

WOMEN IN INTERNATIONAL MISSION A RETIREMENT ADVENTURE FOR CHRIST: EILEEN KNIGGE IN AMERICAN SAMOA

by Ana Gobledale

WONDERING WHAT to do when you retire? Experiencing a bit of wanderlust? Feeling God still has work for you to do? Being an international mission volunteer might be for you!

As I travel around the country speaking at churches about my mission work in Africa and Australia, older folks frequently comment, “I always wanted to be a missionary,” or “I dreamed of working overseas.” Then they add, “But now I’m too old.” Well, if that’s you, you may want to reconsider.

As you read about Eileen and Irwin Knigge’s post-retirement experiences serving Global Ministries in Samoa, I hope you feel her enthusiasm. Surely, when we approach God with a “willing spirit,” God can always use us and our talents!

Ana

Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me,

Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.

Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

—Psalm 51:10-12 (Eileen’s favorite Bible passage)

Unchurched Beginnings to Christian Commitment

Eileen grew up in Madison, Illinois. She explains, “My family did not go to any church, but at about ten years of age I began attending the Free Methodist Church which was a block from my house....My church had a great children’s after school youth program conducted by the pastor, dedicated lay people and a great pianist. We listened to Bible stories, learned how to cook and sang rousing lively songs. (I still remember some of them. It was one of the best church memories I have.) Devoutly committed Sunday School teachers became great mentors.”

Eileen continues, “During my high school years, my pastor and his wife as well as my Sunday School teacher took a special interest in me and involved me in church related activities such as youth group and teaching Sunday School. At about age 16 I made a commitment to Christ—a decision that was life changing. My desire from then on was to be a follower of Christ. I truly wanted to do what would be pleasing to Christ.”

■ **QUESTION FOR REFLECTION:** What are your “faith beginnings”? How did Sunday School impact your life?

Life’s Path

Eileen smoothly stepped into college, a profession and marriage. “My minister and his wife were also responsible for my attending our church school, Greenville College, in Greenville, Illinois. This is where Irwin and I met. I briefly thought I would like to be a missionary to Japan. However, I did not really have a call and so majored in Psychology/Education.” Though Eileen considered the option of international mission, her life path, at that time, was in the USA where she taught and raised a family in Rapid City, South Dakota. Of her 28 years at Pinedale Elementary School (grades 3-5), she exclaims, “What a great job it was!!” Eileen and Irwin joined South Park United Church of Christ in 1981.

■ **QUESTION FOR REFLECTION:** When have you set aside one dream to follow another dream?

After fulfilling careers, Eileen and Irwin were open to the future. She explains, “Our associate minister, Mark Stewart, saw an ad in the Global Ministries paper seeking help at the print shop in American Samoa. He gave it to Irwin who had just retired from the printing business. Irwin and I talked it over, prayed and then called the Director of Personnel for Global Ministries in Indianapolis... It was uncertain whether or not we would be chosen but what an exciting prospect. Our trip to Indianapolis occurred the day after 9-11. A wonderful adventure began for us when we left for American Samoa on Jan. 15, 2002.”

■ **QUESTION FOR REFLECTION:** When have you felt most “open to the future”?

An Adventure in American Samoa

Eileen taught at Kanana Fou Congregational Christian Church of American Samoa which is administered and financially supported by the women of the church. Classes are held in English, a second language for Samoans. “My first teaching assignment,” Eileen explains, “was helping the Samoan remedial reading teacher with grades K-8 ... working on oral reading and comprehension.”

Though she knew no Samoan, Eileen jumped right in. "My first assignment was to help with the Spelling Bee. That is a biggie on the island. The winner is rewarded with a trip to Washington, D.C. Our principal asked me to practice with the students-grades 4-8- so they could hear the correct pronunciation of the words. WOW. Some of those words were so unfamiliar I had to use a dictionary myself!!! The spelling contest at our school lasted all afternoon. Our young eighth grader was not the island winner, but she did place."

■ **QUESTION FOR REFLECTION:** When have you had to "jump right in" to a new situation in your life?

Spiritual Tools and Disciplines for daily living

When asked what spiritual disciplines strengthened her in her work and daily life, Eileen explains: "As I was in a foreign culture and all sermons were in Samoan, I learned to just enjoy the singing and communion. I sang in English if I knew the songs. I did talk to God a lot. If I felt homesick (once in a while--not too much) I reminded myself that 'all things work together for good'. I had a neighbor that listened if I needed to talk. I tried to keep a positive attitude. AND I never doubted that American Samoa was where I was supposed to be. I like to think that I made a difference and was able to help the students under my tutorage. Walking with God has been a great adventure. God always does more than we can ever imagine. Who would have ever thought that when I received Christ as my Savior at age 16 that I would have such a great adventure.

■ **QUESTION FOR REFLECTION:** Which spiritual disciplines strengthen you in your work and daily life?

The Adventure Continues

Back in Rapid City, Eileen continues to be an adventurer, teaching Sunday School and riding motorcycles with Irwin. "We plan to ride with our motorcycle group to the Beartooth Mts. in Montana. Then tour the Northeast. If we accomplish that we will have covered all 48 states!"

(Eileen and Irwin headed out on their northeast trek the day this article was completed!)

■ **QUESTION FOR REFLECTION:** How are you an adventurer for Christ?



Eileen and her teaching team at Kanana Fou Congregational Christian Church



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PRAYER POINTS

- Conference Ministers like Mark Stewart who creatively connect people with opportunities to serve the wider church.
- Retired volunteers currently serving International Partner Churches through Global Ministries
- The Congregational Christian Churches of American Samoa
- The students and staff at Kanana Fou Congregational Christian Church school

ACTION OPPORTUNITIES

- Locate American Samoa on the map and learn three things about it.
- Ask your Conference Staff to provide information about volunteer opportunities, for all ages, throughout the UCC and educate your church membership.
- Explore Global Ministries web site at <http://www.globalministries.org/> and learn about the numerous missionaries and mission projects you currently support through Our Church's Wider Mission.