
GLOBAL JUSTICE

Focus

From the very beginning, “Justice” has been a core value and driving force for Metropolitan Community Churches around the world. Salvation, Community, and Social Action were the “three-pronged gospel” that Troy Perry began preaching, and social (and political) activism in the cause of creating a more just and equitable world has always been a priority of MCC. In the past few years, MCC has increasingly been known around the world as “The Human Rights Church,” which we believe is an indication of our continued commitment to the pursuit of justice. But, what is justice? How do we most effectively work for justice in the world, in our communities, and within our churches? This session invites participants into a Holy Conversation about Global Justice, and the ways in which individuals and communities can best participate in the Divine imperative to do justice.

Centering Quotes on Justice

“... Oppression and liberation are the very substance of the entire historical context within which divine revelation unfolds, and only by reference to this central fact can we understand the meaning of faith, grace, love, peace, sin, and salvation.” (Elsa Tamez, *Bible of the Oppressed*)

“Black theology’s answer to the question of hermeneutics can be stated briefly: The hermeneutical principle for an exegesis of the scriptures is the revelation of God in Christ as the Liberator of the oppressed from social oppression and to political struggle, wherein the poor recognize that their fight against poverty and injustice is not only consistent with the gospel but is the gospel of Jesus Christ.” (James Cone, *God of the Oppressed*)

“In the past thirty years, an explosion has taken place in Christianity. All around the world popular movements are rising up out of the culture of silence and finding their voices. In Latin America, Asia, North America, Europe, and the Pacific Rim, the spirit is moving and communities of the oppressed are forming, crying out against their suffering and the social, political, economic, and religious structures that give rise to that suffering. But that is only half of the story. These cries of protest are the signs not of a mass outpouring of hatred and revenge, but of a movement committed to working for liberation toward abundant life. Realizing that ‘only justice can stop a curse,’ these communities have begun a new practice of Christianity, experimenting with new ways of being the church, engaging in the practice of justice, and reflecting critically on the meaning of this practice. Theology done in these communities grows out of solidarity with those suffering and in need and is rooted in particular social justice contexts.” (Mary Potter Engel and Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite, *Lift Every Voice*)

“I am cognizant of the interrelatedness of all communities and states. I cannot sit idly by in Atlanta and not be concerned about what happens in Birmingham. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. ...

But the judgment of God is upon the church as never before. If today's church does not recapture the sacrificial spirit of the early church, it will lose its authenticity, forfeit the loyalty of millions, and be dismissed as an irrelevant social club with no meaning for the twentieth century. Every day I meet young people whose disappointment with the church has turned into outright disgust. Perhaps I have once again been too optimistic. Is organized religion too inextricably bound to the status quo to save our nation and the world? Perhaps I must turn my faith to the inner spiritual church, the church within the church, as the true *ekklesia* and the hope of the world. But again I am thankful to God that some noble souls from the ranks of organized religion have broken loose from the paralyzing chains of conformity and joined us as active partners in the struggle for freedom ... They have acted in the faith that right defeated is stronger than evil triumphant. Their witness has been the spiritual salt that has preserved the true meaning of the gospel in these troubled times. They have carved a tunnel of hope through the dark mountain of disappointment. I hope the church as a whole will meet the challenge of this decisive hour. But even if the church does not come to the aid of justice, I have no despair about the future.”

(Martin Luther King, Jr., *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*)

“I would like to highlight our understanding of the concept of peace. We need to have a deep understanding of peace-- that peace signifies salvation, especially in the African world-view—wholeness and integrity. It also signifies community, righteousness, justice and well-being. So, we have many ways, and one of the significant ways we highlight, especially in the South African context when we talk about peace, is that justice creates peace. And I want to underline this ... One of the important ways we [talk] about peace, especially in the African context, is a word which is commonly known as *ubuntu*, a deep sense of humanity, of relatedness, that as people we are part of the corporate body of the people of God. The notion of corporate personality as we know it in the Old Testament is that you cannot exist as an individual, but we are a part of the larger community. So that concept continues to play an important role in our understanding of peace, shalom. Shalom is a very wholistic concept in our own struggle within the African context.”

