons appointed a committee on the recommendation of Steve Herman and Dr. Bob Davis. The committee was to look into the possibility of a closer relationship with the Sierra Leone U.M. church pastors and the then Central PA Conference of the U.M. Church. Their concern was that the pastors in the Sierra Leone UM churches were receiving little or no salaries.

Therefore they had to find other ways to provide for their families, leaving them little time for their church. And so membership was declining. I was asked to serve on that committee. We had many meetings trying to find the most effective way to solve the problem and at the same time give our churches the opportunity for mission involvement. We decided to work closely with the General Board of Global Ministries. Executives from New York met with us here as well as in N.Y. They were very supportive.

It was decided to enter into a partnership with covenant relationships between churches of the two conferences. The main objective was to provide salary support for pastors. It took two years before the resolution was approved by both conferences. In September 2006 Bishop Middleton and Bishop Humper, Sierra Leone, signed the covenant. We had to make changes from time to time to be most effective. This was always done in consultation between the two conferences. There had to be strict accountability. I believe this has been accomplished. We were a little disappointed that we did not reach our goal of 80 churches. But even so the contribution of \$1200/year per church has made a tremendous difference for the pastors serving the churches of Sierra Leone. I believe the personal relationships that have been formed by VIM teams from here to Sierra Leone and the visits by delegates from that conference are most important.

Unfortunately, I was never able to visit Sierra Leone, but I know I have many friends there. When I see how congregations are doing more than going the extra mile I can tell that it changes the concept for mission for them. It becomes truly a partnership. I am grateful that I was asked to serve on this committee. I have also learned that sometimes you have to take time to do things right. But the most important point in all of this is the pastoral salary support and partner church relationships that were accomplished with prayer and a lot of faith.

I pray that Susquehanna Conference will continue these relationships and most important the pastoral support for our brothers and sister serving the churches in Sierra Leone.

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