

ACTS OF FAITH: RESOURCES FOR PROPHETIC WORSHIP

LECTIONARY-BASED WORSHIP AIDS FOR YEAR C, PART 1
SPEAKING TO NORTH CAROLINA JUSTICE ISSUES

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LOOK FOR THESE YEAR C TOPICS IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF ACTS OF FAITH, AVAILABLE FEBRUARY 2007:

- W HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS PROPER 8. FOCUS TEXT—LUKE 9:51-62
- W MATERIALISM PROPER 13. FOCUS TEXT—LUKE 12:13-21
- W HUNGER PROPER 16. FOCUS TEXT—ISAIAH 58:9B-14
- W MENTAL HEALTH CARE PROPER 20. FOCUS TEXT—JEREMIAH 8:18-9:1
- W FAIR WAGES PROPER 21. FOCUS TEXT—LUKE 16:19-31
- W NORTH CAROLINA'S NATIVE AMERICANS PROPER 25. FOCUS TEXT—JOEL 2:23-32
- W GUN VIOLENCE PROPER 26. FOCUS TEXT—ISAIAH 1:10-18
- W GLOBAL WARMING PROPER 28. FOCUS TEXT—PSALM 98

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ACTS OF FAITH: RESOURCES FOR PROPHETIC WORSHIP YEAR C

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INTRODUCTION

The North Carolina Council of Churches is pleased to present this third installment of Acts of Faith, our ecumenical resource for pastors and other religious leaders offering lectionary-based worship aids focusing on themes relating to progressive social justice in North Carolina. Acts of Faith: Resources for Prophetic Worship addresses twelve to sixteen themes each liturgical year. This current issue covers eight topics, the first half of Year C. Another eight topics will be available in the February 2007 issue of Acts of Faith.

The themes chosen for inclusion reflect the Council's focus areas of work. Each topic contains preaching aids, including scripture commentary and reflection written by a North Carolina pastor or other religious leader; worship resources such as prayers, litanies, and hymn suggestions; and issue-based statistics and facts. Most units will also contain a personal vignette by or about a North Carolinian affected by the issue.

Acts of Faith would not have been possible without Chris Liu Beers, a student at Duke Divinity School and an intern with the Council during the summer of 2006 and the 2006-2007 academic year, and Jason R. Jenkins, Program Associate. Denise Cumbee Long, also a Program Associate with the Council, is managing this project. Aleta Payne (Communications Associate) and Rose Gurkin (Web Coordinator) have handled the tasks of making this resource available in print and on the web, while Steve Smith, Program Associate and Acting Executive Director, completed editing begun by Executive Director George Reed, dubbed by his colleagues ("affectionately," they say) as "The Master Editor."

The materials included in Acts of Faith are available as a free download from the Council's website (www.nccouncilofchurches.org) and may be reproduced for use in religious worship or education. Additional printed copies may be ordered at a cost of \$10 by contacting the Council office at 919.828.6501 or at nccofofc@nccouncilofchurches.org.

Finally, as we plan to offer these resources for each lectionary year, we invite interested North Carolina pastors and other religious leaders to submit pastoral reflections of about 1,000 words, or sermons that may be edited to length, on these and other Council issues which may be considered for future issues of Acts of Faith. Contact Denise Long at 919-828-6501, dlong@nccouncilofchurches.org, if interested.

'GOD HAS LIFTED UP THE LOWLY' JUSTICE FOR THE DOWNTRODDEN

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT, YEAR C

EDITOR'S NOTE: This opening section of "Acts of Faith, Year C" is intended as an introduction to many of the justice-oriented themes of the Council's work. Upcoming topics will address, in detail, such issues as poverty, healthcare, discrimination, reconciliation, peacemaking, housing, materialism, hunger, and environmental justice. Please consider the "downtrodden" in your own community—how might these worship resources encourage your congregation to work for justice on their behalf?

Lectionary Texts: Micah 5:2-5a Psalm 80:1-7 Luke 1:47-55 Hebrews 10:5-10

Focus Text: Luke 1:47-55

⁴⁷And my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, ⁴⁸for [God] has looked with favor on the lowliness of [God's] servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; ⁴⁹for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is [God's] name. ⁵⁰[God's] mercy is for those who fear [God] from generation to generation. ⁵¹[God] has shown strength with [God's] arm; [God] has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. ⁵²[God] has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; ⁵³[God] has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. ⁵⁴[God] has helped [God's] servant Israel, in remembrance of [God's] mercy, ⁵⁵according to the promise [God] made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.

NRSV

ADDITIONAL TEXTS

For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them with food and clothing. You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. You shall fear the LORD your God; [God] alone you shall worship; to [God] you shall hold fast, and by [God's] name you shall swear.

Deuteronomy 10:17-20

Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD their God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps faith for ever; who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets the prisoners free; the LORD opens the eyes of the blind. The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down; the LORD loves the righteous. The LORD watches over the strangers; he upholds the orphan and the widow, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin. The LORD will reign for ever, your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the Lord!

Psalms 146:5-10

As for me, I would seek God, and to God I would commit my cause. [God] does great things and unsearchable, marvelous things without number. [God] gives rain on the earth and sends waters on the fields; [God] sets on high those who are lowly, and those who mourn are lifted to safety. [God] frustrates the devices of the crafty, so that their hands achieve no success. [God] takes the wise in their own craftiness; and the schemes of the wily are brought to a quick end. They meet with darkness in the daytime, and grope at noonday as in the night. But [God] saves the needy from the sword of their mouth, from the hand of the mighty. So the poor have hope, and injustice shuts its mouth.

Job 5:8-16

But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and herbs of all kinds, and neglect justice and the love of God; it is these you ought to have practiced, without neglecting the others. Woe to you Pharisees! For you love to have the seat of honor in the synagogues and to be greeted with respect in the market-places.

Luke 11:42-43

SCRIPTURE COMMENTARY

BY REV. JILL EDENS
PASTOR, UNITED CHURCH OF
CHAPEL HILL (UCC)

Frederick Danker observes in his commentary on Luke (Jesus and the New Age, Frederick W. Danker, Fortress Press, 1988), that deities have been viewed as arbiters of justice and deliverers of the oppressed since ancient times. No people were more acquainted with the dynamics of reversal than were the Greeks, who gave the theme its loftiest expression in the Homeric epics and the tragedies of Aischylos and Eurip-

ides. The poet Archilochos expressed a consensus:

The deities are ever just. Full oft they raise
those who lie prostrate on the darkened earth.
Full oft the prosperous are tripped, their bellies
to the sky; and miseries untold attend them.
Mindless in aimless poverty they wander.

When asked what God was doing, Chilon, the Lacedaemonian poet, replied: "humbling the lofty and exalting the humble" (Diogenes Laertius 1.69).

Mary recalls the words of her own ancient faith tradition. Mary's Magnificat is a literary quilt that stitches together various parts of the Hebrew scriptures, first expressing Mary's personal experience in vv. 46-50 and then praising the Savior of Israel in vv. 51-55. She echoes Hannah's words from 1 Sam. 1:11 where God remembers those who have been humiliated (in Hannah's case, by infertility) and she conceived and bore a son. The Magnificat also recalls Deut. 10:17-18 where God's will is executed as justice for the widow and orphan, as love for strangers, and provision of food and clothing for the destitute. God's mighty acts are also expressed in the rescue of the oppressed and the rejection of the wicked in Ps. 146.

PASTORAL REFLECTION

BY REV. JILL EDENS

News of any pregnancy is an unsettling, life-changing event. Hold a newborn, and all of a sudden you experience cars and parking lots differently. As they grow the world seems edged with ledges and corners and sharp objects. In the unfolding of everyday life, we ourselves

know what it means to bear another in our bodies – to be overshadowed by a new life that will not only change our lives but for whom we would be willing to change the world.

To accept the angel's message, Mary had to embrace a deep displacement in life. "How can this be?" she asks. She wants to know whose idea this was and how it would happen. Now that God was ready to surrender to human flesh, would she agree to surrender too, carry God around in her body? What might happen to her? Would she be expelled from her father's house, abandoned by Joseph, become the focus of community derision? Would this mean exile as it had for Hagar and Ishmael? Israel already had a king after all, and we know that Jesus' arrival would later cause Mary and Joseph to flee into exile in the land of Egypt. Yet, with all her questions and giving her assent, Mary travels to share this good news with her cousin, Elizabeth, singing the Magnificat and foretelling a deep displacement in the world where the proud are scattered, the powerful put in their place, the lowly lifted up, the hungry filled with good things, and the rich sent away with nothing.

One can hardly imagine a more intrusive demand from God than the one to which Mary responds, "Here am I, servant of the Lord: let it be with me according to your word." And, she cannot know how much intimacy with God will cost. This gospel confronts us and requires us to get close to a God who calls us to bear him in our bodies and with our lives. Elizabeth O'Connor writes of the risks involved in bearing witness to a world that prefers risk-free conversion. "What are the risks?" She asks:

For me they are all summed up in rejection – that most painful of all experiences. If I follow my path, I have friends who will learn that their hearts are not in communion with mine. We all seek out the company of those who think the way we think, and perceive the world the way we perceive it. It is when we find at-oneness with each other that we feel at home, accepted, companioned. . . I want to be in step with people I care about, to laugh with them, celebrate with them, agree with them. In all the world I want least to be a prophet.

Like the unwed mother, when we invite Christ into our lives, we cannot hide it from the world anymore than his mother could forever camouflage her swelling belly. Christ will reshape us, displacing our old lives for the new creation. O'Connor is right, our friends and loved ones will soon learn that we are not in step with them but are in the business of fomenting a great displacement where the first will be last, and the last will be first.

Luke knew this. Luke preached this sermon to a congregation of converts whom he knew would be isolated by this vision of ministry. And so he tells a story about what will happen when they, like Mary, become Theotokos, God bearers in the world. "See?" He seems to say. This is how it is when Jesus is born in you. Good pastor that he is, Luke worries about his flock. How can he prepare them for what will happen when they let Jesus in? When they join up with those who are smuggling God into the world in their bodies? There will be exile from friends and family who do not share this vision, and there will be rejection just as Elizabeth O'Connor describes it.

If this story is just a nice tale about Mary, then we are the most to be pitied, and the world is without hope because Mary has served her term and has gone on to her reward. But if this story is about you and me and what happens when Jesus starts to grow in us, then we wonder if these bodies are expansive enough to bear such a hope.

Meister Eckhart, a medieval mystic and theologian, wrote, "We are all meant to be [Theotokos], mothers of God. What good is it to me," he said, "if this eternal birth of the divine Son takes place unceasingly, but does not take place within myself? And, what good is it to me if Mary is full of grace and I am not also full of grace? What good is it to me for the Creator to give birth to his son if I do not also give birth to him in my time and my culture? This, then is the fullness of time: when the Son of God is begotten in us." (Meditations with Meister Eckhart, Matthew Fox, Santa Fe, NM: Bear & Company, 1983, pp. 74, 81.)

You now bear the hope of the world in your bodies. You are the ones who will bear him into the future, old and young, fertile and barren. In the unlikeliest of containers God has seeded hope for the lowly, justice for the down-trodden, and new life for the sinner. Why? Because with God, nothing is impossible.

WORSHIP AID – 'GOD HAS LIFTED UP THE LOWLY'

RESPONSIVE READING

For all those who have fallen victim to hatred and inhumanity, for those loved ones who are left behind to mourn, for the souls of those whose hearts are cold,
Lord, hear our prayer.

For the children who are being born into this world of conflict and violence, for women and mothers who suffer needlessly,
Lord, hear our prayer.

For all those who have been forced into unemployment, who long to return to work, for all those who struggle to support their families,
Lord, hear our prayer.

For the policy-makers who are misguided in thinking that bombs and bullets will bring about peace, and for those who feel called to conscientiously object to military orders,
Lord, hear our prayer.

For the children who cry in their beds at night and wonder 'what have I done?', for the mothers and fathers who must try to explain the inexplicable,
Lord, hear our prayer.

For all the children who have died before their time, for the healers who are denied the opportunity to use their gifts,
Lord, hear our prayer.

For the redemption of souls of both victim and perpetrator, for those who commit themselves to the forgiveness of sins,
Lord, hear our prayer.

ALL: O God,
 Open our eyes that we may see the needs of others;
 Open our ears that we may hear their cries;
 Open our hearts that we may feel their anguish and their joy.
 Let us defend the oppressed, the poor, the powerless, without fear of the anger and might of the powerful.
 Show us where love and hope and faith are needed, and use us to bring them to those places. Open our ears
 and eyes, our hearts and lives, that we may in these coming days be able to do the work of justice and peace
 for you.
 Amen.

(adapted from "A Call to Prayer in Two Voices," Sabeel Center, www.sabeel.org/old/conf2001/worship1.htm)

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Hold us before you in judgment as well as grace, O God, until we are willing to serve instead of being served; until we are more concerned for justice than our comfort; until we walk the second mile and turn the other cheek; until we make right our wronged relationships. We confess how we run from the demands of the Gospel while expecting our demands to be met. Forgive, O God, our cowardice in the face of injustice, our posturing on the issues instead of acting in faith, our endorsement of pettiness and false patriotism. Please forgive us for all that is past and renew our discipleship that we may serve you in these dark and perilous days.

(by Rev. Eugene Walker, from the National Council of Churches, www.nccusa.org/iraq/prayersforpeace.html)

SUGGESTED HYMNS

- ✓ We Are Often Tossed & Driven AM 394/UMH 525/NCH 444/CM 325
- ✓ I Will Lift Up My Eyes GA 500
- ✓ What Does the Lord Require MW 695/CH 659/PH 405/TH 605/UMH 441
- ✓ Canto de Esperanza (Song of Hope) PH 432

w Hymnal Legend w
† UMH – United Methodist Hymnal
† PH – Presbyterian Hymnal
† GA—Gather Hymnal (Roman Catholic)
† TH – The Hymnal 1982 (Episcopal)
† MW – Moravian Book of Worship
† AM – African Methodist Episcopal
† CM – Christian Methodist Episcopal
† CH—Chalice Hymnal (Disciples of Christ)
† NCH—New Century Hymnal (UCC)

A New Vision

Grant us, Lord God, a vision of our land as your love would make it;
 - a land where the weak are protected, and none go hungry or poor;
 - a land where the benefits of civilized life are shared, and everyone can enjoy them;
 - a land where different races and cultures live in tolerance and mutual respect;
 - a land where peace is built with justice, and justice is guided by love.
 And give us the inspiration and courage to build it, through Jesus Christ our Lord.
 Amen.

(from the Anglican Church, www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/carey/releases/011002c.htm)

Prayer for Social Justice

Almighty and eternal God, may your grace
 kindle in all persons a love
 of the many unfortunate people
 whom poverty and misery reduce
 to a condition of life unworthy of human beings.

Arouse in the hearts
 of those who call you God
 a hunger and thirst for social justice
 and for fraternal charity in deeds and in truth.
 Grant, O Lord, peace in our days,
 peace to our souls, peace to our community.

Amen.

(Pope Pius XII, from the Center of Concern, www.coc.org/focus/ej/prayers/justice_piusXII.html)

Justice Prayer

O God, we pray for all those in our world who are suffering from injustice: For those who are discriminated against because of their race, color or religion; for those imprisoned for working for the relief of oppression; for those who are hounded for speaking the inconvenient truth; for those tempted to violence as a cry against overwhelming hardship; for those deprived of reasonable health and education; for those suffering from hunger and famine; for those too weak to help themselves and who have no one else to help them; for the unemployed who cry out for work but do not find it. We pray for anyone of our acquaintance who is personally affected by injustice. Forgive us, Lord, if we unwittingly share in the conditions or in a system that perpetuates injustice. Show us how we can serve your children and make your love practical by washing their feet. Amen.

(Mother Teresa, from the Center of Concern, www.coc.org/focus/ej/prayers/justice_motherteresa.html)

ADVENT MATERIALS

ADVENT HYMNS

- ✓ Comfort, Comfort You My People NCH 101/MW 264/CH 122/LW 28/TH 67/
PH 3/GA 326
- ✓ The Clouds of Judgment Gather LW 463

RESPONSIVE READINGS

An Advent Prayer of Confession and Dedication

O God, in the fullness of time you sent your son Jesus in a manner that confounded kings yet moved shepherds and magi. Guide us now as we prepare to celebrate the coming of the Prince of Peace.

As we make our family plans for Advent and Christmas,

We commit to hold central the one whose birth we celebrate.

As we feel the pressure to buy and buy and buy,

We commit to resist our temptations to find you in material things.

As we consider all of the waste generated in our celebrations,

We commit to set limits on what we will consume and throw away.