(Bonganjalo Goba, *Peace in Africa: a personal perspective*)

“Those who profess to favor freedom, and yet deprecate agitation, are people who want crops without plowing up the ground. They want rain without thunder and lightening; they want the ocean without the awful roar of its waters. This struggle may be a moral one; or it may be both moral and physical; but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand; it never did and it never will. Find out what people will submit to, and you have found out the exact amount of injustice which will be imposed on them. The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress.”

(Frederick Douglass, c. 1857)

“... Love has its price. God wants to make us alive, and the wider we open our hearts to others or the more audibly we cry out against the injustice which rules over us, the more difficult our life in the rich society of injustice becomes. Even a small love of a few trees, of seals, or of schoolchildren who cry at night in torment ... is costly. Many cannot afford even a small love for creatures and prefer not to have seen anything.”

(Dorothy Söelle, *Theology for Skeptics: Reflections on God*)

Some Testimonies about Justice

A Plan for Hope and Justice in Pakistan Contributed by Pat Bumgardner

In Pakistan, MCC has the opportunity to literally be part of what can and will bring longed for social change, freedom and “salvation” (if we understand that term in its Gospel context as “safe” – what those who are “saved” find is safe space for who they are and what their lives were intended to be about) to women and children, particularly girl children, and to directly address the issue of poverty.

Statistically we know that roughly 70% of the poor in the world are women. Change their realities and you change the shape of the global economy. In Pakistan, a small group of lesbians that both Rev. Elder Ken Martin and I had the opportunity to meet with have a plan. For \$1500 one of them can obtain the kind of 6-month training that will allow her to acquire out-of-the-home employment that is acceptable for women. That woman could then rent a safe space where she could be joined by the others in the group. They would live communally and frugally until enough could be saved to educate the second woman, who would then also go to work and contribute to the support of the group. This strategy would continue until all in the group were educated and employed. And it is one that could work for establishing other “safe spaces” for other young lesbians. It could work with the community of “eunuchs” in Bagria. It is a concrete example of what it means to be on the ground, to be listening to those who are trying to live under extremely oppressive circumstances and who have developed a plan that we must not close our eyes to. It holds great potential not only for Queer people in Pakistan, but for the revitalization of communities of faith that MCC has already given birth to and who are looking to and need to connect to the wider, global LGBTQIA community.

The Pakistani plan for providing safe space as the groundwork for social change is a strategy worth embracing on a global level. In Kuala Lumpur, for example, \$330 US per month will enable our fledging parish extension to rent enough space to not only house a worship community, but to also provide safe space for young activists engaging a range of issues, including HIV/AIDS and gender equality. (MCCNY, in its relationship with the Kuala Lumpur community is very clear, we did not “found” or “plant” a church. We connected with a movement for equality in the works, we listened to what people were saying, we shared some resources, and we are now celebrating the accomplishments and progress being made toward opening the first Queer Community Center in Malaysia that will house a community of faith at its heart.)

SAFE SPACE is a primary and urgent need among Queer communities around the globe. Many things become possible when dreams and hopes, as well as trials and tribulations, can be openly shared. Global Justice is about connecting with that need as a way of laying a foundation for people to begin to organize and work for change collectively.

An Eye Witness Account of MCC's Relief Efforts in Haiti Contributed by Tania Guzman (February 2010)

We have just arrived back in the Dominican Republic and are exhausted from the events of the day. The team of five volunteers and three drivers from ICM Santo Domingo departed for Haiti at 4am on Thursday, February 11th. From the church were Rev. Tania Guzman, Wilkin and three Haitian church members (Webster, Gregory and Jonel) who are very familiar with navigating Haiti and whose families still live in the areas affected by the earthquake.

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We developed a very effective system that involved having the church members contact their families and select one person for us to deliver the food to. When we approached the drop off points, we contacted the individuals via cell phone. Once we arrived at each point of delivery the contact person was already there waiting for us and we only had seconds to get all the food out of the bus and leave before we were noticed and crowds would gather.

