

The Rev. Dr. Paul “Chip” Jahn  
Citation  
Honorary Doctor of Divinity

Paul “Chip” Jahn has served the same rural parish in Indiana since 1979, the year he graduated with a Master of Divinity from Eden Theological Seminary. The churches he serves are so small that it takes two of them to keep him employed, St. Peter and Trinity United Church of Christ in Lamar, Indiana. Chip Jahn has not spent his career moving up the ladder to the tall steeple churches that attract our best and brightest. Instead, he has faithfully pastured his rural Indiana flock and, on the side, worked with Tigers – Tamil Tigers.

When Chip Jahn traveled to Sri Lanka for the first time in 1987, the war between the minority Tamil and Sinhalese factions was already 4 years, had taken thousands of lives, and displaced hundreds of thousands of refugees. Rev. Jahn went to Jaffna to return a visit to Indiana made by a missionary from the Jaffna Diocese of the Church of South India, a partner church of the Indiana-Kentucky Conference of the United Church of Christ. The violent warfare he encountered there spurred him into action. He contacted his congressman, who happened to be the Chair of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, and with his help began to educate public officials about the war in Sri Lanka. Since few westerners had been to the areas affected by the worst fighting, Rev. Jahn’s repeated trips to Tamil areas to visit church contacts soon made him a trusted source of information about the situation on the ground. He bore witness to the Sri Lankan tragedy to the State Department, Congress, the United Nations and the World Bank, asking them to use their influence and leverage to bring the warring parties to the negotiating table. Because he was a non-partisan, small-town pastor, well spoken, well-read, and experienced, people listened. In 2004 Rev. Jahn was instrumental in arranging the ill-fated peace talks which tragically broke off following the election of a Sinhalese hard-liner as Prime Minister. But his efforts for peace in Sri Lanka have not flagged. Today he continues to work with the London-based organization he helped to found, the International Working Group on Sri Lanka, to advocate for Sri Lankans caught in the struggle and to monitor human rights violations.

The churches he serves, St. Peter and Trinity UCC, have been partners with Rev. Jahn in reaching out to the wider world. In the beginning, it was they who funded the Sri Lankan advocacy work. But that’s not all they have done. In 2005, when a deadly tsunami struck the coast of Sri Lanka, St. Peter and Trinity responded immediately with relief offered through their partner churches in Sri Lanka. In that same year they provided funds to dig a well for a village in Niger and provided food relief when the crops for that year later failed. And when Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans that summer, the two semi-trailers sent by these churches filled with food and water were the first to arrive in Thibodaux, LA where refugees from the Superdome were being brought for relief. If the church exists for mission, St. Peter and Trinity UCC have found their calling under Rev. Jahn’s leadership.

The Rev. Dr. Paul Jahn was born and raised in the shadow of Eden Seminary in Webster Groves, Missouri. He holds a B.A. in psychology from Missouri State University, and both the M. Div. and D. Min. degrees from Eden Theological Seminary. He is married to Gayle Morley Jahn, also a Webster native, and is the father of Caroline, Paul, Marie and Muriel, who has just completed her first year at Eden.

Because Rev. Jahn has shown how faithful ministry can change the lives of people in countless communities across this country, and sometimes even has a chance to change the world, we are pleased to confer upon him the degree of Doctor on Divinity, honoris causa.

Written and read by Professor Stephen Patterson  
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