As our plans do not include those who are hungry, sick, lonely and imprisoned,

We commit to seek you in the spirit of humility.

As we make our Christmas lists for family and friends,

We commit to remember our reason to celebrate.

O God, forgive us when we forget who you are and why you have come. As we prepare for the Prince of Peace to be born in our midst, help us to bring peace to a troubled world and people. As the shepherds and magi looked for you in a stable, let us look for you among those you came to serve. Amen.

(from the "Buy Nothing Christmas Information Kit," www.buynothingchristmas.org/images/resources/pdf/Info_Kit.pdf)

Holy Child of Bethlehem

We pray for all who are homeless.

Holy Child of Bethlehem, born in a stable,

We pray for all who live in poverty.

Holy Child of Bethlehem, rejected stranger,

We pray for all who are lost, alone, all who cry for loved ones.

Holy Child of Bethlehem, whom Herod sought to kill,

We pray for all who live with danger, all who are persecuted.

Holy Child of Bethlehem, a refugee in Egypt,

We pray for all who are far from their homes.

Holy Child of Bethlehem, in you God was pleased to dwell,

Help us, we pray, to see the divine image in people everywhere.

(from the "Buy Nothing Christmas Information Kit," www.buynothingchristmas.org/images/resources/pdf/Info_Kit.pdf)

w Hymnal Legend w

- † LW – Lutheran Worship
- † GA—Gather Hymnal (Roman Catholic)
- † PH – Presbyterian Hymnal
- † TH – The Hymnal 1982 (Episcopal)
- † MW – Moravian Book of Worship
- † CH—Chalice Hymnal (Disciples of Christ)
- † NCH—New Century Hymnal (UCC)

ADDITIONAL HELPS

• QUOTES •

Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Justice cannot be for one side alone, but must be for both. Eleanor Roosevelt

There are two ways to get enough: one is to continue to accumulate more and more. The other is to desire less.
G.K. Chesterton

Christmas is a school for consumerism - in it we learn to equate delight with materialism. We celebrate the birth of One who told us to give everything to the poor by giving each other motorized tie racks.

Bill McKibben

Our Christmas cheer turns sour as mass marketing, frenzied shopping, shortened tempers, burgeoning debt, and an exhausting calendar of activities overwhelm us. Buying fair-trade gifts and celebrating Christmas within the context of the Christian year are two humble practices for disentangling the holy day from consumerism.

F. Matthew Schobert, Jr.

• VIGNETTE •

ALTERNATIVE CHRISTMAS MARKET UNITED CHURCH OF CHAPEL HILL (UCC)

In the early 1980's, several United Church of Chapel Hill members began having conversations about combating the ever-increasing consumerism accompanying each Christmas season. One member in particular, Elizabeth Greenlee, had a vision to create an alternative Advent season, and soon the idea spread rapidly throughout the congregation. Obvious questions began to surface: what would it mean to offer an alternative? What would it look like? As Jill Edens, co-pastor of United Church, puts it, "we were looking for ways for people to avoid the mall altogether" during the Christmas season—a formidable task!

At this same time, United Church began holding classes based on Alternatives for Simple Living's "Whose Birthday Is It, Anyway?" a yearly publication designed to offer ideas and products that can keep Christmas "Christ-centered." Young parents in the church, including the pastors, Rick and Jill Edens, also began having conversations about combating consumerism in their own families. From these classes and conversations, the idea arose to begin a yearly offering (called a "gift of life") to Church World Service during the Advent season.

After several years, these "gift of life" offerings expanded to include donations to Interfaith Council, Habitat for Humanity, and One-World Market, among others. As United Church began to realize how much money was being raised for these missions, they began inviting recipients of their offerings to the church during the Advent season. Tables were set up for these organizations, providing space for them to educate congregants on their mission activities through handouts and videos.

According to Church World Service, United Church's Alternative Christmas Market has grown into one of the largest of its kind in the country. The Market has expanded to include, along with the original "gifts of life" to Church World Service, arts and crafts from around the world; gifts of time and service from church members that are sold or auctioned to benefit the market; and craft and food items made by church groups.

The proceeds of Market are divided between Church World Service and a designated mission outreach program of United Church. Last year, the Market raised over \$30,000, with close to \$20,000 going to Church World Service and \$2,500 going to the North Carolina Council of Churches.

Jill Edens feels that the Alternative Christmas Market is "a creative and fun way to find resources for missions. It is a festive way to give 'gifts that give twice:' once to the recipient, and also to the service project that receives the money. The Market has become an alternative celebration."

For more information, go to www.unitedchurch.org or contact the United Church of Chapel Hill office, 919-942-3540.

• CONTACTS AND OTHER RESOURCES •

- W www.nccouncilofchurches.org/areasofwork/index-areas.html - North Carolina Council of Churches' "Work of the Council Page," which includes links to: criminal justice, economic justice, environmental justice, racial justice, and others.
- W www.ncjustice.org – North Carolina Justice Center, the state's leading private, nonprofit anti-poverty organization. Its mission is to reduce and eliminate poverty in North Carolina by helping to ensure that every North Carolina household gains access to the resources, services, and fair treatment that it needs in order to enjoy economic security.
- W www.common-sense.org – The Common Sense Foundation. Founded in 1994, the Common Sense Foundation is named for the most famous work of Thomas Paine, one of America's earliest progressives. Like Paine, Common Sense is guided by a belief in equality and justice for all people regardless of race, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, or economic status.
- W www.ncpeacejustice.org – North Carolina Peace & Justice Coalition, a coalition of various organizations devoted to fighting injustice.
- W www.legalaidnc.org – Legal Aid of North Carolina, a statewide, nonprofit, 501(c)3 law firm that provides free legal services in civil matters to low-income people in order to ensure equal access to justice and to remove legal barriers to economic opportunity.
- W www.buynothingchristmas.org—Buy Nothing Christmas is an initiative started by Canadian Mennonites who offer a prophetic "no" to the patterns of over-consumption of middle-class North Americans. They invite Christians (and others) all over North America to join a movement to de-commercialize Christmas and re-design a Christian lifestyle that is richer in meaning, smaller in impact upon the earth, and greater in giving to people less-privileged.
- W www.simpleliving.org—Alternatives is a non-profit organization that equips people of faith to challenge consumerism, live justly, and celebrate responsibly. Founded in 1973 as a protest against the commercialization of Christmas, its focus is on encouraging celebrations that reflect conscientious ways of living. Its mission is to challenge the way our consumer society continues to usurp our holy days and to exploit people and the environment.

KEY FACTS

DID YOU KNOW?

- q The income gap between North Carolina's richest and poorest families is widening again, following a brief pause after the last economic boom. The income gap between the state's richest 20 percent of families and the poorest 20 percent of families is now the nation's 10th worst.¹
- q The Institute of Medicine estimates that at least 18,000 Americans—approximately 530 North Carolinians—die prematurely each year simply because they lack health insurance. In addition, being born into a household without health insurance increases the probability of death before the age of one by about 50 percent. At least 1.3 million North Carolinians are currently without health insurance.²
- q Globally, almost half of the world's total population—nearly 3 billion people—live on less than \$2 per day.³
- q According to UNICEF, about 30,000 people die every single day from preventable, poverty-related causes.⁴
- q The GDP (Gross Domestic Product) of the poorest 48 nations (i.e. a quarter of the world's countries) is less than the wealth of the world's three richest people combined.⁵
- q The most industrialized nations in the world contain about twenty percent of the world's population but consume about 85 percent of the world's resources.⁶
- q In 1998, the United Nations Development Programme set out to document the vast inequalities in the spending priorities of industrialized nations. Their findings debunk the myth that there are not resources in the world to provide for the basic needs of people in developing countries, who represent about two thirds of the world's population. To provide a basic education for all people would cost an additional \$6 billion per year; Americans spend \$8 billion on cosmetics per year. To provide clean water and basic sanitation for all people would cost an additional \$9 billion per year; Europeans spend \$11 billion on ice cream per year. To provide basic reproductive healthcare for all women would cost an additional \$12 billion—the same amount that Americans and Europeans spend on perfumes. To provide access to basic healthcare and nutritious food for all people would cost an additional \$13 billion; by contrast, tobacco companies spend \$15.4 billion annually marketing tobacco products in the United States.⁷
- q The amount that rich countries currently spend on HIV/AIDS, a human security threat that claims 3 million lives a year, represents three days' spending on military hardware.⁸
- q Americans spent about \$440 billion for Thanksgiving, Christmas and Hanukah in 2005. This amount is almost \$200 billion more than all charitable giving. Americans surveyed indicated that they planned on average to spend nearly \$1,000 per person for Christmas. In 2001, Americans spent about \$6.4 billion on holiday decorations, lights and trees. By contrast, global spending on HIV/AIDS was only \$6.1 billion in 2004—less than Americans spent on decorations and a mere 1.3 percent of what Americans spent at retail stores in December.⁹

1. North Carolina Justice Center, "The Rich and the Rest: Income Inequality Accelerates in N.C.," www.ncjustice.org/headlines/details.php?id=614.

2. United Nations Development Programme, "Human Development Report 2005," <http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/2005>. See also Center for Disease Control and Prevention, "Health Insurance Coverage: Estimates from the National Health Interview Survey, 2005," www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nhis/earlyrelease/insur200606.pdf.

3. United Nations Development Programme, "Human Development Report, 2005."

4. Global Issues, "Causes of Poverty: Poverty Facts and Stats," <http://www.globalissues.org/TradeRelated/Facts.asp?p=1>.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid. See also Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, "Toll of Tobacco in the United States of America," www.tobaccofreekids.org/research/factsheets/pdf/0072.pdf.

8. United Nations Development Programme, "Human Development Report, 2005."

9. National Retail Federation, "2005 Holiday Survival Kit," www.nrf.com/download/holidaysurvivalkit05.pdf. Giving USA Foundation, "2005 Annual Report Press Release," www.aafrc.org/gusa/GUSA05_Press_Release.pdf. American Research Group, "2005 Christmas Spending Plans Slip Below \$1000," www.americanresearchgroup.com/holiday. "The Christmas Decorating Market," http://retailindustry.about.com/library/bl/03q1/bl_um020303a.htm. See also JournAIDS, "Fact Sheet: HIV/AIDS Funding," www.journ-aids.org/funding.php.

'...EXCEPT THE SYRIAN' EMBRACING THOSE EXCLUDED ON THE BASIS OF SEXUAL ORIENTATION

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY, YEAR C

Lectionary Texts: Jeremiah 1:4-10 Psalm 71:1-6 Luke 4:21-30 I Corinthians 13:1-13

Focus Text: Luke 4:21-30

²¹ Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." ²² All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, "Is not this Joseph's son?" ²³ He said to them, "Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, 'Doctor, cure yourself!' And you will say, 'Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.'" ²⁴ And he said, "Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown. ²⁵ But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; ²⁶ yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. ²⁷ There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian." ²⁸ When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. ²⁹ They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. ³⁰ But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

NRSV

ADDITIONAL TEXTS

But the LORD sits enthroned forever, [the LORD] has established [the LORD's] throne for judgment. [The LORD] judges the world with righteousness; [the LORD] judges the peoples with equity. The LORD is a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. And those who know your name put their trust in you, for you, O LORD, have not forsaken those who seek you.

Psalm 9: 7-10

Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD their God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps faith for ever; who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets the prisoners free; the LORD opens the eyes of the blind. The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down; the LORD loves the righteous. The LORD watches over the strangers; [the LORD] upholds the orphan and the widow, but the way of the wicked [the LORD] brings to ruin.

Psalm 146:5-9

[Jesus] unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Luke 4:17b-19

SCRIPTURE COMMENTARY

BY STAN KIMER, LAY LEADER
ST. JOHN'S METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY
CHURCH, RALEIGH

In Luke 4:21-30, Jesus taught in his hometown, speaking eloquently and with authority. However, the people of Nazareth questioned his calling and credentials since they had seen him growing up as a common boy in a lowly carpenter's home. Most likely they presumed that a teacher with real authority would come to them from a mysterious place far away after many years of formal training at the feet of the best scholars. Perhaps they could not fathom that God would work through Jesus, a common boy who grew up before their eyes in an average family. They had their preconceived notions of how God could work and through whom God would work.

So Jesus addresses this issue head-on with two examples from Hebrew scripture where God worked through, and in, the unconventional and unexpected. He references the widow of Zarephath in Sidon. Elijah was sent to her for sustenance (I Kings 17:1-16). It is interesting that from all the places Elijah's rescue could come, God chose to lead Elijah to an unlikely person and place, a poor person low in society (a widow) in a town which practiced idolatrous religions previously condemned by Elijah. Jesus reminds the hometown crowd that even though there were many lepers in Israel included among the faithful, none were healed except for Naaman the Syrian (II Kings 5:1-15). Naaman was a sworn enemy of Israel, and as an unclean leper he would have been cast out of society. Yet, God's miraculous healing occurred in this excluded man's life. Jesus' fellow townspeople were angered at the audacity of this teaching and drove him away.

Are many people in our churches and denominations today like these people of 2,000 years ago who drove Jesus away? Are there people who think God can only work through a certain type of person, perhaps a person just like them, white, straight, and middle class? Or do they believe God only chooses people with "clean" external lives and the best credentials? We must open our minds to the truth that all of humanity are God's children and that God can, and will, work through anyone and everyone.

The people of Nazareth were very uncomfortable receiving the word of God from a man who grew up in their midst within a humble family. Perhaps we need to be challenged to understand that people in our midst who come from different countries, cultures, races, economic backgrounds, and sexual orientations can equally be called by God into God's house, "a house of prayer for all people" (Isaiah 56:7). Instead of gay and lesbian people being driven from the church, perhaps God intends that they be embraced. Rather than concluding (like the foreigners in Isaiah 56:3) that they are supposed to be separated from God's people (and wither like dry trees), maybe people of faith should welcome their GLBT brothers and sisters and invite them to be nourished and encouraged within the church and to expand themselves within God's ministry.

PASTORAL REFLECTION

BY STAN KIMER

The Rev. Dr. Mona West, a long time pastor and teacher within Metropolitan Community Churches, wrote the following words in a paper called "The Bible and Homosexuality":

Lesbians and gay men face discrimination because of societal attitudes. Unfortunately, these attitudes are often taught by churches, and sadly, the Bible is frequently used as a weapon to "bash" lesbians and gays. It is important to remember that such hurtful things are not a reflection of Christ, or the way God wants the church to be ... Only a small number of passages in the entire Bible reference same-sex sexual activity (only within six books of the Bible.) Obviously this topic is not of great concern to the biblical writers. Yet these verses have been used to justify hatred, condemnation and exclusion of God's lesbian and gay children..

www.mcccchurch.org/Content/NavigationMenu/Resources/SexualitySpirituality/Sexuality_Spirituali.htm

In my own life, in my mid-thirties I started coming to terms with being gay. I experienced a great inner conflict between what was going on inside of me and my adherence to a faith which taught, I thought, that being gay was one of the gravest sins. When I finally "came out" to myself, I stopped going to church altogether, convinced I had completely and irreconcilably fallen away from God. But thankfully, within six months of coming out, a friend invited me to a service at St. John's Metropolitan Community Church. I felt I was home. I realized I could continue to grow as a Christian while also embracing my sexual orientation. In fact, since that time my spiritual life truly has blossomed, and I have experienced God in a way richer than ever before.

The discussion within many of our churches has really intensified in regard to lesbian and gay people, especially as gay people in general and gay religious leaders specifically have become more visible. What are some of the possible responses churches today can make to the issue of homosexuality? Let me mention three common approaches taken by mainstream Christian congregations.

One extreme response taken by some churches and denominations today is that of declaring homosexuality as one of the most heinous of all sins. Homosexuals, in this view, are horrible, immoral people who will certainly destroy the moral fabric of our country and families, and should be condemned and rooted out at all costs.

A more moderate position teaches that homosexuality is a sin like any other sin, and so the church should welcome these sinners with open arms but work with them so that they will turn away from their "sinful lifestyle". This alternative is not acceptable to the vast majority of gay people who believe that sexual orientation is not a sin, nor simply the "choosing of a lifestyle," but instead is an innate human characteristic, like gender and race. For gay people to be active in a church while hiding their relationships and their connections to the gay community is in some ways parallel to an upper middle class white church welcoming in black members with the caveat that they will be accepted as long as they act and worship like upper middle class white folks, or welcoming in Hispanic members only if they can first speak perfect English.

The third approach, and the one I would encourage, is adopted by churches wishing to take a fresh and honest look at the issue of sexual orientation. These congregations study the topic with an open mind, earnestly seeking God's wisdom and guidance. They believe that the church's role should not be to follow society's lead in condemning a subset of human population but instead should be to challenge the systems and structures which discriminate or oppress others on the basis of sexual orientation. Here are some practical ways in which churches can act on this belief.