Each person receiving the delivery was so grateful and happy and blessed our efforts and the journey. When we arrived, we were greeted by friends of our church members who arranged to meet us and helped us make the deliveries. As it turned out, 2 of these friends are members of POZ, the GLBT organization that was meeting during the earthquake and lost some of their members in the building collapse. They were so grateful and touched by the church's efforts to help.

We wanted to capture photos to share with the world but it was difficult because we had to move so quickly. We hope that our stories will suffice. It was bittersweet for our Haitian church members because they could only see their loved ones for the few moments we were unloading things for them. Their parents wanted to hold on to them, but we only had what felt like seconds to be with them and then we had to let go.

We were able to make deliveries to 22 families and had more food left which we just handed out to people on the street very quickly as we drove through some of the affected areas.

I have been following the situation in Haiti through the news media since the disaster happened, but it was hard to actually be there and see the devastation with my own eyes. There were tents everywhere; in public areas, even on the medians of what were once very busy streets. Most of them are not even real tents but bed sheets and pieces of fabric. There is still a lot of chaos and unrest and the streets were filled with thousands of people who were in desperate need of food and relief.

This experience was overwhelming. Our hearts went out to those that we were able to assist. This was a life changing experience for each of us.

We still have funds remaining and we were able to do a lot of bargaining for things because we want to continue to help where we can. It was the consensus of our group that we need to make another trip, this time with tents and tarps so that they can have shelter from the elements.

A Day on the Road with Soulforce Equality Ride 2010 Contributed by Sabrina Diz

Today we visited the much anticipated Baylor University. Two years ago when Soulforce visited the campus they chalked in front of the chapel and were asked to stop. All but five Riders and one student stopped at which point the ones that continued were arrested on trespassing charges. Yes, I said "chalked" which is the same as writing on sidewalk and streets with chalk. When they were taken to jail they were cavity searched, kept overnight before pretrial even though they were arrested mid-day, and a Trans Rider was mistreated as he was placed in a female cell. All this, may I repeat, for chalking on a sidewalk.

Mia and Jaxon, the Stop Planners for the school, coordinated a different approach this year and negotiated with administrator's permission on campus to speak to students, faculty, and staff. So at 9am we walked onto campus excited to engage in dialogue and common ground. Nick and I volunteered to join in on a Philosophy class led by Dr. Dougherty who was the only Professor on campus to facilitate any kind of discussion or incorporate our visit into a class. This, I am sure, had a lot to do with the fact that Baylor did

not send any type of e-mail announcing our visit and kept it very silent up until a day or two ago that they sent an e-mail that could be considered condescending (at best) by many. Kudos to Prof. Dougherty who I feel had the best intentions. It was disappointing that the dialogue that this opportunity fostered was greatly hindered by time constraints and an administrator that sat in on the conversation. However, the questions posed by Dr. Dougherty were insightful and the responses to the questions we posed back at him were honestly answered.

The rest of the day Riders spent engaging students and challenging them to think about the policy, how this policy aligns/contradicts Christian teachings, the intersection of justice and faith and sexuality, and just asking and answering questions. Personally, I had some really great discussions. During one of these with a student I tried to explain the difference between a sexual act and an identity. A question posed to me that I had not been asked before was, “If a lesbian couple does not engage in sexual activity, how is this different than two female friends?” I must admit it took me by surprise because it was so obvious to me, but I had to take a step back and admire this person for being courageous enough to admit ignorance and willing to be vulnerable by asking an honest question. These are the kinds of questions that students want to know; the kind of questions that could be answered within the safe spaces of a Queer/Straight Alliance if Baylor would allow one to exist.

Promptly at four o’clock, in accordance with our agreement, we boarded the bus and left campus. We rolled to a nearby park where Jaxon and Mia had planned a Variety Show. Under a pavilion with the sun shining down on us people shared a part of their lives with a friendly and eager audience. We had a little bit of everything. The show included spoken word, dance routines, slam poetry, queer skits, original music, and amazing ‘coming out’ testimonies that had the crowd in thunderous applause. In my own Equality Ride experience and after such a depleting day, this reminder of the wonderful and amazing community and culture I belong to, affirmed and replenished my belief in my faith, my cause, and my friends.

