

Talking Cents

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Talking Cents is an ecumenical group charged by the Anglican Diocesan Council to promote an alternative to current economic and political thought, and to encourage debate within the church.

Ministry units are encouraged to distribute these articles. This article is contributed by Prince Devanandan, director Mission and Ecumenical, Methodist Church of New Zealand

Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace – A call to Christians

The World Council of Churches (WCC) 2013 Busan assembly invited Christians and people of good will everywhere to join in a pilgrimage of justice and peace. “Challenged by our experiences in Busan, we call all people – young and old, women and men, differently abled, people of different faiths – to engage their God-given gifts in transforming actions, together.” It is an important message not only to all Christians throughout the world, but also to all who are concerned about the world in which we live. But for many, it will be an important question: why should we be involved in a pilgrimage of justice and peace? It is a legitimate question for an average Christian. The rationale for getting involved in a pilgrimage of justice and peace is because, everywhere we look today, life seems imperilled. It is time for Christians and Christian churches everywhere to unite in sustaining life by working together on today’s most pressing issues. The world is experiencing one of the largest migration in history with the war in Syria displacing millions of people to abandon their habitat and move to Europe for safety. It is certainly not the fault of the innocent Syrians, but those who live to make money by war have caused this calamity. The cause of this war itself is a call for justice. While the international law attempts to punish the perpetrator, the real perpetrator remains hidden – the weapons industry. On the other hand the argument of ‘fight for oil’ is the underlying factor.

In a catastrophic context of this magnitude, it is time for Christians everywhere to join in a sacred journey – a pilgrimage – of justice and peace. The World Council of Churches stated, “We call first of all on the member churches and partners to walk together in a common quest, renewing our vocation of the church through collaborative engagement with the most important issues of justice and peace, healing a world filled with conflict, injustice and pain.” The call to be involved in the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace is primarily a mission of healing the wounded while humanity takes steps to prevent the man-made disaster of war.

The call to be involved in the pilgrimage of justice and peace is reiterated further; that by participating in God's mission of justice and peace (*missio Dei*), we intend to respond to God's will for this world by becoming communities of justice and peace and celebrating the fellowship of such communities.

The next question that may arise is, why a pilgrimage? The word “pilgrimage” was chosen to convey that this is a journey with deep spiritual meaning and with profound theological connotations and implications. As a “pilgrimage of justice and peace”, it is neither a journey towards a concrete geographical place nor some simple form of activism. It is a transformative journey that God invites us to in anticipation of the final purpose for the world that the Triune God brings about. The movement of love which is essential to the Triune God manifests itself in the promise of justice and peace. They are signs of God’s reign to come

which is already visible here and now wherever reconciliation and healing are seen.¹ This pilgrimage promises to be a transformative journey, discovering ourselves anew in new relationships of justice and peace, but the challenge is, whether we are prepared to go on this pilgrimage.

We as Christians are busy with running our ecclesial practice of faith while we neglect the deeper call to be involved in the *Missio Dei*, a pilgrimage of justice and peace. While the wounded around us and in the world wait for the neighbour to treat them, we are content with our prayers and praises. While the robbers continue to rob, plunder the vulnerable and exploit the workers, those called to be prophets are given a seat in Caesar's court.² Unless and until we stand up for the mission of God here and now, we too will regret our failure to pay attention to the call to God's mission.

The World Council of Churches meeting on capacity building and leadership for Pacific Church leaders held from 14 to 17 September 2015 in Auckland heard the voices of the *Young Solwaras* [people of the same salt waters] who cried about the situation in West Papua. The young lady who highlighted the human rights violations in West Papua asked "If not now, when? If not us, who?" The innocent blood of the West Papuans is shed for asking for their freedom. The call of the hour is the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" But there is very little response that says, "Here am I; send me!" [Isaiah 6:8].

Right now the debate in Aotearoa New Zealand is around a new flag and the referendum estimated to cost \$ 26 million. The question is, whether the change of a flag is imperative for this country while so many children go to school with empty stomachs and so many people are waiting for surgeries for months if not for years to get their health restored. Where is justice in this instance? Is a change of flag at such a cost justifiable while there are so many crying out for life and health and daily food? The cry for justice is coming from every quarter, but not heeded. There are numerous other issues that can be added to the list of injustices where a pilgrimage of justice and peace is urgently needed.

God's call to mission is a collaborative way for churches everywhere to respond to the steep challenges presented by today's world, the pilgrimage summons the churches, Christians everywhere, and all people of good will to journey together in their efforts toward justice and peace, experiencing renewal and transformation while addressing ecology and economy, conflict and human dignity.³

Pilgrimage is always a collective search for the divine presence. It requires Christians to walk together, work together and pray together. The pilgrimage takes place in a world that cries out for engagement by Christians and all people of good will. Whether in the arenas of ecology, economy, peace, or human dignity, Christians find local and global affronts to the gospel values of justice and peace.

¹ Pamphlet on "Walking together, working together, praying together", World Council of Churches Publication

² Chris Tremevan(1983) – Teatime at the Revolution, Hong Kong, WSCF Asia-Pacific

³ Pamphlet on "Walking together, working together, praying together", World Council of Churches Publication.