First, churches can earnestly and openly study the scripture and ask the Holy Spirit to provide guidance in interpretation of those passages which are often used to condemn homosexuals (Leviticus 18:22, 20:13; Genesis 19; I Corinthians 6:9-10; I Timothy 1:9-11; Romans 1:24-27). What words are used in the original text and how should they be translated, and what did they mean at that time? In what context were these verses written, and what is the meaning and intent of the larger passage? What is the historical and cultural backdrop of the passages that can provide insight into their true meaning? Are these passages speaking to nurturing, committed same-sex relationships?

Second, straight members of churches wanting to take an honest look at the issue of sexual orientation can seek dialogue with gay people in order to get to know them. They might invite a gay couple for dinner and interact with them, seeking to learn about each other. What are their passions and dreams? What gets them excited about life? What are their struggles and hardships? It is far better to develop a belief system about a group of people after you have gotten to know them personally. Instead of viewing gay people as some mysterious, unknown, impersonal group "out there" somewhere, consider gay people as your neighbors, your co-workers, and even your parishioners. That is what Jesus did. While the religious leaders of his time were looking down their noses and condemning tax collectors, prostitutes, people with disabilities, lepers, and Gentiles, Jesus ate with them and ministered to them in a loving, non-judgmental way.

Third, a church can evaluate the place gay and lesbian people hold in that congregation. Are there gay men and lesbians within your church today? Is your church in a neighborhood which has a high concentration of gay and lesbian people? Ask how you might minister to the GLBT persons in your church. Would you feel comfortable inviting a gay couple to attend a couples Bible study group or retreat? Many gay couples have children and are looking for churches with strong children's ministries. Would your children's ministry be a welcoming and affirming environment to a child who had two mommies or two daddies? What are ministries in your church where gay people would be welcome to serve?

Finally, your church can speak out on social justice issues relating to gay and lesbian people. Hate language and physical abuse of gay people, or any person for that matter, is not defensible. Consider whether all people, regardless of sexual orientation, should have equal and fair access to health benefits, housing and employment. Should gay teenagers have equal access to education and be protected from bullying and harassment so they can develop into productive members of society? And should the church be honoring healthy and loving, committed same-sex relationships?

This topic is not easy. It is difficult and often emotional. But following Christ often is not easy. We are taught to work out our salvation with trembling and fear and that the path of discipleship often goes counter to the ways of popular society.

WORSHIP AID – 'NONE WERE CLEANSED EXCEPT THE SYRIAN'

RESPONSIVE READING

Lord of all creation, we worship you this day with great adoration,
As a people chosen by you to bear witness to your Kingdom.

Enlightened by the Spirit, we acknowledge that all are invited to participate in this Kingdom,
"For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call on you."
(Psalm 86:5)

We see throughout the Bible you often champion those who reside at the fringes of society,
Just as you called Israel out of slavery in Egypt; just as Jesus dined with the outcast.

Open our haughty hearts that we may see the plight of those considered "worthless;"
Remind us that you see us all as your children; no one is beyond the reach of your redeeming love.

Inspire us to seek justice for excluded peoples, whether that includes us or our neighbors;
Show us how to extend your compassion to all who call upon your name.

We seek your guidance in gathering those excluded, those whom the world labels "others;"
We listen when you say, "If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you."
(John 15:18)

Preserve us from passing judgment upon others on the basis of color, sexual orientation, or class;
And grant that we may keep your Church open to all who seek your Name.

Amen.

(by Jason R. Jenkins)

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Wise and wonderful Creator of infinite variety,
Forgive our petty striving to squeeze You and Your creation into our conventions.
God of mercy and compassion for the oppressed, the excluded, the ignored,
Forgive the many ways we pass judgment on others different from ourselves.
Though You created us with wondrous diversity,
We have tried to restrict one another into limited ways of being and doing, and we are all the losers.
Forgive us and heal us of our racism, heterosexism, classism, sexism and all other evils that keep us
From appreciating Your abundant, manifold creation.

Amen.

(Adapted from Jann Aldredge-Clanton's prayer, "Wise and Wonderful Creator of Infinite Variety," in *Courage to Love: An Anthology of Inclusive Worship Material*, compiled by Geoffrey Duncan, 2002.)

SUGGESTED HYMNS

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| ✓ Community of Christ | CH 655/NCH 314 |
| ✓ You Are Salt of the Earth | NCH 181 |
| ✓ All Creatures of Our God and King | TH 400/UMH 62/ CM 5/AM 50
BH 27/PH 455/CH 22/GA 533 |
| ✓ Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross | CM 94/UMH 301/NCH 197
BH 280/ CH 587 |

w Hymnal Legend w

- † UMH – United Methodist Hymnal
- † BH – Baptist Hymnal
- † PH – Presbyterian Hymnal
- † TH – The Hymnal 1982 (Episcopal)
- † AM – African Methodist Episcopal
- † CM – Christian Methodist Episcopal
- † CH—Chalice Hymnal (Disciples of Christ)
- † NCH—New Century Hymnal (UCC)
- † GA—Gather Hymnal (Roman Catholic)

ADDITIONAL PRAYERS

Sexual Justice

Sexuality is God's gift and our responsibility.

We celebrate our sexuality as central to our humanity and as integral to our spirituality.

We suffer because of the pain, brokenness, oppression, and loss of meaning that too many experience about their sexuality.

We celebrate the goodness of creation, our bodies, and our sexuality.

We suffer when this sacred gift is abused or exploited.

We celebrate sexuality which expresses love, justice, mutuality, commitment, consent, and pleasure.

We suffer because of discrimination against people because of sex, gender, color, age, bodily condition, marital status, or sexual orientation.

We celebrate when we are truth seeking, courageous, and just.

We suffer because of violence against women and sexual minorities, and the HIV pandemic.
We celebrate the full inclusion of women and sexual minorities in our congregational life.

We suffer because of unsustainable population growth and over-consumption, and the commercial exploitation of sexuality.
We celebrate those who challenge sexual oppression and who work for sexual justice.

All: God rejoices when we celebrate our sexuality with holiness and integrity.

(adapted from Religious Institute on Sexual Morality, Justice and Healing, "Religious Declaration," www.religioustheology.org/declaration.html)

Prayer for the Spirit

God, source of all life, we pray:

Fulfill your promise and bless us with your presence.
Without you we cannot live as a new creation.
Only you lead us into the truth.
Only you broaden our horizon and our heart
So that we can accept each other
With empathy and without prejudice—
Whatever our culture and tradition,
Our gender, our sexual orientation,
Or our age and education may be.

Each day transform us so that we may become more human,
More friendly towards our neighbor
And all your creation.

Make us co-workers and partners

In your work of love and liberation.

May evil be overcome with good in us and around us.

May your will prevail.

For your endless mercy hear our prayers

And accept the grateful praise of your name.

Amen.

(by Jana Opocenska, "Prayer for the Spirit," in *Courage to Love: An Anthology of Inclusive Worship Material*, compiled by Geoffrey Duncan, 2002.)

ADDITIONAL HELPS

EPIPHANY MATERIALS

RESPONSIVE READING

An Epiphany Prayer

Eternal God, we remember that in the story of the wise men Jesus is acknowledged by people who knew nothing of him beyond what the silent stars told.

Lord, help us to move beyond the narrow faith that wants to confine Jesus to the church and fails to see you as Lord of the universe.

Give us humility and strength, that we may trust you even when we do not understand.

And as we, like the wise men, take again the road that always goes on, help us to see beyond the perils of the way to the horizons of your love, and to the goal to which you call us.

(adapted from Terry Falla and Eduard Schweizer, www.stephens.org.nz/bulletins_2004/bulletin_11Jan2004.PDF.)

• QUOTES •

No [person] is excluded from calling upon God, the gate of salvation is set open unto all [persons]: neither is there any other thing which keeps us back from entering in, save only our unbelief.

John Calvin

I believe all Americans who believe in freedom, tolerance and human rights have a responsibility to oppose bigotry and prejudice based on sexual orientation.

Coretta Scott King

'Gay panic' is insidious. It is corrupt because it appeals to a public that is used to discarding and disregarding gay lives.

Jeffrey Montgomery

Disapproval of homosexuality cannot justify invading the houses, hearts and minds of citizens who choose to live their lives differently.

Harry A. Blackmun

• PERSONAL VIGNETTE •

AN ORDAINING MOMENT

BY REV. MAHAN SILER, FORMER PASTOR, PULLEN MEMORIAL BAPTIST CHURCH, RALEIGH

Persons of same-sex orientation face an excruciating question: will I or will I not "come out of the closet"? If "yes," then --- when, with whom and how?

As a pastor in Raleigh, I was faced with a similar dilemma: will I "come out of the closet," declaring openly a welcome to GLBT persons who have felt unwelcome, if not condemned, by the church? My decision crystallized on August 12, 1987 at a public hearing on violence against lesbians and gay men. The Human Relations Council of Raleigh wanted to recommend that "sexual orientation" be added to the city's non-discrimination ordinance. I was unprepared for the impact of this hearing upon my ministry. I tell the story in my book, *Exile or Embrace? Congregations Discerning Their Response to Gay and Lesbian Christians*, pg. 23:

What a night!

At the public hearing tonight my name is placed at the end of the docket, requiring me to sit through over two hours of testimony. Most of the witnesses are lesbians and gay men who, at considerable risk, report specific acts of violence and discrimination against them. Typical are stories of police abuse, loss of children, unfair job evaluations, lack of employment opportunities, and dismissals for trumped up reasons. Two or three of these stories I could have managed. However, being one of the last ones to speak, I had to sit through story after story after story. The crescendo effect from back-to-back testimonies eventually broke through my well-honed defenses.

Most disturbing are their experiences with the church, especially from preachers. Witnesses speak of pulpit messages that declare homosexuality as sin, an "abomination" before God, worthy of punishment. Even the feelings of homosexual attraction could warrant the wrath of God.

Tonight there was no wiggle room left for sidestepping a conviction that's been forming within me. An alternative message from the church, especially from preachers, must be voiced publicly, and this voice must be as compelling as the messages these witnesses have internalized.

It was an ordaining moment.

The process of "coming out" continued. I wrote an editorial for the local newspaper about the council hearing and made other public stands for explicit gay inclusion in the church. Increasingly, the Pullen Memorial congregation became a safe, welcoming place for GLBT persons and their families, fostering friendships across sexual orientation lines. Then, in the fall of 1991, two gay men came to me requesting a service of blessing upon their commitment to each other. I presented their request and the possibility of this additional ritual to the lay leadership of the church and gave it my support. After weeks of intense soul searching, they in turn went to the congregation with a recommendation that such a ritual of blessing be part of our liturgical life.

The congregation, in the midst of public controversy, entered into a two-month process of discernment that issued into a near unanimous welcome of gay Christians into full membership, as well as a two-thirds majority of members affirming the covenant ceremony between couples of the same gender orientation. To our surprise, this "coming out" of our congregation became a "light set on a lamp stand," giving light throughout the larger church and nation ---a light that was a disturbing glare to some, while a warm, revealing witness to others.

The ordaining moment in 1987 opened a door, and led me, and eventually our congregation, down a path toward joys beyond our imagining.

• CONTACTS AND OTHER RESOURCES •

- W www.nccouncilofchurches.org/areasofwork/issues/sexual_orientation/sexual_orientation_issue.html - North Carolina Council of Churches' "Sexual Orientation" page, which gives the Council's focus statement on the issue. Also included are links to resources of various denominations for facilitating discussion on homosexuality in the church, as well as links to relevant Council policy statements.
- W www.equalitync.org – Equality NC, a statewide organization dedicated to securing equality and justice for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people. Equality NC works toward that goal by effectively lobbying the North Carolina General Assembly, executive branch, and local governments on issues like employment discrimination, hate violence, privacy rights, sexuality education, adoption, domestic partnership, HIV/AIDS, and more.
- W www.whosoever.org – Whosoever Magazine, an online magazine intended for the spiritual growth of anyone who believes in God, with a special focus on gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender Christians.
- W www.religiousinstitute.org – Religious Institute on Sexual Morality, Justice, and Healing, an organization founded in 2001, it is an ecumenical, interfaith organization dedicated to advocating for sexual health, education, and justice in faith communities and society.
- W www.welcomingresources.org—Institute for Welcoming Resources, a national ecumenical organization under the auspices of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, seeks to provide the resources to facilitate a paradigm shift in multiple denominations whereby churches become welcoming and affirming of all congregants regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity.
- W www.hrc.org—Human Rights Campaign is the nation's largest civil rights organization working to achieve full equality for GLBT persons. HRC strives to end discrimination against GLBT citizens and to realize a nation that achieves fundamental fairness and equality for all. HRC was founded in 1980 and currently has a membership of almost 600,000.

North Carolina Council of Churches Official Statements¹

In 1992, the North Carolina Council of Churches' House of Delegates adopted the following statements concerning violence, harassment and discrimination against the GLBT community:

- Intolerance cannot be tolerated. Silence and passivity by the churches allow hostility, and are unfaithful responses to the Christian gospel. Justice, respect, and freedom must be claimed and pursued for all persons in the service of the justice and peace of God's sovereignty in history.
- The North Carolina Council of Churches rejects the fear, prejudice, and hatred that foster societal and religious attitudes which either encourage, condone or ignore violence and discrimination against gay men and lesbians.
- The Council stands with gay men and lesbians in their struggle to achieve equal human and civil rights under the laws of North Carolina and of the United States.
- We unite in affirming that no person or class of persons should be subjected to violence, harassment, and discrimination because of sexual orientation. The church's firm support of civil rights for gay persons ought not depend upon agreement concerning the theological and ethical appropriateness of the homosexual orientation or of specific same-sex acts. Civil rights support ought to be considered an expression of Christian concern for basic social justice.

In 2004, the Council's Executive Board adopted a policy statement on a constitutional amendment regarding marriage. In it, the Council emphatically stated:

- The North Carolina Council of Churches opposes a marriage amendment to the federal or state constitution because it would enshrine at the constitutional level discrimination based on sexual orientation.

DID YOU KNOW?

- q A statewide poll in 2005 of 25,000 North Carolinians, conducted by the Common Sense Foundation, found that:
 - 73 percent of respondents agreed that all North Carolinians should have equal rights under the law regardless of sexual orientation.
 - 51 percent said that it is not fair to define marriage in such a way that it excludes same-sex couples.
 - 57 percent stated that it is not fair for an employer to discriminate against an employee based solely on his or her sexual orientation.
 - 69 percent agreed that it is unfair for a landlord to deny housing to a tenant based solely on sexual orientation.²
- q At the federal level, the U.S. General Accounting Office has recently identified 1,138 federal statutory provisions in the U.S. Code in which marital status is a factor in determining or receiving benefits, rights and privileges. These benefits, rights and privileges are currently denied to same-sex couples.³
- q In 2001, the Human Rights Campaign estimated that the gay and lesbian population of North Carolina was over 16,000 persons. The Triangle and Triad areas have the highest concentrations of gay and lesbian persons.⁴
- q From 2001-2004, there were 37 recorded hate crimes in North Carolina based on sexual orientation. Current North Carolina law makes no provision to prosecute hate crimes motivated by biases against the victim's gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability status or age.⁵

1. See www.nccouncilofchurches.org/areasofwork/issues/sexual_orientation/sexual_orientation_issue.html.

2. The Common Sense Foundation, "Liberty and Justice for All: A Study of Issues Affecting the LGBT Community in North Carolina," http://common-sense.org/pdfs/LGBT_report_2005.pdf.

3. United States General Accounting Office, letter to Senator Bill Frist, www.gao.gov/new.items/d04353r.pdf.

4. Research Briefs, "Gay and Lesbian Families," http://sww.unc.edu/jif/famtrend/briefs_gayles_main.htm.

5. FBI Hate Crimes Data, www.fbi.gov/ucr/hc2004/openpage.htm. Equality NC, "House Bill 1322: Safer Communities Act," www.equalitync.org/leg/05/2005h1322.

'FOR YOURS IS THE KINGDOM OF GOD' THE POOR IN OUR MIDST

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY, YEAR C

Lectionary Texts: Jeremiah 17:5-10 Psalm 1 I Corinthians 15:12-20 Luke 6:17-26

Focus Text: Luke 6:17-26

¹⁷He came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon. ¹⁸They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. ¹⁹And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them.

²⁰Then he looked up at his disciples and said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. ²¹Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. ²²Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. ²³Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets. ²⁴But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. ²⁵Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry. Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep. ²⁶Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets."