Holy Conversations: Exploring My and Our Understanding of Justice

Points of Reflection (Small Group Discussion): Have you ever experienced being treated unjustly? If so, how? What is your experience of working toward justice in this or any other situation?

Points of Reflection (Small Group Discussion): Whom do you think we might identify as the most vulnerable people in the world today (e.g. the widow, the orphan, the outcast)? What are the current situations of injustice in the world about which you feel most passionate? Why?

Points of Reflection (Large Group Discussion): What did you most appreciate about your small group discussions? With what stories or experiences did you most identify? How does it “feel” (emotionally and/or physically) to talk about justice?

Additional Thoughts About Global Justice

MCC's Calling to Global Justice

Contributed by Pat Bumgardner, Chair of MCC's Global Justice Team

“Justice” is a many-splendored concept in MCC, perhaps partly because that is also the case in the Scriptures we reverence. It is a concept rooted in God’s all-embracing love, God’s covenant with creation, God’s desire that all of us have the fullness of life, and God’s sense that not all of us have an equal shot at that fullness.

MCC’s Global Justice Team is currently working or partnered in Latin America, the Caribbean, Malaysia, Pakistan, parts of the United States, Canada, Eastern Europe, and parts of Africa. We have contacts seeking to discuss partnering with us in places like Iraq and Iran. We are currently addressing issues as divergent as marriage equality in the United States and HIV/AIDS among children in Zimbabwe.

The areas we are working on include justice for families and how that impacts social change, how to use technology to reach a broader audience (while not overlooking the fact that many, many people around the globe do not have access to computers, email, Youtube, Myspace, etc.), how to build our constituency, developing partnerships with activists and other human rights organizations, training young activists from a spiritual perspective, integrating Queer rights as part of the overall human rights agenda, reviving passion around HIV/AIDS and launching HIV/AIDS and drug literacy curriculum in local congregations, how to raise money beyond the borders of MCC, immigration and asylum issues, sexism and social change, establishing a Global Justice Center to host meetings and offer trainings, how to prioritize needs and developing protocols, how to best intersect with other teams and how to resource our constituents, global poverty, safety and support for activists in places like Jamaica, Uganda and Nigeria, learning from movements and leaders on the ground, developing non-violent strategies for social action, developing evaluative tools, community building, learning about existing legislative and human rights codes around the globe plus the histories of work and the interactions of other faith traditions --- and we are trying to do all of this with a budget that represents about half of what it takes to live in any major metropolitan area of the United States for one year. In short, we are attempting the miraculous and falling short in the following areas:

- using existing technology where possible to maximize our reach
- establishing a credible voice for MCC on matters of war and peace
- having enough time and resources to work on an overall Global Justice Plan
- dealing with human slavery and sex tourism
- engaging the terrorism/illegal imprisonment/torture issue with our congregations
- time to develop a global theology around Queer rights that offers a serious counter to Western Queer Theology
- developing tools to define and measure success

We often operate much like a triage center: When the head of state in Gambia, for example, threatens to behead Queer people, we drop everything to respond and hopefully save lives in that moment in that place. The needs of Queer people around the globe are so vast that it has been difficult to come up with an overarching strategy of engagement.

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In general, however, we operate under the guidelines so succinctly articulated by that champion of global justice, The Rev. Elder Diane Fisher:

- go only where we are invited
- assume we have a lot to learn
- listen to our hosts
- forge partnerships
- respond when requested
- understand that our priority is furthering the human rights effort on the ground

Sometimes the latter principle is viewed in opposition to the more traditional “missional” efforts of the Church. I believe our Team views prioritizing the human rights effort on the ground as a way to ensure that if and when congregations develop, they will grow out of a solid understanding of the Gospel as a radical social manifesto in which the pursuit of human rights is first and foremost.

We see ourselves as people of faith called to stand in solidarity with those who are marginalized and oppressed, to be partners in working for change, to be witnesses who call attention to human rights abuses, to be voices in the international community for justice, to tear down walls and build up hope, and to build on hope and create a common future. Doing these things is human rights work. It is work that is rooted in the original three-prong vision of our Founder, The Rev. Troy Perry. I think I am on solid ground when I say, there is a strong sense among Team Members that God has called this ministry to the forefront of MCC once again, as a way of helping all of us refocus on that founding vision. It is a way to help MCC in its efforts to become not simply a church, but a movement of faith, in which the colonialist heritage and by-products of the tradition we represent are overcome. It is a way to help all of us reclaim the prophetic call to act justly, love tenderly and walk humbly with our God (Micah 6:8). It is one way to renew, re-invent, and re-invigorate ourselves and our sustaining vision.

