



December 2023

Dear Fellow Presbyterians,

In 1991 our family of five returned from an overseas ministry posting in Bonn, Germany. My husband Bob had served a term as Associate Pastor for the American Protestant Church in Bonn. At that time communication “across the pond” was not as easy as it is today. Therefore, we needed a place to live with our three small children while awaiting his next call. Bob contacted the Executive Director of Mission Haven about the availability of one of the residences there. We were fortunate to be provided with a lovely home furnished with everything we needed during this time of transition. We called Mission Haven “home” for six months and remain thankful for its ministry.

My family and I love Mission Haven. As you will see at the end of this letter, I am asking for *your partnership* with this *vital mission* of Presbyterian Women and the Presbyterian Church in two crucial areas. But first I want to tell you a little about the “Fair Haven” called Mission Haven...

### *Life at Mission Haven*

PC(USA) mission co-workers utilize housing at Mission Haven to plan their itineration while on what used to be called “furlough” from the mission field. Many people mistakenly think that “furlough” is a fancy name for vacation. It is far from vacation. It is a time for missionaries to plan trips around the United States to communicate the work of their posting. They travel widely and share news of the country in which they serve, the work that they do, the successes and the needs of the people in that country, and the prayer requests of the people they serve and their own family. They garner support for the national mission funding of the PC(USA) and encourage other Presbyterians to consider service in co-worker and volunteer positions around the world. They plan for the day, six

months to one year later, when they will return overseas, and they receive any medical attention and supplies they may need for their return to the field. Mission Haven provides the setting for the planning for missionaries to speak, preach, teach, and demonstrate the life and needs of mission for Jesus Christ!

### *The importance of proximity to Columbia Seminary*

Positioned beside the campus of Columbia Theological Seminary, Mission Haven allows, with the permission of the seminary, auditing of seminary courses and use of the seminary library. Missionaries engage with students and professors at Columbia, and they take part in the life of local churches in the Decatur and Atlanta, Georgia areas. They and their families take part in social and sporting activities on campus, if they so choose, to keep fit and enjoy the camaraderie of teamwork. The seminary chapel services provide daily spiritual sustenance and the chance to worship in daily community.

### *A chance to learn from the CTS faculty*

My husband discovered the story-telling magic of Dr. Catherine Gonzalez while we were at Mission Haven. Professor Gonzalez was a Church History professor, who taught church history through the stories of the church through the centuries. Bob would attend a 50-minute class, and stay 45 minutes more, writing longhand the stories Dr. Catherine had told. He later converted the boxes of notes into classes for the members of his next church. Imagine, church history taught century by century to the laity of the local church—they loved it, and he loved teaching it.

### *Life and Learning for the children of missionaries*

For missionaries with elementary aged children, Mission Haven is a short few blocks from the Winnona Park Elementary School. Our oldest son, Bill, began First Grade at Winnona Park School. I'll never forget the morning ritual for school in those days. Students arrived before school each morning, and unless the weather was bad, they lined up by grade and class outside the school. When the bell rang, all the students marched by class grouping into the school to their individual rooms. They were required to enter the school silently and with respect for the school and the faculty. Each day began thusly, in respect and anticipation for the learning the day would bring. Bob and I still get a little teary at the gift our son received because we lived at Mission Haven.

Our middle child, Tom, was a preschooler that year, and we were fortunate to find a spot in the Decatur Presbyterian Pre-School. Tom had some language and learning challenges, and those were met beautifully by the Decatur Presbyterian pre-school teachers. Again, because we lived at Mission Haven we found wonderful resources that met our needs. We can only imagine the myriad of needs of mission co-worker children through the years when their families came back to the United States; but we know that Mission Haven is the place to be to begin to find resources to meet the needs of the children.

### *Themes of prayer and joy*

Life still happens even at a place as wonderful as Mission Haven. So, when there is a need, we provide for one another. When there is sadness we pray for one another. We sense the bond of *life-together* as something special during the time we spend there. When our son Tom wrecked his bicycle and required stitches, our friends surrounded us with love and prayer. When Bob received his call to his next church, our friends rejoiced with us at our next adventure in Christ. Through it all we shared meals, played games, and learned from the life experiences of others, both from Mission Haven and the Columbia campus.

We even occasionally scraped together enough to attend a Braves baseball game or savor a meal at the Varsity Drive-In beside the Georgia Tech campus. When the Braves played in the World Series that Year, one of the students at Columbia pulled his wide-screen television outside so everyone could watch and cheer.

### *Seventy-Plus years of service, and counting*

For over seventy years Mission Haven has provided affordable short-term housing to mission co-workers and other ordained ministers of the Presbyterian Church (USA) who serve overseas. When space permits international seminary students enrolled in Columbia Theological Seminary also call Mission Haven home.

- Mission Haven is supported and operated by Presbyterian Women in seven southern states and is a 501 (c) (3) organization.
- Mission Haven provides furnished housing to those who dwell there.
- Mission Haven through its famous “Clothes Closet” provides donated clothing for the missionary families in addition to Columbia Theological Seminary students and their families.

- Mission Haven is a place touched by God, blessed by Jesus Christ, and fortified by the Holy Spirit.

*A new day, with new needs*

But as you may imagine, times change and needs change. Presbyterian Women do so much, yet the needs increase. PW as an organization is facing its own changes, and financing is not as easily found as in decades past. Plus, we have deferred maintenance needs which must be addressed in the year(s) to come. We need the support of individuals, PW groups, sessions, and churches in order to thrive in the next 70+ years of service.

As the Mississippi Representative for the Mission Haven Board, I write to ask for your support in the ongoing ministry of Mission Haven. Unlike some organizations, Mission Haven does not have an endowment fund for major expenses. We rely solely on contributions for the upkeep and maintenance of three homes, six apartments, the clothes closet, and the supporting buildings.

*Our request from you*

First, we ask you to pray for Mission Haven and the missionaries we support! If our mission is not undergirded by prayer we are a futile effort of mere human beings. But with prayer we can thrive as we have for 70 years, in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Second, we ask you to place an item in your ongoing annual church mission budget beginning in 2024 for the support of Mission Haven. We ask for \$100, \$1,000, \$10,000, or the amount that your church can prayerfully give each year, to support this excellent work. An ongoing annual contribution from your church's main or mission budget will be an excellent way to support the work of this vital ministry. We need you, the church—to support the mission of the church—by supporting Mission Haven.

Contributions may be mailed to Mission Haven, 235 Inman Drive, Decatur, GA 30030 or made via the website [www.missionhaven.net](http://www.missionhaven.net). Please contact me if you have any questions, at (336) 848-3031 or [mbsharman@gmail.com](mailto:mbsharman@gmail.com). Also, I am willing to come to your church and present a “Minute-for-Mission” in your worship service or present a program for a fellowship event or class.

God be praised for his church and its mission. And God bless the “Fair Havens” of Mission Haven. Thank you for your consideration of support.

Sincerely,

*Mary Beth Sharman*

Mary Beth Sharman

Mission Haven Board, Mississippi Representative

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*Sailing past Crete with difficulty, we came to a place called **Fair Havens**, near the city of Lasea.*

--The Missionary Paul on his journey to Rome, Acts 27:8