NRSV

ADDITIONAL TEXTS

If there is among you anyone in need, a member of your community in any of your towns within the land that the LORD your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward your needy neighbor. You should rather open your hand, willingly lending enough to meet the need, whatever it may be.

Deuteronomy 15:7-8

The bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble gird on strength. Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, but those who were hungry are fat with spoil. The barren has borne seven, but she who has many children is forlorn... [The LORD] raises up the poor from the dust; [the LORD] lifts the needy from the ash heap, to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor. For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and on them [the LORD] has set the world.

I Samuel 2:4-8

Ah, you who make iniquitous decrees, who write oppressive statutes, to turn aside the needy from justice and to rob the poor of my people of their right, that widows may be your spoil, and that you may make the orphans your prey! What will you do on the day of punishment, in the calamity that will come from far away? To whom will you flee for help, and where will you leave your wealth?

Isaiah 10:1-3

My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ? For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, "Have a seat here, please," while to the one who is poor you say, "Stand there," or, "Sit at my feet," have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that [God] has promised to those who love [God]? But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who oppress you? Is it not they who drag you into court? Is it not they who blaspheme the excellent name that was invoked over you?

James 2:1-7

SCRIPTURE COMMENTARY

BY JOCLEEN MCCALL, ASSIST. PASTOR FOR
CHRISTIAN EDUCATION AND TRAINING,
FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, FAYETTEVILLE

Jesus Christ. However, on this 6th Sunday in Epiphany, we are focusing on the poor in our midst.

The temptation is to focus on the poor in the world. It is very easy to focus on the starving children around the world and forget about those around the corner. It is very easy to focus on the effects of poverty that we see halfway around the world and ignore those effects that are halfway across town. Sometimes a harsh, straightforward sermon is what is needed to shake us out of our revelry. This is what Luke provides. In what has come to be called the Sermon on the Plain, Luke does not add the spiritual elements that are found in Matthew's Sermon on the Mount. Luke is clear that the poor are the blessed group and the rich had better wake up and smell the coffee! The riches that bring you comfort now will not comfort you for long. The satisfaction you now have with life in general will change when we enter into the Kingdom of God.

From the very beginning Luke removes any notion of status. Christ comes down from the mountain to a level place, to a place where all can reach him and all can be healed. He is talking to a mixed crowd, Jew and Gentile, rich and poor, allowing this text to be seen as an admonition to the local community as well as a more global community. Once the healings are complete, Jesus settles down to teaching what it truly means to be a disciple of Christ in a world that has very different values. For Luke, being a disciple means dealing with real socio-economic issues, those issues that cause poverty, hunger, weeping and hatred. Being a rich disciple means a drastic change in the status quo and a shift of thinking to stand with God and the poor. In the spirit of removing the log from our own eye before removing it from another's, I submit that this text is encouraging us to pay more attention to those in our midst while we are helping those around the world. Many of us will never have the opportunity to travel around the world to experience the life changing moments that come when you are genuinely engaged in the work of God with the poor. We must keep in mind that many of us do not need to travel around the world to work hand in hand with the poor: the poor are right here with us.

PASTORAL REFLECTION

BY JOCLEEN MCCALL

Preferences...we all have preferences. Some of us prefer hot over cold, the mountains over the beach, long over short or comedy over mystery. Our preference is our first choice...it is what we like the best, the thing that makes us feel comfortable, content, happy. That is probably why most of us prefer Matthew's words in his version of this text over Luke's. Matthew says "blessed are the poor in spirit," "blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness," "blessed are those who mourn" and "blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness." These are beautiful words that welcome all of us. Sometime or another all of us have felt "poor in spirit" or have found ourselves "hungering and thirsting for righteousness." Many of us have "mourned" and been "persecuted" because of our righteousness. We can see ourselves in these blessings and we feel comforted, welcomed and reassured.

Luke, however, presents us with a problem. "Blessed are you who are poor." "Blessed are you who hunger now." "Blessed are you who weep now." "Blessed are you when men hate you." Not a whole lot of comfort in these words for contemporary American Christians, nor is there a large measure of welcome or reassurance. Ninety-nine percent of us are knocked out of the "blessed" group before the first sentence is complete. Regardless of what you think of your financial situation, you are not poor. You may be hungry now, but that is because you chose to skip breakfast. If you walked out of here this minute, you could go home and fix something to eat or stop and pick something up along the way. Many of us miss out on the "weeping" versus "mourning" also. We may be sad about something in particular. However, we could hardly say that we are actively and consistently weeping, actions that Luke associates with the status of being poor. And that last blessing..."when men hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you and defame you on account of the Son of Man." Perhaps I am a bit cynical, but I don't see many of us fighting to get in that line, either. We want to be liked, perhaps by not everyone, but by most people. Some of us are huge name droppers...it is not enough that we know who we know; we need to make sure that you know who we know and what groups we are affiliated with, all so that perhaps you will like us more, respect us more and want to spend time with us. We pride ourselves on our reputations. If we are honest and view ourselves through Luke's lens, we are probably not getting the blessing.

Not only are we probably not in line for the blessing, we are in line for the "woes." We know there is trouble coming because the first word in the NRSV is "but," a sure sign that we are about to look at the other side of the coin—especially when it follows a verse that begins with "rejoice." We have not seen ourselves in the "blessings;" we really don't want to know if the next part applies to us. Unfortunately, it does. "Woe to you who are rich"...yep, there we are. America is the richest country in the world. Honestly, I have always had a problem with that kind of terminology. What does "the richest country in the world" mean in real terms? Glad you asked! According to the World Bank, in 1998 America was ranked number one with \$40,100 per capita (per unit of population...per person). At the bottom of the barrel is Rwanda at \$5,000 per capita. \$40.1 vs. \$5. As ambassadors for Christ throughout this world, can anyone honestly tell me that we are not rich? Unfortunately for us, we "have received [our] consolation." "Woe to [us] who are full now, for [we] will be hungry." "Woe to [us] who are laughing now, for [we] will mourn and weep." "Woe to [us] when all speak well of [us], for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets." What does this all mean? What are you trying to say? I am saying that we...the rich, the full, the laughing, the well spoken of...could be in for some real trouble unless we learn to love as God loves.

You see, for Luke, this is what it means to be a disciple. This is the teaching directly from Jesus to the 12 disciples, “a great crowd of disciples” and “a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon” that came to hear and be healed. This is the teaching... blessings for the poor and woes to the rich. It appears that Jesus is addressing a mixed crowd. They are Jew and Gentile, rich and poor. The one thing they all have in common is their desire to hear the Great Teacher. They have waited until Jesus and the 12 descend from the mountain; the evil spirits have been expelled and all who came have been healed. Now they are settling down for this lesson in discipleship. Imagine their surprise when they heard these words. Imagine the joy that must have embraced the poor and the fear that must have overshadowed the rich. The poor have received two blessings, but the rich, who certainly thought they had it made now that there were healed, get a rude awakening! Thank God, for the rich—regardless of the period in time—there is an injunction for those who will listen...love.

We are given numerous examples of loving behavior that all culminate in “Do to others as you would have them do to you.” “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again.” Sounds ridiculous to our contemporary ears, doesn't it? It probably sounded equally ridiculous to the people who were hearing it for the first time. Why would I want to love someone who hates me? Why in the world would I let someone hit me once, let alone twice? If someone steals from me, I am not to seek restitution? Ridiculous! Why are we encouraged to “love” in this manner? Because it is the way of God. God loves regardless...regardless of how you look, smell, speak, act or react. God loves you regardless of where you come from, where you were born, what you have done to yourself or to others. God loves and blesses regardless. As children of God, we are obligated to demonstrate this same love. Love that is demonstrated regardless of the circumstances or the situation is the way of God. Love that is demonstrated regardless of person or stature is the way of God. Love that is demonstrated without expectation is the way of God. Love that is demonstrated by the rich on behalf of the poor, expecting nothing in return, expressed sacrificially and solely because it is the Christian thing to do is the way of God.

That kind of love is radical! That is what gets lost in the contemporary spreading of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the radical nature of what he taught. Jesus Christ was hanging out with the outcasts, conversing with women he was forbidden to speak to, eating with known sinners, touching people who were considered dirty. Jesus Christ proclaimed a radical shift in the status quo. If we are to call ourselves disciples and desire to live up to the standard that Jesus set, we are obligated to proclaim that same radical shift.

Admittedly, in our current society, we must work very hard to arrive at this radical shift in our thinking. Do not misunderstand me; there is no crime in being rich. There are rich people throughout the Bible, and nowhere does it say that being rich is bad. The problem occurs when those who are rich think they are set in this life and the next because of their riches. The problem with being rich is thinking that what you have belongs to you and is for your use only. The shift we must make is from “I have made it and now I can keep my immediate family safe” to “I have made it and now I can keep my universal family safe.” If your brother/sister worked at a meat processing plant where he/she were confronted with unsafe working conditions, sexual harassment, intimidation and injury everyday would you sit idly by? If your brother/sister was working two or three jobs trying to keep a roof over their children's heads, clothes on their backs and food in their stomachs yet could not afford their medication, would you stand idly by? No, you would not. You would do something. Some of you would help them find another job. Some of you would pressure the company owners to improve conditions. Some of you would pay for the medication. Some of you would push legislators to provide better medical coverage. Some of you would move to a better neighborhood with better schools. Yes, all of us would do something. But how many of us would choose the way of God that loves and blesses the poor? Getting another job, paying for the medication, moving...those are the easy ways out. These options leave the focus on the rich, favoring our ability to change our circumstances and giving no regard to others who are less fortunate. Those of us who choose the easy way out need a radical shift. We need the mind of God so that we can follow the way of God. Showing God's love means that we fight for better working conditions for everyone because we are rich; we would not work under those conditions, why should our brothers/sisters? Showing God's love means that we fight for better medical coverage for everyone because we are rich and the nature of our wealth gives us the ability to fight against systems that are unfair and unGodly. Showing God's love means that we fight for better educational systems for everyone because we are rich and we know that this generation of students and the next are doomed unless we demand some change. God loves regardless. God loves rich and poor and God will judge rich and poor. The poor will have their standard of measure but, I am afraid, the rich will be judged by what we did with the wealth God gave us as it relates to the poor. Unfortunately, some of us will be greatly disappointed when we realize that the measure we gave will be the measure we will get back.

It is by the grace of God that we are rich and it is by the grace of God that we are rich. I say it twice because the focus changes with each statement. The first speaks to the personal; it is by the grace of God that we were born in this country, to people who were able to provide for us and give us opportunities to succeed. It is the grace of God that has allowed us to progress to this point and that will carry us on until we meet him face to face. The second speaks to the universal; it is by the grace of God that we, in our richness, are able to stand up against those forces of evil that make the rich richer and the poor poorer. It is by the grace of God that we, in our richness, are able to fight for a world where no one goes hungry. It is by the grace of God that we, in our richness, are able to not only wipe away the tears of those who weep, but to eradicate the reasons for weeping. It is by the grace of God that we, in our richness, are able to stand before those who hate us, those who want to exclude us, those who revile us and those who defame us without fear of reprisal because we stand, with God, on the side of the poor. It is by the grace of God that we, with God and in the richness that God has provided, are able to live lives that say “blessed are you who are poor.”

WORSHIP AID – ‘FOR YOURS IS THE KINGDOM OF GOD’

RESPONSIVE READING

In a world where we are not always good stewards in caring for God's creation,
Lord, open our hearts and help us to be a blessing to your world.

In a world where a few are living off of the abundance of the land, while the many struggle to make ends meet,
Lord, open our hearts and help us to be a blessing to your children in need.

As globalization makes some wealthier while others join the ranks of the poor,
Lord, open our hearts and help us to be a blessing to your children who are facing poverty.

While some have more homes than they need and others are condemned to homelessness,
Lord, open our hearts and help us to be a blessing to your children who have nowhere to lay their head.

While statistics show that people in poverty are more likely to end up in prison than in college,
Lord, open our hearts and help us to be a blessing to your children who need guidance.

As news reports tell us of people who are eating themselves to death and we turn the page to read of those who are starving to death,
Lord, open our hearts and help us to be a blessing to your children who come to you in need.

While many of us have taken for granted and squandered the blessings, gifts, and talents you have given to us,
Lord, open our hearts and help us to be a blessing to your children who do not realize how blessed we truly are.

In a world filled with so many people who have lost their way,
Lord, open our hearts and help us to be your light that guides them back to you.
Amen.

(from the Reformed Church in America, Peace with Justice Sunday, www.rca.org/worship/material/peacejustice/index.html)

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

God of Moses and the prophets, God of Jesus and the Church, as we pause to account for who we are and how we live, we find that we are lacking. We confess that we have resisted your demand for justice and domesticated your call to discipleship. We have ignored your persistent cry in the voices of our neighbors. We have refused the mantle of prophecy vaguely hoping that someone else would dare proclaim your shalom. Time and again we've helped to build structures that contain and constrain your transforming power and so trivialize the church's witness in a broken world. Forgive us God. We want to change, God; to start fresh; to be transformed. Grant us vision and voice when we stand stupefied in the face of injustice. Let us taste the vigor and resilience of your Spirit when our spirits are exhausted and cynical. And nourish in us a trust in you that perseveres, until your realm becomes a reality in our midst. We pray trusting in the name of Jesus Christ,
Amen.

(by Noelle Damico, from the University of the Poor School of Theology, www.universityofthepoor.org/schools/theology/prayers/booklet_prayers.htm)

SUGGESTED HYMNS

- | | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|---|
| ✓ | The Church of Christ in Every Age | PH 421/MW 694/NCH 306/CH 475/
BH 402/UMH 589 |
| ✓ | Blest Are They | GA 284 |
| ✓ | The Servant Song | BH 613/CH 490/GA 285 |
| ✓ | Stir Your Church, O God, Our Father | BH 392 |
| ✓ | Does Jesus Care? | AM 442/CM 237 |

w Hymnal Legend w
† UMH – United Methodist
† BH – Baptist Hymnal
† LW – Lutheran Worship
† PH – Presbyterian Hymnal
† TH – The Hymnal 1982 (Episcopal)
† MW – Moravian Book of Worship
† AM – African Methodist Episcopal
† CM – Christian Methodist Episcopal
† CH—Chalice Hymnal (Disciples of Christ)
† NCH—New Century Hymnal (UCC)
† GA—Gather Hymnal (Roman Catholic)

ADDITIONAL PRAYERS

In the Day of Our Trouble

In the day of our trouble we will call to you, for you will answer us.

When we have done what is wrong and displeasing in your sight,

O Lord, extend your love to correct us.

When we ignore those in need and pretend that all is right with the world,

O Lord, help us to face the truth.

When we turn a blind eye to those who have been stricken with poverty and face the injustices that come along with it,

O Lord, teach us your way.

Enable us to extend your love; and give us an undivided heart, that we may fear your name.

We will praise you, O Lord our God, with all our heart;

and we will glorify your name forever.

Amen.

(edited, adapted from Psalm 86, Reformed Church in America, Peace with Justice Sunday, www.rca.org/worship/material/peacejustice/index.html)

I Dare to Pray

I dare to pray: Lord, let the world be changed,

for I long to see the end of poverty;

I dare to pray: Lord, let the rules be changed,

for I long to see trade bring justice to the poor;

I dare to pray: Lord, let my life be changed,

for I long to bring hope where good news is needed.

In the strength of your Spirit

and inspired by Your compassion,

I make this promise to work for change,

and wait confidently for the day

when You make all things new.

Amen.

(by Peter Graystone, Christian Aid, accessed at the Church of England's Diocese of Portsmouth's website, www.portsmouth.anglican.org)

Help Us to Be Agents of Hope

Our loving God, we admit that we have neglected to remember the poor. Forgive us, we pray. Help us, as followers of Jesus, to work together to pursue justice, be passionate about kindness and walk humbly with you, our God. May our world be transformed in every area by your love. We admit that we have been arrogant as a nation. Forgive us, Lord, we pray. Help us to be agents of hope for and with the poor and to work with others to hold our leaders accountable in securing a more just and merciful world.

Amen.

(adapted from World Vision Australia, Anti-Poverty Sunday, www.worldvision.com.au/resources/files/Micah_Challenge_prayers.pdf)

Deliver Us from a Comfortable Conscience

O Lord Christ, who became poor that we might be rich,

deliver us from a comfortable conscience if we believe or intend

that others should be poor that we might be rich;

for in God's economy, no one is expendable.

Grant us instead the riches of love.

Amen.

(by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, accessed at the Church of England's Diocese of Portsmouth's website, www.portsmouth.anglican.org)

ADDITIONAL HELPS

• QUOTES •

It is not from your own possessions that you are bestowing alms on the poor; you are but restoring to them what is theirs by right. For what was given to everyone for the use of all, you have taken for your exclusive use. The earth belongs not to the rich, but to everyone. Thus, far from giving lavishly, you are but paying part of your debt.