There is a great revolution going on globally in terms of Queer rights/human rights, and MCC is awake, playing an active role, and can play an even greater one. We have a chance to work with, learn from, train and shape not only today’s spiritual activists, but tomorrow’s world leaders.

Queer rights are human rights and human rights are Queer rights. Our challenge is to rise above the dominant ethic of globalization that thrives on a gain for one as a loss for another. St. Paul wrote long ago, when one member suffers we all suffer; when one rejoices, we all rejoice. If we are truly to become a human rights church, this must become our guiding ethic.

Our challenge, as always, is fidelity to the Gospel vision of the Reign of God unfolding here and now. That Reign is one of the “just and equal sharing of the earth’s rewards,” as the hymn posits. TIME magazine in March or April of 2008 highlighted ten ideas that it said are changing the world. Number one was “common wealth” --- what we pray for in the prayer Jesus taught (Thy common/wealth – Thy kin-dom – Thy Reign come). Actually mirroring what we pray for remains our greatest challenge, as we together – leadership and congregants and partners around the globe – seek to pool our resources financial and otherwise for the singular purpose of fulfilling the dream of God that we all have the fullness of life.

Biblical Passages About Justice

Deuteronomy 10:17-19
Deuteronomy 16:20
Deuteronomy 27:19
Micah 6:8
Psalm 33
Psalm 37
Psalm 82
Psalm 106

Isaiah 1:17
Isaiah 42
Jeremiah 22:3
Amos 5:24
Matthew 12:15-21
Luke 18:1-8
Matthew 20:1-16

Holy Conversations: Seeking, Sharing and Stretching

Point of Reflection (Small Group Discussion): What is justice? In what ways is the work of justice related to your understanding of God and/or your faith/spirituality?

Point of Reflection (Small Group Discussion): Many times, people become aware of injustice when it affects themselves or someone close to them. How might we expand our sensitivities to situations of injustice that are not about “just us,” and that are truly “Global” in nature?

Point of Reflection (Large Group Discussion): In the essay above, Pat Bumgardner describes the challenge of planning strategically for justice work in the face of so many competing needs and limited resources. How do you think we might best prioritize and allocate resources for justice in MCC? In your local church?

Point of Reflection (Large Group Discussion): What connections do you see between queer rights and human rights? What are the strengths of MCC’s work for justice on behalf of LGBTQI people that we might put to use for other justice-related causes?

Pulling it All Together: A Justice Covenant

As you close this “Holy Conversation,” it seems fitting to allow participants to take or commit to take some action to work for justice. Ask participants to come together and spend a few minutes thinking about the situations of injustice that are most important to them, and planning at least one thing that they will covenant to do about that situation (e.g. pray, demonstrate, give, become involved in an organization, write a letter/make a phone call, etc.). Gather in a circle and ask each participate to state aloud what they have decided. Close with a prayer of commissioning (sample provided below).

God of justice and liberation, you have called us to “do justice, love tenderly, and walk humbly with you.” It is our sincere desire to do so, to make a difference in the world around us, to participate in the healing of the world and of ourselves and our communities. We ask you to continue to awaken us to the suffering of those around us and to infuse us with compassion, courage, and the strength to make a difference. You have heard the hopes of our hearts, and the actions we promise to take. Please work through us, and through the larger body of Metropolitan Community Churches around the world that way may be your hands and feet, your voice and heart in the world. And now, let us recite together the prayer attributed to St. Francis, who said:

[God,] make me an instrument of your peace;
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon:
where there is doubt, faith ;
where there is despair, hope
where there is darkness, light
where there is sadness, joy
O divine Master,
grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;
to be understood, as to understand;
to be loved, as to love;
for it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to Eternal Life.
Amen.

Additional Resources

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