St. Ambrose

Poverty is the worst form of violence.

Mahatma Gandhi

It is a poverty to decide that a child must die so that you may live as you wish.

Mother Teresa

Wealth and poverty: the one is the parent of luxury and indolence, and the other of meanness and viciousness, and both of discontent.

Plato

Poverty is the open-mouthed relentless hell which yawns beneath civilized society. And it is hell enough.

Henry George

• PERSONAL VIGNETTE •

TOUGH TIMES AFTER JOB LOSS

BY DORIS LONG, EFLAND, NORTH CAROLINA

December 14, 2001 was my last day of work at Nortel Network in RTP after 18 years of employment as a Quality Inspector. My salary had been sufficient to have the things I needed and to pay the bills. I had health insurance and other company benefits. But all of a sudden, all of that changed. I grew up accustomed to hard work. I was raised on a farm in Cedar Grove, the youngest in a family of 10 children. My family raised tobacco. We had chicken, pigs, and vegetable gardens, Although my family was poor, our farm helped us provide a lot of food, and we were able to pay the bills. We were blessed to be raised on a farm. My family never did go without food. We didn't owe anything on the house that we lived in.

After I was laid off from Nortel in 2001, I knew that my life was going to dramatically change financially. I attended Alama Community College in Graham in Medical Office Administration in 2002 and 2003. In September 2003, before I finished, I still did not have a job. I prayed and asked God to help me.

As I faced hard times, lonely, sad, and ashamed of my situation, I really had to trust God. My family was no support, nor was my old church. I cried many nights, my pillow wet with tears. It was so hard for me to ask for help from anyone - even my friends, I was so ashamed when I had to go to Social Services and ask for help and see people there that knew me. My heart was heavy many days, and I learned to do without a lot of things. But God has really blessed me now in other ways. Presently, I am a member of the Cedar Grove United Methodist Church - a new family, new friends, good fellowship. I attend Bible study, Sunday School, and Living the Word, and serve as the Acolyte Leader and a Choir Member.

I have worked a lot of temporary jobs since being laid off in 2001. Trying to find permanent, full-time employment with health insurance has been very difficult. At the present time, I am working part-time at Harris Teeter, 24 -30 hours a week. I make \$8.00 an hour, and last month my take-home pay was \$414. I don't have enough to pay my mortgage. I have to trust God that someone will hear my prayer and help me, or I will have to ask some of my friends to help me with my mortgage. After paying for utilities, food, and other necessities, I don't have much leftover.

When I have been hired at jobs in the past, I found ways to encourage my co-workers because many live paycheck to paycheck, just like me. I tell them "Be grateful and appreciate your job, because you never know when your job will end. But God will see you through. God can do anything." As I finish this story, I am happy inside to know that my story can be used so that someone else can see how it is to go through adversity and difficult financial situations.

• CONTACTS AND OTHER RESOURCES •

- W www.nccouncilofchurches.org/areasofwork/issues/economic_justice/economic_justice_issue.html - North Carolina Council of Churches' "Economic Justice" webpage, which includes the Council's focus as well as links to various resources and to the Economic Justice Committee's homepage.
- W www.ncjustice.org – North Carolina Justice Center, North Carolina's leading private, non-profit anti-poverty organization. Its mission is to reduce and eliminate poverty in North Carolina by helping to ensure that every North Carolina household gains access to the resources, services and fair treatment that it needs in order to enjoy economic security.
- W www.ncruralcenter.org - North Carolina Rural Economic Development Center, Inc. The mission of the North Carolina Rural Economic Development Center is to develop, promote, and implement sound economic strategies to improve the quality of life of rural North Carolinians. The Center serves the state's 85 rural counties, with a special focus on individuals with low to moderate incomes and communities with limited resources. Created in 1987, the Rural Center operates a multi-faceted program that includes conducting research into rural issues, advocating for policy and program innovations, and building the productive capacity of rural leaders, entrepreneurs and community organizations. The Center is a private, non-profit organization, funded by both public and private sources and led by a 50-member board of directors.
- W www.calltorenewal.org – Call to Renewal, a national network of churches, faith-based organizations, and individuals working to overcome poverty in America. Through local and national partnerships with groups from across the theological and political spectrum, Call to Renewal convenes the broadest table of Christians focused on anti-poverty efforts. Together, all work to influence local and national public policies and priorities, while growing and developing a movement of Christians committed to overcoming poverty.
- W <http://nccp.org> - The National Center for Children in Poverty, a non-profit, non-partisan research and policy organization at Columbia University. The Center's mission is to identify and promote strategies to prevent child poverty in the United States and improve the lives of low-income children and families. Its website contains accessible data concerning poverty in the U.S. and individual states.
- W www.economichumanrights.org – Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign, an organization committed to unite the poor across color lines as the leadership base for a broad movement to abolish poverty. The Campaign works to accomplish this through advancing economic human rights as named in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, such as the rights to food, housing, health, education, communication and a living wage job.
- W www.justneighbors.net—Just Neighbors is a comprehensive curriculum designed by Family Promise, which is an interfaith organization committed to achieving lasting independence for low-income families. The Just Neighbors experience is designed to foster a sense of community among the participants. It is an engaging, thought-provoking curriculum offering a wealth of resources and materials along with the flexibility to make the program work in a wide range of settings and organizations.
- W www.faireconomy.org – United for a Fair Economy, a national, independent, non-partisan, 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. UFE raises awareness that concentrated wealth and power undermine the economy, corrupt democracy, deepen the racial divide, and tear communities apart. They support and help build social movements for greater equality.
- W www.letjusticeroll.org—Let Justice Roll's Living Wage Campaign is a non-partisan program of more than seventy faith-based and community-based organizations working in support of federal legislation to raise the federal minimum wage and state legislation and ballot initiatives to increase the minimum wage in selected states. The Campaign conducts an ongoing educational program to inform people of the severity of conditions facing low-wage working people and what must be done to bring about constructive change. It is organizing actively at the federal level and in selected states to raise the minimum wage.

KEY FACTS

DID YOU KNOW?

- q Over 1 million North Carolinians—over 12 percent of the whole population—live below the Federal poverty guidelines, which are currently \$20,000 for a family of four. In addition, of North Carolina’s 1.1 million families with children, almost 50 percent earn too little to meet their basic needs. Of the nearly 1 million families with children and at least one worker, 45 percent are paid too little to meet bare-bone living costs.¹

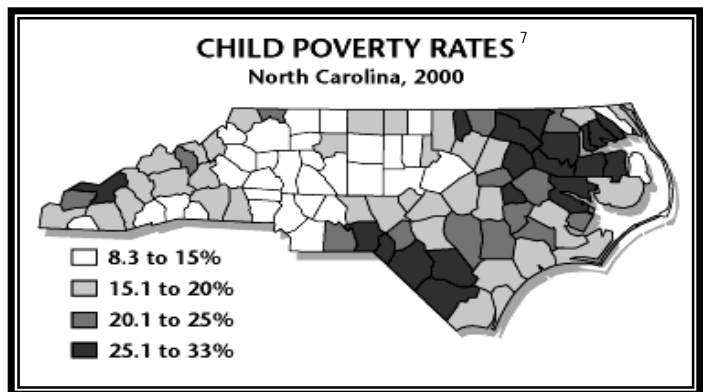
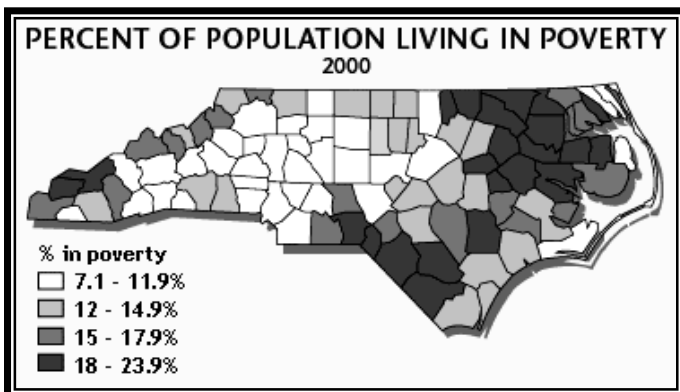
- q Because the Federal poverty guidelines are so low, many more people actually live in poverty than are documented by the Federal government and state agencies. The North Carolina Justice Center calculates that a family of four living in North Carolina needs at least \$40,000 to adequately address its basic needs—more than double the Federal poverty guidelines. This amount only covers the necessities of food, housing, health care, childcare, transportation, taxes and miscellaneous expenses.²

- q North Carolina’s poverty rate is 12th-worst in the nation. Over 15 percent of North Carolina’s children and over 13 percent of North Carolina’s elderly population live in poverty as defined by the Federal government. Between 1990 and 2000, the number of North Carolinians living in poverty increased by 15 percent.³

- q North Carolina’s poverty rate for families with children under age 18 rose from 15 percent in 2000 to almost 19 percent in 2004. Likewise, the poverty rate for families with children under age 5 rose from almost 15 percent in 2000 to over 21 percent in 2004—an increase of almost 50 percent.⁴

- q Warren County is home to the highest poverty level in North Carolina, with 28 percent of the population living below the Federal poverty guidelines. In addition, the poverty rates of many of North Carolina’s far western and far eastern counties’ poverty rate exceeds the state average of 12.6 percent, with Swain at almost 21 percent and Graham at over 18 percent. Many of the families living in these counties lack everyday necessities like indoor plumbing.⁵

- q MANNA food bank in western North Carolina serves more than 115,000 North Carolinians per year with emergency food assistance. Of the households served by MANNA:
 - 25 percent include children under the age of 18;
 - 31 percent have one employed adult in the home;
 - 47.5 percent choose between paying for food and paying for utilities or heating fuel;
 - 31.2 percent choose between paying for food and paying their rent or mortgage bill;
 - 29.8 percent choose between paying for food and paying for medicine or medical care;
 - 33.8 percent have one household member in poor health; and
 - 26.2 percent receive Food Stamp Program benefits, although many more may be eligible.⁶



1. North Carolina Justice Center, “Falling Jobs, Falling Wages,” www.ncjustice.org/media/library/551_livingincome2005.pdf.
 2. Ibid.
 3. North Carolina Rural Economic Development Center, “Income in North Carolina,” www.ncruralcenter.org/databank/datasheet.asp?topic=Income.
 4. North Carolina Justice Center, “BTC Reports: Time to Start Climbing,” www.ncjustice.org/media/library/478_btcrpt09152005census.pdf.
 5. Laura Kleinhenz, “Surviving Rural Poverty,” www.sightphoto.com/sightphoto/Kleinhenz/kleinhenz_warren.html.
 6. MANNA Foodbank, “Hunger in Western North Carolina,” www.mannafoodbank.org/faceofhunger/wncmap/wncmap.html.
 7. North Carolina Rural Economic Development Center, “Poverty in North Carolina,” www.ncruralcenter.org/databank/trendpage_Poverty.asp.

'THE SAME LORD IS LORD OF ALL' RACISM & RECONCILIATION

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT, YEAR C

Lectionary Texts: Deuteronomy 26:1-11 Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16 Romans 10:8b-13 Luke 4:1-13

Focus Text: Romans 10:8b-13

⁸"The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); ⁹because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. ¹¹The scripture says, "No one who believes in him will be put to shame." ¹²For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. ¹³For, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

NRSV

ADDITIONAL TEXTS

Then Peter began to speak to them: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears [God] and does what is right is acceptable to [God]. You know the message [God] sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all."

Acts 10:34-35

As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest also may stand in fear. In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels, I warn you to keep these instructions without prejudice, doing nothing on the basis of partiality.

I Timothy 5:20-21

Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!

Colossians 3:9-11

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it.

Ephesians 2:13-16

SCRIPTURE COMMENTARY

BY REV. JOSEPH BROWN, SR.
PASTOR, ST. LUKE AMEZ, WILMINGTON

In Paul's letter to the Romans he writes that he has a burning desire and longing for the salvation of Israel. Their salvation was possible. They could be saved. Their rejection of Jesus Christ was not a lost cause. The door of salvation is open to all men and women, Jew as well as Gentile.

The steps toward salvation were simple: confession and belief that Jesus Christ died and rose again. Through this, salvation would be possible. The great opportunity for salvation is available to all persons.

This God, this Jesus, is God of all regardless of race, creed, color, or national origin. Everyone who calls will be saved, moral or immoral, just or unjust, rich or poor, pretty or ugly, sick or well. Anyone who cries out with a deep-rooted call from the heart could be elevated to a Utopian experience on earth.

The access to salvation by all persons is the bond that ties all of us together. There may be some things on earth that are restricted to certain socio-economic groupings or levels of education, but Jesus is there for all of us to grab hold to and can save us from sin and destruction.

PASTORAL REFLECTION

BY REV. JOSEPH BROWN, SR.

It is rare that the issue of racial reconciliation is attached to salvation. Many times, the issues of race are only discussed from a legal or political perspective, but in our text there is a direct correlation between salvation and racial reconciliation.

It appears at times that there are those among us who proclaim salvation, going to heaven after death with shouts of praise and hallelujah, is separated from how we treat others who are different from us racially. But in Paul's writing, he shows a direct link between racial harmony and salvation. I further submit that, in line with Paul's words, there can be no racial reconciliation until there is a Jesus experience.

First, we must confess the evil within us. The old saying "confession is good for the soul" is still true. We must own up to the hatred that is within us, and not only own up to it, we must be willing to let it go and allow God to remove it. We must be willing to confess that hating someone strictly because they are of a different race than we are is as evil as adultery, stealing, or murdering. We must realize that hate separates us from God, and that separation denies us the blessings He has in store. As we confess and seek forgiveness for our other sins, we must also seek forgiveness for racial hatred.

Secondly, belief in Jesus Christ brings a heart change. In 1964, during the debate over the Civil Rights Act, one of our senators stated that "we cannot legislate feelings from the heart." How right he was, and though the 1964 legislation mandated many changes which have had some positive results, we must admit that there are still underlying problems which remain today.

I am convinced these underlying issues can only be resolved when we fully surrender our lives to Jesus Christ. The hymn writer states: "what a wonderful change in my life has been wrought, since Jesus came into my heart. I have light in my soul for which long I have sought, since Jesus came into my heart. Since Jesus came into my heart, floods of joy o'er my soul like the sea billows roll." When Jesus comes into our hearts and is really there, we can experience the joy of loving and accepting all people.

Finally, accepting Jesus Christ as Lord helps us understand love and reconciliation. The whole idea of salvation is understanding the events of Calvary. It was there that God accepted the sacrifice offered for our sins. It was there through Jesus that God became able to see beyond our faults. God was able to do this because of the love He has for us. When we fully understand that love, and that love grows and matures within us, then we cannot help but reconcile ourselves to each other. If God through Calvary pardons, accepts, and loves us, then when that love flourishes within us, we will find ourselves looking beyond other people's color, where they came from, and where they live, and embrace them as we were embraced at Calvary.

Whenever I think of social reconciliation and the effort we all have to make to bring it to reality, I am reminded of a gathering that occurred some years ago in a city where I was a pastor.

A group of progressive ministers, black and white, came together to organize a group called CLIFF (Clergy Living in Faith and Fellowship). We came together because we were concerned about race relations in that city, and the evident worsening of the divide.

As usually is the case, the public schools in that area reflected the ever-growing social divisions. From what I hear, it is not much better now. Nevertheless, about 10 or 15 of us came together not only to pray about the situation, but also publicly to express our opposition to what the school board was doing to perpetuate the social disharmony in the community.

CLIFF had several meetings and several of us exchanged worship services. What was unique about this was that we did not have these exchanges in the afternoons or on Wednesday nights. These pulpit exchanges occurred on Sunday mornings at 11:00 a.m.

I remember vividly the first Sunday we did this. The pastor of the United Methodist Church and his choir were coming to our African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, and I and my choir were going to the United Methodist Church. I must admit both pastors and choirs were jittery, but we had to demonstrate what we preached and sang about. The exchange went very well, both congregations enjoyed it. We came together after church and had dinner together. I understand this exchange still occurs annually. Those of us who stand in pulpits must take the lead in bringing people together.

During our meetings as members of CLIFF, we discovered something really scary that many of us hate to face but is a reality. We discovered that even as progressive and loving as we were, we had some deep seated racist issues within us that had been unconsciously nurtured and grown through the years. Conversion education and life experiences had helped us shift those racist notions to the point where we could attempt to build bridges, but the tendencies were still there. It was frightening to have to face this, but we did. We also concluded that we could not lead in healing if we were sick and diseased ourselves.

We decided to bring in Doug Tanner, a nationally known leader in facilitating groups in social reconciliation. We spent a full day openly confessing our social sins and shortcomings. During that session we got angry, we talked harshly, we aired our feelings, but at the end, our bond was closer than before. This "Come to Jesus Meeting," as we called it, started us on the road to healing. As a result of our own healing, we could better lead our congregations toward social reconciliation.

Several years have passed since that retreat, and several of us have gone to other fields of endeavor. However, the bond that we established that day has continued. It has also helped us build relationships in other cities.

As clergy persons, maybe more of us need to search ourselves and be honest with what is really inside each of us so that we can more effectively lead others to social reconciliation. Sometimes it is good for us to look back at Calvary and experience the wonderful, refreshing power of God demonstrated there.

WORSHIP AID – 'THE SAME LORD IS LORD OF ALL'

RESPONSIVE READING

Gracious God, we thank you for making one human family of all the peoples of the earth and for creating all the wonderful diversity of cultures.

Enrich our lives by ever-widening circles of fellowship and show us your presence in those who differ most from us.

Forgive those of us who have been silent and apathetic in the face of racial intolerance and bigotry, both overt and subtle, public and private.

And take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts.

Break down the walls which separate us.

And help us to find that unity which is the fruit of righteousness and which will enable us to become your beloved community.

Empower us to speak boldly for justice and truth and help us to deal with one another without hatred or bitterness, working together with mutual forbearance and respect.

And work through our struggles and confusion to accomplish your purposes.

Amen.

(adapted from "Sabbath of Support in Opposition to Racism," www.religioustolerance.org)

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

For the racism which denies dignity
to those who are different, Lord, forgive us:
Lord, have mercy.
For the racism which recognizes prejudice in others
and never in ourselves, Christ, forgive us:
Christ, have mercy.
For the racism which will not recognize
the work of your Spirit in other cultures, Lord, forgive us:
Lord, have mercy.

(from the United Church of Canada, www.united-church.ca/bfw/resources.shtm)

SUGGESTED HYMNS

- ✓ In Christ There Is No East or West AM 557/CM 360/CH 687/BH 385/GA 738
MW 523/NCH 394/UMH 548/PH 39/
TH 529
- ✓ Diverse in Culture, Nation, Race GA 739/CH 485
- ✓ We Are Called to Be God's People BH 390/MW 635

w Hymnal Legend w
† UMH – United Methodist
† BH – Baptist Hymnal
† GA—Gather Hymnal (Roman Catholic)
† PH – Presbyterian Hymnal
† TH – The Hymnal 1982 (Episcopal)
† MW – Moravian Book of Worship
† AM – African Methodist Episcopal
† CM – Christian Methodist Episcopal
† CH—Chalice Hymnal (Disciples of Christ)
† NCH—New Century Hymnal (UCC)

ADDITIONAL PRAYERS

To the Creator of All Peoples

To the Creator of all peoples, who loves each of us for our uniqueness, we offer our prayers of petition:

For an end to discrimination in all its forms, we pray,

Lord of all, hear our prayer.

That each person may be respected and valued as a child of God, we pray,

Lord of all, hear our prayer.

That the Church may be a witness and a universal sign of unity among all peoples, we pray,

Lord of all, hear our prayer.

That each of us may acknowledge our part in mistakes and sins of the past pertaining to discrimination and racism, we pray,

Lord of all, hear our prayer.

For a spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation among peoples who share a history of mutual mistrust, hatred, or aggression, we pray,

Lord of all, hear our prayer.

That the victims of racial prejudice may forgive those who persecute them, and that their persecutors may have a change of heart, we pray,

Lord of all, hear our prayer.

That the Church will continue to strive to make every element of human life correspond to the true dignity of the human person, we pray,

Lord of all, hear our prayer.

For those who have struggled for civil rights, economic justice and the elimination of discrimination based on race, we pray,

Lord of all, hear our prayer.

For the conversion of the hearts and minds of those who allow another to influence their relationships and limit their openness, we pray,

Lord of all, hear our prayer.

That we may work to influence the attitudes of others by expressly rejecting racial stereotypes, slurs, and be affirming of the cultural contributions of every racial group in our world, we pray,

Lord of all, hear our prayer.

That we may make a personal commitment to abolish social structures which inhibit economic, educational and social advancement of the poor, we pray,

Lord of all nations, hear our prayer.

That we may work for decent working conditions, adequate income, housing, education and health care for all people, we pray,

Lord of all nations, hear our prayer.

Amen.

(adapted from the Augustinians of the Midwest, www.midwestaugustinians.org/justpaxracepray.html)

Creator of All People

Almighty God, source of our life, we acknowledge you as Creator of all people of every race, language and way of life. Help us to see each other as you see us: your sons and daughters loved into being and sustained by your parental care. Keep watch over our hearts so that the evil of racism will find no home with us. Direct our spirits to work for justice and peace so that all barriers to your grace which oppress our brothers and sisters will be removed. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

(from the Augustinians of the Midwest, www.midwestaugustinians.org/justpaxracepray.html)

ADDITIONAL HELPS

LENTEN MATERIALS

LENTEN HYMNS

- ✓ Must Jesus Bear the Cross Alone AM 155/CM 85/UMH 424/BH 475
- ✓ Were You There UMH 288/AM 136/CM 485/NCH 229,
GA 416/TH 172/PH 102/CH 198/
MW 354/BH 156
- ✓ In the Cross of Christ I Glory NCH 193/BH 554/MW 332/CH 207/
PH 84/TH 441/LW 101/CM 88/AM 153/
UMH 295

LENTEN PRAYER

O God of unconditional love,
you who show no partiality in respect to persons or nations,
we have heard your good news of great joy for all the people,
We hear that good news, and in hearing, believe.
We know that your sanctuary is a house of worship for all people,
with no regard for the color of our skin.
As we worship you, knit us into a people,
a seamless garment of many colors.
May we celebrate our unity, made whole in our diversity.
Forgive us for our inability to let our "old selves" die to the world.
We acknowledge that we participate in structures that are inherently racist,
and yet we do nothing to remedy it.
Show us when we fail when we judge others according to the color of their flesh.
Amen.

(adapted from the United Church of Christ's "Prayers for Racial Justice Sunday," www.ucc.org/worship/ways)

w Hymnal Legend w

- † UMH – United Methodist
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• QUOTES •

Love is creative and redemptive... The aftermath of the 'fight with fire' method which you suggest is bitterness and chaos, the aftermath of the love method is reconciliation and creation of the beloved community. Physical force can repress, restrain, coerce, destroy, but it cannot create and organize anything permanent; only love can do that. Yes, love—which means understanding, creative, redemptive goodwill, even for one's enemies—is the solution to the race problem.

Martin Luther King, Jr

True reconciliation is never cheap, for it is based on forgiveness which is costly. Forgiveness in turn depends on repentance, which has to be based on an acknowledgement of what was done wrong, and therefore on disclosure of the truth. You cannot forgive what you do not know.

Desmond Tutu

It demands great spiritual resilience not to hate the hater whose foot is on your neck, and an even greater miracle of perception and charity not to teach your child to hate.

James Arthur Baldwin

At the heart of racism is the religious assertion that God made a creative mistake when He brought some people into being.

Friedrich Otto Hertz

• VIGNETTE •

THE GREENSBORO TRUTH & RECONCILIATION COMMISSION

from the Greensboro Truth & Community Reconciliation Project, www.gtcp.org
& the Greensboro Truth & Reconciliation Commission's Press Release of 19 April 2005, www.greensborotrc.org

BACKGROUND

In Greensboro, North Carolina, on November 3, 1979, members of the Ku Klux Klan and American Nazi party killed five people and wounded 10 others as activists gathered for a statewide "Death to the Klan" rally and conference for racial, social, and economic justice. The planned event, organized by members of the Communist Workers Party, was to start in Greensboro's Morningside Homes, a now-demolished African-American public housing community. The organizers had obtained a parade permit from the city and had been assigned police escorts, but all the police were called to an early lunch just before the Klan and Nazis arrived in a caravan and opened fire.

Four TV crews captured the killings on film, but the perpetrators were twice acquitted of any wrongdoing. Eventually, in a federal civil suit, Klan members, Nazis and Greensboro police were found jointly liable for one of the deaths. Although the city paid a \$385,000 settlement, it has never apologized or acknowledged any wrongdoing.

The entire city has suffered from the impact of this tragedy and its aftermath. Because there is no common understanding about this painful episode in Greensboro's history, it continues to serve as a basis for fear, division and distrust. For this reason, a broad coalition of concerned community leaders has formed to call the people, institutions and government of Greensboro to engage in the Greensboro Truth & Community Reconciliation Project to confront this troubled history honestly so it can move forward in the unity and strength that can come from forgiveness and reconciliation.

CURRENT WORK

With a five-member staff, volunteers and collaborations with a wide range of community organizations, the Commission hopes to become a model that other American communities can use to address incidents of unresolved injustice in their own histories. Created through a public nomination and selection process, the independent Commission is mandated to objectively examine "the context, causes, sequence and consequence" of Nov. 3, 1979. Given the confusion caused by the two acquittals and the subsequent civil lawsuit, as well as the volume of rumors and misinformation that surrounded these events and their aftermath, the Greensboro community has been deeply divided in its collective understanding of what actually happened and why.

FINAL REPORT

The Commission issued its final report on May 25, 2006. In the report's executive summary, the Commission concludes: "We believe the truth and reconciliation process in Greensboro opened up the debate around Nov. 3, 1979, in a positive way and has successfully engaged a broad spectrum of the community in an effort that offers hope for reconciliation. As a Commission that looks a bit like Greensboro in microcosm, we found that this process — and our own struggle to hear and understand each other — had a profound impact on our perceptions of the issues we explored. Our individual and collective commitment to the truth helped us persevere. And the human stories and emotions we encountered along the way moved us to do our best to leave behind a legacy we hope will serve Greensboro for years to come. We cannot say what the future will hold for this community or what the long-term impact of this process will look like, but we hope that this process also serves as a learning tool for others in this country who, like Greensboro, are burdened by a legacy of hurt and inspired by the possibility of honestly coming to terms with their own history."

• CONTACTS AND OTHER RESOURCES •

- W www.nccouncilofchurches.org/areasofwork/issues/racial_justice/racial_justice_issue.html - North Carolina Council of Churches' "Racial Justice" page, describing the Council's focus on the issue as well as related events and resources.
- W The Elephant in the Courtroom: Racism and Criminal Justice in North Carolina – an adult education curriculum resource provided by the North Carolina Council of Churches which explores themes of community, forgiveness, racism, and restorative justice. To request a copy, please send an email to nccofof@nccouncilofchurches.org.
- W www.ywcatriangle.org/RacialJustice.html—YWCA Triangle Racial Justice Initiative seeks to increase the interaction and dialogue among individuals of different racial and ethnic backgrounds and to address underlying assumptions and attitudes about race and ethnicity. It hosts Study Circles, Action Task Forces and Action Agendas.
- W www.faithaction.com—FaithAction, based in Greensboro, aims to form a united community of many cultures. This interfaith community offers numerous resources on multiculturalism and diversity, including in-house publications and two-day retreats.
- W www.visions-inc.org—VISIONS, Inc. is a nonprofit training and consulting organization that provides a variety of services which support organizations, communities, and individuals as they engage in the process of multicultural development.
- W <http://hrw.org> - Human Rights Watch, an independent, nongovernmental organization which stands with victims and activists to prevent discrimination, to uphold political freedom, to protect people from inhumane conduct in wartime, and to bring offenders to justice.
- W www.ncimed.com/index.cfm - The North Carolina Institute of Minority Economic Development, a statewide nonprofit organization representing the interest of underdeveloped and underutilized sectors of the state's economic base. The Institute's working philosophy is that information and business development are critical to wealth creation and to building the asset base among low-wealth sectors of the population.
- W www.manilasites.com/naacpncgreensboro - the NAACP NC Weblog Network, based in the Guilford County (Greensboro) branch. The website announces current events of the NAACP, and contains articles covering the NAACP's work in North Carolina.
- W www.antioppressiveeducation.org—Center for Anti-Oppressive Education. The Center for Anti-Oppressive Education (CAOE) recognizes that the quality of education cannot improve unless we commit to challenging the racism, classism, sexism, and other oppressions which permeate our schools and societies. Through its projects on research, curriculum, professional development, and local advocacy, CAOE develops and provides innovative resources for educators, leaders, students, and advocates throughout the United States and the world who are interested in creating and engaging in anti-oppressive forms of education.
- W www.tolerance.org – A Web Project of the Southern Poverty Law Center is a principle online destination for people interested in dismantling bigotry and creating communities which value diversity. Located in Montgomery, AL, the SPLC was founded in 1971 as a small civil rights firm. Today it receives international acclaim for its tolerance education programs, its legal victories against white supremacist groups, and its tracking of hate groups.

KEY FACTS

DID YOU KNOW?

- Q "White privilege" names the set of benefits received by all whites, regardless of their personal prejudices and attitudes, as a result of widespread, systemic, institutional racism. By its very nature, white privilege often remains invisible to those who receive its assets. For white people, acknowledging complicity in receiving the benefits of white privilege is often a first step towards genuine racial reconciliation. The following is a checklist that begins to name many white privileges; check off the ones which you have experienced:

- ⇒ My ancestors were legal immigrants to this country during a period when immigrants from Asia, South and Central America or Africa were restricted.
- ⇒ My ancestors came to this country of their own free will and have never had to relocate unwillingly once they arrived here.
- ⇒ I live on land which formerly belonged to Native Americans.
- ⇒ I don't need to think about race and racism everyday. I can choose when and where I want to respond to racism.
- ⇒ No one assumes that when I give my opinion on something that I am speaking on behalf of my own race.
- ⇒ I never worry that my co-workers, bosses, or teachers might misjudge me because of my race or culture.
- ⇒ I turn on the television or read the newspaper and see people of my race positively represented.¹

How North Carolina Churches Are Dealing With Racism

PRESBYTERIAN INTERRACIAL DIALOGUE

As a response to several racially-motivated incidents that took place in 1992, three Presbyterian pastors from Winston-Salem began a series of conversations that led to the formation of Presbyterian Inter-Racial Dialogue. Each of their three churches sent 10 to 20 people to the first meetings, which focused the participants on the history of racism and the resources of their own Christian faith. Members of the Dialogue were committed to more than academic study together; they formed lasting friendships with one another and began to engage together in community service and advocacy. From 1994-1995 three more churches were added, and of the six churches that now constituted the Dialogue three were black and three were white. In 1994 the Dialogue met with the mayor and began work with Habitat for Humanity, which has continued to the present. In the year 2000, the Dialogue joined with Temple Emanuel and the Islamic Masjid Almuminun to construct the first interfaith, interracial Habitat house in the entire nation. Acts of service, community-wide advocacy, strong faith commitments and deep friendships have continued to characterize the work of Presbyterian Inter-Racial Dialogue as it has attempted to break down barriers that stand between black people and white people in North Carolina.²

RECONCILIATION UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Reconciliation United Methodist Church is an intentionally multiracial, multicultural congregation that was formed in January 1998 in Durham. Founding pastors Lawrence Johnson and Kevin Baker were drawn together by a vision of a local congregation that would faithfully live both the joy and the pain of truly reconciling with one another across the dividing lines of race, class, and gender. The mission of Reconciliation UMC is to "embody God's ministry of reconciliation through our practice of worship, devotion, compassion, and justice. We believe that receiving and sharing God's all encompassing love is our greatest challenge and our only hope." According to members Jeanne and Travis Montgomery, "As an interracial couple we quickly discovered the failings of traditional, segregated worship. Reconciliation not only acknowledges and accepts different cultural traditions, it seeks them out, celebrates them, and weaves them together to create a worship experience that speaks to all of God's children." Because of their belief that worship is a shared space where people are invited to bring their gifts and experience the gifts of others, Sunday services are conducted in both Spanish and English.

- Q According to the Congregational Project on Multiracial Congregations in America, only about 7 percent of American congregations are multiracial. The definition of multiracial is that no one racial group comprises 80 percent or more of the congregation. The Project found that while about 15 percent of Catholic churches are multiracial, only about 5 percent of Protestant churches are multiracial. In addition, non-Christian congregations are more likely to be racially mixed than are Christian congregations. Finally, the most common type of racially-mixed congregation is comprised of Anglos and Hispanics or Asians.⁵

1. Third Way Café, "Beyond the News: White Privilege, Responding and Identifying," www.thirdway.com/BTN/racism/church/privilege.asp.

2. Adapted from the booklet by Stephen P. McCutchan, "Presbyterian Inter-Racial Dialogue: Ten Year History 1992-2002," Winston-Salem, NC.

3. In Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

4. In Durham, North Carolina; www.gbgm-umc.org/reconciliation

5. Congregational Project on Multiracial Congregations, "Facts," www.congregations.info/facts.html.

'WE ARE AMBASSADORS FOR CHRIST'
JEWISH-CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM DIALOGUE & SERVICE
FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT, YEAR C

Lectionary Texts: Joshua 5:9-12 Psalm 32 II Corinthians 5:16-21 Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

Focus Text: II Corinthians 5:16-21

¹⁶ From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. ¹⁷ So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to [Godself] through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to [Godself], not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. ²⁰ So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making [God's] appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹ For our sake [God] made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

NRSV

ADDITIONAL TEXTS

Your steadfast love, O LORD, extends to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds. Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains, your judgments are like the great deep; you save humans and animals alike, O LORD. How precious is your steadfast love, O God! All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings. They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights. For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light.

Psalm 36:5-9

I ask, then, has God rejected [God's] people? By no means! I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected [God's] people whom [God] foreknew.... But if some of the branches were broken off, and you [Gentiles], a wild olive shoot, were grafted in their place to share the rich root of the olive tree, do not vaunt yourselves over the branches. If you do vaunt yourselves, remember that it is not you that support the root, but the root that supports you. You will say, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand only through faith. So do not become proud, but stand in awe.

Romans 11:1-2, 17-20

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love... Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and [God's] love is perfected in us.

I John 4:7-8, 11-12

SCRIPTURE COMMENTARY

BY MAX CARTER, DIRECTOR OF FRIENDS' CENTER, CAMPUS MINISTRY COORDINATOR, GUILFORD COLLEGE, GREENSBORO

On first reading, the focus text seems to affirm the tradition of going into the world to convert others to Christianity. Upon further examination, however, the key words of the text appear to be directed at the Christian's own attitude and relationship to "the other."

Who is it that is "in Christ," for example? It is the one already made new through God's reconciling work in Christ – the Christian audience for Paul's letters. This person is no longer to view others in the old way, as alien, foreign, apart from God, but to see the world as God sees it: graciously accepted by God through unremitting, overpowering love and forgiveness.

"The other" now has most favored nation status! And we are to be God's ambassadors, representatives of God's realm, values, and intents. The Christian's charge, now that s/he is a jet-set diplomat, is to look out for the interests of God's kingdom and to maintain the friendship with God of those among whom the diplomatic mission has been established.

It would be a pretty poor ambassador who went to "East Pitooey" and said, "You Pitooies are loathsome creatures, and Her Majesty's government looks with disgust on you!" Rather, the envoy views the nation and its people as allies and friends, seeks to know its customs, and even learns their language and engages in their culture.

Robert Barclay, the 17th century Quaker theologian, wrote of how Christ continues to reconcile the world to God through that Real Presence which serves as a Light in all (John 1:9). He went so far as to say that this Light, if not resisted, would lead to salvation, even if one had never heard the name of Jesus (Apology, p. 73). For it is the power the name signifies, the continual working of the inward Christ, and not the name itself, which saves.

William Penn, when given a tract of land in the New World which he chose to use as a holy experiment of religious freedom and application of Quaker testimony, invited the Native Americans to meet with him and his agents. Certainly not Christians, and not confronted with the need to be converted, the Indians were invited into relationship with the Quakers in order to agree on how they might live together. Penn trusted "that of God" in the Indians, while others – even Christians – branded them savages and instituted laws to exterminate them.

If we are to see the world as God sees it, filled with those whom God has chosen to redeem and call friends, our job as God's representatives is to understand the "for" in "ambassadors for Christ" as a directive not to convert others to but be advocates for the friendship already established.

PASTORAL REFLECTION

BY MAX CARTER

Nadia came screaming out of her bullet-riddled home, "And you call us terrorists; you call US terrorists! I hope all Americans burn in hell!"

We were unsure how to respond. A group of American Quakers visiting Ramallah, Palestine to volunteer at the Friends Schools, we had walked over to a section of the town to see the after-effects of a military strike the night before. A grocery store displayed a gaping hole caused by an artillery shell; a house was a burned out hulk; two homes had been strafed by machine gun fire – the pockmarks in the walls and gaping windows showing the intensity of the attack. There wasn't a military target in sight. There had been no firing from the area. The neighborhood was "collateral damage" in the power politics of the region.

Nadia dramatically called us into the reality of her life and away from our being disengaged onlookers. Angrily, she described the early morning hours onslaught as she, her husband, and three little children huddled on their bedroom floor, bullets ricocheting around the room for half an hour. They assumed they would die in the hail of gunfire. But surviving the experience, the family began cleaning up their devastated home and quickly recognized the telltale imprint of American military hardware: spent shells that they knew came from American-made equipment.

And there we were, American Christians incurring the wrath of a young Muslim woman only hours after her near-death encounter. What were we "ambassadors for Christ" to do?

Perhaps it was our pacifist upbringing; perhaps it was the default setting of those stymied for an adequate response; but we simply listened. We took in the rage of this terrorized young mother, sharing our sorrow and empathy, grasping for meaningful words. The question actually did occur to me – "What would Jesus do?"

Whether Jesus would have calculated the average military expenditure of United States taxpayers or not, we did. We expressed our condolences to Nadia and hurried off to an appointment, shaken and earnestly conversing about what to do. Having heard earlier in our visit from Israeli and Palestinian peace workers that each American gives an average of \$25 annually for the weaponry that almost killed Nadia, we knew what we had to do. We each contributed that amount and more to a fund to help Nadia's family rebuild.

A Palestinian teacher at the Friends Schools delivered the money to her, but we heard no response for several days. We worried that she may have looked on our donation as blood money. Maybe she was offended by the thought that we were buying her forgiveness. Perhaps she wanted nothing to do with Americans or Christians.

Finally, on our last day in Ramallah, we got a phone call from Nadia asking if she and her family could come thank us in person. Relieved, we invited them to our closing supper. Apologizing to us for “venting” during our earlier visit, she laughed with us and her family, as we exchanged mundane stories of daily life and the challenges of parenting. Then she paused, asking “Are Quakers Christians?” We answered “Yes, just not always very good ones!”

“I thought so,” Nadia responded, “but I didn’t want to offend you.” She then reached into a bag and handed each one in our group a little Christian token: a Crusader’s Cross, a crucifix made of olive wood from Bethlehem.

A Muslim woman, nearly killed by weaponry supplied by the country of a group of visiting Christians, chose to express her gratitude with Christian souvenirs. We Quakers remained silent about our symbol-impairment, simply breathing a prayer of gratitude and amazement.

What might it mean truly to be ambassadors for Christ, carrying Christ’s reconciling love into the world? What might it really mean to act as envoys for the Kingdom of God? It certainly should mean no less than acting out the basic constitution of that Realm, the “Magna Carta” of the Kingdom – the Sermon on the Mount. Living authentically. Loving even our enemies. Seeking to bring peace. Focusing on eternal truths.

It might mean no more than responding to that light and life which John’s Gospel says is in all people. We could do worse than seek to act as Christ did with the marginalized and excluded. In her hysterical fear and anger, Nadia merely wished for us to burn in hell. Many in the world live in a hell of alienation, oppression, and helplessness. As Christ’s emissaries, we can model the gift of God’s love by seeking to remove the occasions of war, violence, and hatred.

During our visits in Israel and Palestine, we have witnessed this possibility many times, not only in the transformation of our relationship with Nadia and her family but also in the transformation of broader interactions. Palestinian Muslims and Christians have warmly welcomed Jewish members of our group into their homes; Israeli rabbis have joined with Palestinians to rebuild homes and replant uprooted orchards. Each time, a little seed is sown that may eventually blossom into the fullness of the reign of God on earth.

Perhaps, if we seek truly to be representatives of Christ’s ways, we may overcome evil with good; and if we are lucky, there may even be some Christian tokens in it for us!

WORSHIP AID – ‘WE ARE AMBASSADORS FOR CHRIST’

RESPONSIVE READING

In an era when the forces of division and decay abound, we dare to believe that God has created all peoples of the earth, and that God loves all of creation. God cares deeply about the relationships between Christians, Muslims and Jews around the world and in North Carolina.

We join together with our sisters and brothers of other faiths because our love for God and humanity inspires it; our concern for justice, freedom and peace demands it; and what we can learn from each other requires it.

Jews, Muslims, Christians; we have begun to listen together to the spirit within our varied and venerable traditions. In spite of our differences, we share a common ancestry through Abraham, who obeyed God and became a blessing to all nations. Because of our common heritage, we share many principles which spring forth from the teachings of each of our faith traditions:

A conviction of the fundamental unity of the human family under God and the equality and dignity of all human beings.
A sense of the sacredness of the individual person and each one’s conscience.

A sense of the value of human community.

A realization that might is not right; that human power is not self-sufficient or absolute, and that in God is our trust.

A belief that love, compassion, selflessness, and the force of inner truthfulness and the spirit have ultimately greater power than hate, enmity, and inordinate self-interest.

A sense of obligation to stand on the side of the poor, the hungry and the oppressed, and to serve the cause of justice.

A profound hope that good finally will prevail.

Because we affirm these convictions held in common, we also affirm one another in our different religious and cultural expressions. Because we affirm our community, we also affirm our commitment to stand together as a unified force for its social and moral benefit, and to be a symbol of living together in diversity which the creator intends for all creation.

Amen.

(Adapted from the National Council of Churches' "Finding Words for Unspeakable Tragedy," <http://www.nccusa.org/nmu/mce/crisis-worship-and-prayer.html>)

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Lord God Almighty,

We humbly come before You to confess our sin. We have mistreated our Jewish and Muslim sisters and brothers in word, thought and deed. We have failed to see Your image residing equally in all people. We have confused political and social power with spiritual truth; we have been participants of a Christian majority that continues to discriminate against people of other faiths. We have historically benefited from the oppression of both Muslims and Jews and yet we continue to live in fear and mistrust. Forgive our arrogance in thinking that we are more important than they in Your sight, O God, because of our beliefs. Forgive our ignorance that belies our lack of respect, interest and understanding. Give us eyes to see, ears to hear and hearts to receive Your truth found in both Torah and Koran. Give us opportunities to engage one another across the boundaries of religion and culture in acts of service and dialogue, that we would be faithful to Your command to love all people without reservation. In the name of Christ, Amen.

(by Chris Liu Beers)

SUGGESTED HYMNS

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| ✓ The God of Abraham Praise | LW 450/BH 34/NCH 24/PH 488/GA 544
UMH 116/CH 24/MW 468/TH 401 |
| ✓ Many Gifts, One Spirit | UMH 114/NCH 177 |
| ✓ Creating God | GA 580 |
| ✓ In Christ There Is No East or West | NCH 394/UMH 548/BH 385/CH 687/
PH 439/TH 529/GA 738 |
| ✓ O For a World | NCH 575 |

w Hymnal Legend w

- † UMH – United Methodist
- † BH – Baptist Hymnal
- † LW – Lutheran Worship
- † PH – Presbyterian Hymnal
- † GA—Gather Hymnal (Roman Catholic)
- † TH – The Hymnal 1982 (Episcopal)
- † MW – Moravian Book of Worship
- † CH—Chalice Hymnal (Disciples of Christ)
- † NCH—New Century Hymnal (UCC)

ADDITIONAL PRAYERS

Muslim—Jewish—Christian Prayer for Peace

O God, you are the source of life and peace. Praised be your name forever.

We know it is you who guide our minds to thoughts of peace. Hear our prayer in this time of war.

Your power changes hearts. When Muslims, Christians, and Jews remember and profoundly affirm that they are followers of the one God, children of Abraham, brothers and sisters, enemies begin to speak to one another, those who were estranged join hands in friendship, and nations seek the way of peace together.

Strengthen our resolve to give witness to these truths by the way we live.

Give to us:

Understanding that puts an end to strife;
Mercy that quenches hatred, and
Forgiveness that overcomes vengeance.

Empower all people to live in your law of love. Amen.

(Adapted from "Muslim—Jewish—Christian Prayer for Peace," www.paxchristiusa.org/news_events_more.asp?id=210)

A Christian Prayer of Thanksgiving for Jews

Almighty God, you are the one true God,
and have called forth people of faith
in every time and place.
Your promises are sure and true.
We bless you for your covenant
given to Abraham and Sarah,
that you keep even now with the Jews.
We rejoice that you have brought us
into covenant with you
by the coming of your Son, Jesus Christ,
himself a Jew, nurtured in the faith of Israel.
We praise you that you are faithful to covenants
made with us and Jewish brothers and sisters,
that together we may serve your will,
and come at last to your promised peace.
Amen.

(Adapted from "Presbyterian Peacemaking Program," www.pcusa.org/peacemaking/actnow/prayers.htm)

A Christian Prayer of Thanksgiving for Muslims

Eternal God,
you are the one God to be worshiped by all,
the one called Allah by your Muslim children,
descendants of Abraham as we are.

Give us grace to hear your truth
in the teachings of Mohammed, the prophet,
and to show your love as disciples of Jesus Christ,
that Christians and Muslims together
may serve you in faith and friendship.
Amen.

(Adapted from "Presbyterian Peacemaking Program," www.pcusa.org/peacemaking/actnow/prayers.htm)

ADDITIONAL HELPS

• QUOTES •

We do not fully comprehend God's way with other faiths. We need to listen to them with openness and respect, testing their words to us by God's word. We should be loving and unafraid in our dealings with them.

A Declaration of Faith,
Presbyterian Church U.S. 119th General Assembly

In the context of interfaith encounter, we need to bring to the surface how our actual beliefs shape what we do - not simply to agree that kindness is better than cruelty.

Rowan D. Williams

The whole idea of compassion is based on a keen awareness of the interdependence of all these living beings, which are all part of one another, and all involved in one another.

Thomas Merton

I appreciate any organization or individual people who sincerely make an effort to promote harmony between humanity, and particularly harmony between the various religions. I consider it very sacred work and very important work.

The Dalai Lama

It seems to rise again when the crisis times come, and this is a time of most severe crisis, as we all know, not just for the history of the United States and the survival indeed of our democracy, but for the future peace of the world. And never before probably has the need for interfaith commitment been nearly as great as it is at this very moment.

Walter Cronkite

TRIANGLE DINNER GROUP MODELS INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

BY LOIS BALLEEN

The Triangle Interfaith Dinner Group was established about three years ago by Ghazala Sadiq, Denise Long, and Sharon Ryan with the goal of fostering good will, understanding and friendship between people of Muslim, Jewish and Christian faiths living in the Triangle.

The Dinner Group continues with over 50 active participants. There are no attempts at "converting" or "evangelizing" others. Participants are expected to use sensitivity and good judgment in bringing up political or other hotly contested issues. People are encouraged to talk about their lives, family, and what their faith means to them, if they choose. There are as few rules as possible to keep the dinners free flowing, so all can enjoy the company and learn from each other.

Dinners are held on Saturday evenings every six to eight weeks either as potluck dinners hosted in several participants' homes or as a restaurant get-together. Participants are contacted a few weeks before each dinner and asked to sign-up if they wish to attend the next scheduled event. Since this is an informal group, there is no obligation to participate each time a dinner is scheduled. Being a host is also voluntary, and it rotates among participants.

Potluck dinners are organized as small groups (8-10 adults and children). These change each time, so everyone has the opportunity to meet new friends at each gathering. Approximately every three months, the group dines at a restaurant so everyone can get together at one time.

It is a wonderful opportunity for food and friendship! Feedback from participants has been very positive, and the group continues to grow. "The interfaith dinners have been very encouraging," writes Judith Harrow of Hillsborough. "They make me think that if we can do this on a personal level, there is hope we can do it on a global level."

For more information contact Bonnie Axelrod at bonbonax@verizon.net, Lois Ballen at loballen@earthlink.net, or Patricia Land at reykie@yahoo.com

• CONTACTS AND OTHER RESOURCES •

- W www.interfaithalliance-nc.org—The Triangle Interfaith Alliance is composed of about 30 board members, clergy and non-clergy, representing the Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh, Jain, Native American, and Unitarian-Universalist religions. The Alliance partners with other organizations in achieving common goals. Desiring to be a unifying force in society with emphasis on agreement and positive attitudes, they focus on building common bonds around which all people can come together, work together, and learn together.
- W www.interfaithalliance.org—The Interfaith Alliance is the national non-partisan advocacy voice of the interfaith movement. Its 150,000 members are from more than 70 faith traditions and people of good will united to: Promote democratic values, defend religious liberty, challenge hatred and religious bigotry and reinvigorate informed civic participation.
- W www.faihtaction.com—FaithAction is an intentional, interfaith community effort based in Greensboro, NC, committed to: helping new neighbors solve problems that result from language or cultural differences, providing immigrants a gathering place and technical assistance for the formation of mutual assistance associations, and helping community members understand, respect, and welcome our new neighbors whether from across the country or around the world.

- W www.nccusa.org/interfaith/ifrhome.html—The National Council of Churches' Office for Interfaith Relations provides resources for Christians to explore the challenges and opportunities of living among people of other faiths. In addition to the numerous resources available on their website, the staff at the Office for Interfaith Relations are available to consult with local groups, congregations, denominational bodies and community organizations about interfaith questions and concerns.
- W www.religioustolerance.org—ReligiousTolerance.Org archives resources, primarily essays and other writings, around the subject of religious tolerance and interfaith dialogue. Its leadership is committed to recognizing the inherent worth of every human person, working towards a society free of discrimination, and the importance of democracy within religious, political and other structures.
- W www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/interreligious/mfm-e.html—World Council of Churches' study guide "My Neighbor's Faith and Mine: Theological Discoveries Through Interfaith Dialogue" invites Christians to reflect on the theological significance of the faith and witness of their neighbors who are not Christians. In addition, it challenges Christians to seek new dimensions of their own faith.
- W www.pluralism.org—The Pluralism Project, a research-based project based out of Harvard University, seeks to document ongoing changes in America's religious landscape as well as helping Americans engage with the realities of religious diversity. Its website contains North Carolina-specific articles.

KEY FACTS

Worshiping With Jews: A Few Basics¹

- There are about 50 synagogues in North Carolina, and a Jewish population of over 25,000.
- Jews celebrate the Sabbath (or Shabbat) from Friday evening until Saturday evening, with most major prayer services taking place both Friday nights and Saturday mornings.
- Most Jewish congregations welcome non-Jews to their weekly Sabbath services.
- The service is centered on prayer and the reading of Torah (the first five books of the Bible). Two major units of the service are the Amidah, which is comprised of thanksgivings, praises and petitions to God, and the Sh'ma, which is a declaration of faith based on passages of the Torah.
- Men should usually wear a jacket and tie, and will be required to wear the traditional Jewish head covering known as a yarmulke or kippah. Women should dress modestly and will be required to wear a hat or other head covering in some congregations. It is not recommended to wear visible symbols of other religions, such as a cross.
- Visitors will be expected to stand with the congregation. Participating in prayers and songs is optional. Non-Jews are typically not permitted to read from the Torah during the service.

Worshiping With Muslims: A Few Basics²

- There are about 35 mosques in North Carolina, and a Muslim population of over 20,000.
- While Muslims are required to pray five times daily, the most important prayer service occurs at noon on Friday. This is a congregational prayer that is recited at a mosque.
- Most Muslim congregations welcome non-Muslims to their weekly prayer service.
- The service consists of a series of prayers, memorized and recited in Arabic. Before praying, Muslims participate in a ritual cleansing known as wadu. The service is led by an imam, who is responsible for leading public prayers and delivering a sermon. In addition, Muslims are called to prayer by a muezzin.
- Non-Muslims should arrive to the service early. Men may wear casual shirts and slacks, while women should dress very modestly and are required to cover their heads with a scarf. It is not recommended to wear visible symbols of other faiths; in addition, guests' clothing and jewelry should not depict the faces of animals or people.
- Visitors should check with the mosque ahead of time as to whether they permit non-Muslim visitors to participate in the prayer service.

America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity:

Insights from Sociologist Robert Wuthnow

In his recent book, *America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity*, Robert Wuthnow attempts to document American Christians' attitudes towards religious diversity. He highlights three main categories into which American Christians can be placed: spiritual shoppers, inclusivist Christians, and exclusivist Christians.

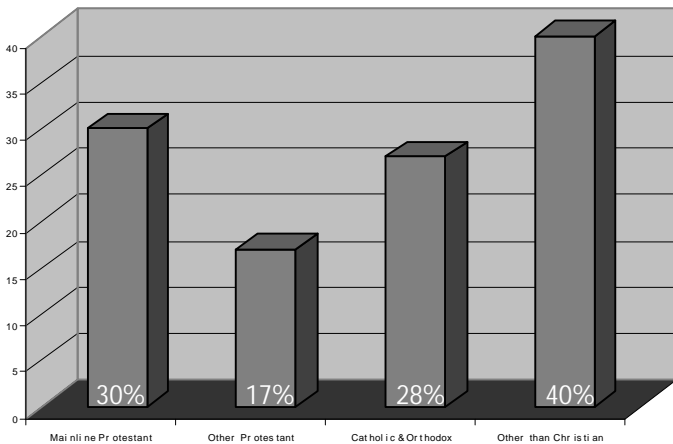
Spiritual shoppers readily embrace practices and beliefs from numerous religious traditions while rejecting the notion that one may be more authoritative than others. Wuthnow notes that "The idea of shopping reflects the fact that American religion is shaped by the consumer culture to which all Americans are exposed from early childhood. Shopping connotes making choices and having the freedom to choose according to one's personal tastes and needs."³

Second, inclusivist Christians do not accept religious diversity as much as spiritual shoppers, but they do believe that there is truth in other religions and that Christians have much to learn about relating to God and one another from adherents of other religions. According to Wuthnow, "Inclusive Christianity is difficult—difficult to understand and difficult to practice—because it involves achieving a deli-

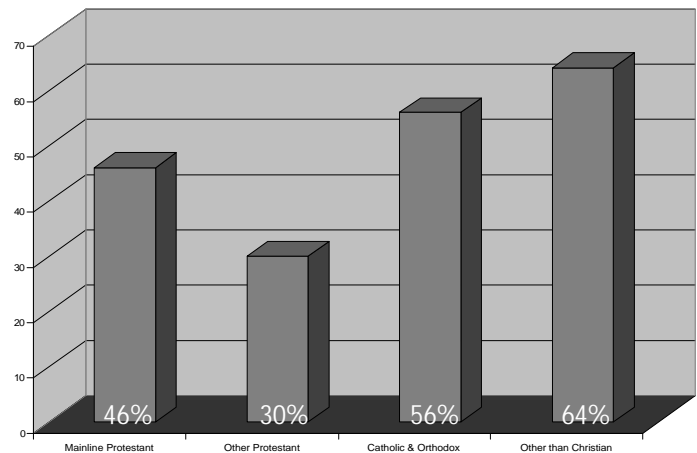
cate balance between a commitment to a radically particular way of relating to God and an ability to grapple sympathetically, even appreciatively, with the fact that a large part of the world's population does not relate to God this way at all.... Inclusive Christians have somehow managed to retain their commitment to Christianity but apparently do not believe in the more exclusionary interpretations that have characterized Christianity in the past."⁴

Finally, Wuthnow discusses the importance of understanding exclusivist Christians, who hold that Christianity is superior to other religions and that Jesus is humanity's only link to God. American Christians who hold exclusivist views typically uphold the civil rights of non-Christians to worship freely and believe that conversion should never happen through coercion. In light of religious diversity, spiritual shoppers, inclusivist Christians and exclusivist Christians all face different sets of contradictions and competing views. Each of these groups navigates the tensions caused by the demographic fact of religious diversity in different ways and arrives at very different conclusions.

Percent of Congregations Involved in Interfaith Worship, Past 12 Months⁵



Percent of Congregations Involved in Interfaith Community Service, Past 12 Months



1. Adapted from Arthur Magida, *How to Be a Perfect Stranger: A Guide to Etiquette in Other People's Religious Ceremonies* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1996). See also *Sociation Today*, "Religious Choices and Preferences: North Carolina's Baskin Robbins Effect?" www.ncsociology.org/sociationtoday/v21/religion.htm.

2. Adapted from Magida. See also Islamic Valley, "Mosques in NC," <http://islamicvalley.com/prod/entitySearch.php/t/09L/s/nc>.

3. Robert Wuthnow, *America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 107.

4. *Ibid*, 132-133.

5. *Faith Communities Today*, "Interfaith Worship and Interfaith Cooperation Among Congregations Has Increased Significantly," <http://fact.hartsem.edu/fact2006news.html>.

'PLEASE COME TO US WITHOUT DELAY' MEDICAL CARE FOR HIV/AIDS PATIENTS

FOURTH SUNDAY IN EASTER, YEAR C

Lectionary Texts: Acts 9:36-43 Psalm 23 Revelation 7:9-17 John 10:22-30

Focus Text: Acts 9:36-43

³⁶Now in Joppa there was a disciple whose name was Tabitha, which in Greek is Dorcas. She was devoted to good works and acts of charity. ³⁷At that time she became ill and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in a room upstairs. ³⁸Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, who heard that Peter was there, sent two men to him with the request, "Please come to us without delay." ³⁹So Peter got up and went with them; and when he arrived, they took him to the room upstairs. All the widows stood beside him, weeping and showing tunics and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was with them. ⁴⁰Peter put all of them outside, and then he knelt down and prayed. He turned to the body and said, "Tabitha, get up." Then she opened her eyes, and seeing Peter, she sat up. ⁴¹He gave her his hand and helped her up. Then calling the saints and widows, he showed her to be alive. ⁴²This became known throughout Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. ⁴³Meanwhile he stayed in Joppa for some time with a certain Simon, a tanner.

NRSV

ADDITIONAL TEXTS

I am utterly spent and crushed; I groan because of the tumult of my heart. O LORD, all my longing is known to you; my sighing is not hidden from you. My heart throbs, my strength fails me; as for the light of my eyes -- it also has gone from me. My friends and companions stand aloof from my affliction, and my neighbors stand far off. Those who seek my life lay their snares; those who seek to hurt me speak of ruin, and meditate treachery all day long. But I am like the deaf, I do not hear; like the mute, who cannot speak. Truly, I am like one who does not hear, and in whose mouth is no retort. But it is for you, O LORD, that I wait; it is you, O LORD my God, who will answer.

Psalm 38:8-15

For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces he was despised, and we held him of no account. Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities.

Isaiah 53:2-5a

Then Jesus called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal. He said to them, "Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money -- not even an extra tunic. Whatever house you enter, stay there, and leave from there. Wherever they do not welcome you, as you are leaving that town shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them." They departed and went through the villages, bringing the good news and curing diseases everywhere.

Luke 9:1-6

SCRIPTURE COMMENTARY

BY REV. CAROLYN MCCLENDON
DIRECTOR, ALLIANCE OF AIDS SERVICES,
RALEIGH

The focus of the text for this Sunday follows the preceding text of Peter healing Aeneas (9:32-34) and serves as a reminder of the continuing ministry of Christ, as demonstrated by the apostle. Likewise, this story reminds us of Jesus raising the daughter of Jarius in Luke 8:41-56 and the healing of the paralytic in Luke 5:18-26.

In this passage, Tabitha, a charitable widow and one of the disciples known throughout the area for her understanding, compassion and care for other widows, has died. Peter is summoned by members of the grieving community with the request to “please come to us without delay.” The purpose of summoning Peter is not identified: whether he is called to bring Tabitha back to life or to be visibly present for those left hurting and grieving is unknown. Yet, regardless of the reason why Peter is summoned, scripture tells us that Peter was summoned: “Please come to us without delay” (NRSV); “do not delay to come to us” (NAS), and “please don’t waste a second getting over here” (The Cotton Patch Version of Luke and Acts), all indicate the seriousness of the situation. In response, “Peter arose and went with them” (NAS); and, “immediately, Peter went off with them.” (The New English Bible). Without question or apparent concern, Peter seems to show no hesitation in going when Tabitha’s friends approach him with the request. The depth of the crisis is immediately apparent and Peter cares and responds. As such, he demonstrates that the church also cares and more importantly, that God cares. Time is of the essence.

In the story of Tabitha, we are given a model of Christian charity to the marginalized in society. We know from scripture (Luke 20:47) that orphans and widows were the economically vulnerable at the time. There was no government safety net to ‘catch them’ or to respond to their need. The immediate response of Peter to this hurting community – to ‘come quickly’ – demonstrates the care and compassion of a loving God toward the plight of the weak and vulnerable. Tabitha is restored to life and to the work of the community which depended on her.

Today, North Carolinians living with HIV/AIDS represent some of the most economically vulnerable in our community. Many of these individuals, because of their economic status, struggle daily to secure the medications needed to help them continue to live with the virus that was once considered a death sentence. Modern-day drug therapies available for persons who are sick can assist persons back into life and better health. However, state laws, such as many here in North Carolina, limit the amount of medical reimbursements that patients can receive; as a result, hundreds of individuals living with HIV/AIDS do not have access to the drugs that would extend and enhance their lives. For many persons whose annual income exceeds 125% of the federal poverty level, access to a healthier life is denied, and death is certain.

The story of Tabitha and the action of Peter remind us that God is shepherd of the world, the protector of the vulnerable, the advocate for the oppressed and the ever-present help in times of sorrow and joy. Like Peter, we are called to ‘come quickly without delay’, to respond to the needs of persons in our communities living without adequate health care, to be prophetic in denouncing North Carolina laws that limit a better life for those infected with HIV/AIDS, and to offer new life and health to all of God’s children. In this way, we all have the power to raise people from the dead.

PASTORAL REFLECTION

BY REV. CAROLYN MCCLENDON

In the past twenty-five years, the face of the AIDS epidemic in this country has shifted dramatically. Initially, gay white men were most identified with the epidemic. Today, the reality is that HIV looks like all of us – regardless of race, gender, age, sexual orientation, or faith tradition. The epidemic is growing most rapidly, however, among minorities who have historically experienced a higher risk for poverty, lack of health insurance, co-morbidity, and disenfranchisement from the health care system. The result is a growing number of individuals living with HIV disease who are living at or below the federal poverty level and who have limited or no access to life-saving, life-extending medications.

In a state where monies for medications and other drug therapies are limited, many of the more than 28,000 North Carolinians living with HIV/AIDS are summoning the church to “please come to us without delay;” i.e., “our very lives depend upon it!” People are dying for the opportunity to live better lives afforded by access and use of medications, yet because of state government legislation, many are often denied access because they make too much money and are over the designated income limit.

Acts tells us how God’s community, the church, reached out with compassion to the world around it, to the life that God created among its members. As people of faith, as the church, all of us are called to convey hope and transformative love to all persons who are infected with and affected by HIV/AIDS.

For many HIV+ persons, however, hope is in short supply. The limitation of life-saving and life-transforming health care places individuals at risk for other health concerns, as well as impacting other areas of their lives. God requires God's people to be a reflection of God's love, mercy, justice and hope. As such, the church must be a radical community, acting out on behalf of the God of love and justice for all of God's people. The stakes are much too high for the church to be anything less.

Throughout scripture, both through direction and by the example of Christ, emphasis has been given to caring for and responding to the needs of the poor and excluded ones amongst us. In the story of Tabitha, Luke offers a model of Christian charity to the marginalized in society. Additionally, Peter's immediate response to the request of Tabitha's friends to not "waste a second getting over here" (The Cotton Patch Version of Luke and Acts) represents the swiftness of God to hear and respond out of love and compassion to the needs of God's children. Peter's actions show his total dependence on God, while reminding us that we are not alone in responding to the needs of people or to the injustices and wrongs in society.

In the early days of HIV/AIDS, the cry of persons living with this disease was for presence and compassion in their living and for peace and comfort in dying. Life-saving, life-enhancing medications were practically non-existent, fear and judgment ran rampant and horrific, devastating death was inevitable and came too quickly for too many.

As a denominational employee in Louisiana during those days, I witnessed the rapid loss of life and the sudden impact this disease had on families, friends and neighbors in the inner-city community where I ministered. With sadness, anger and disbelief, I listened as people of faith, including denominational leadership, debated and discussed, sanctioned and sentenced, and directed and relegated persons living with HIV/AIDS to places of right and wrong and good and bad – all in the name of God! As a result of responding to the needs of persons living with and affected by this deadly, life-altering disease, ministry positions were ended. A beacon of hope and help to the hurting in the inner city was eliminated.

As people of faith, it is imperative to respond to the injustices many of God's children experience. We must be certain that as we respond and advocate for improved health care access for persons living with HIV/AIDS, that resources for other needs are not lessened or eliminated. In essence, we must be certain that holistic care is available for all. Increased access for medical care for HIV+ persons should not lessen or eliminate current existing resources available to provide food for the hungry, housing for the homeless, mental health services and other programs to the hurting.

God requires God's people to be a reflection of God's love, mercy, justice and hope. Likewise, as people of faith, we are called into community with other believers who serve one another and serve their neighbors. The direction and example of Jesus is simply put: as people of God, we are to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." (Luke 10:27 NAS). God requires us to be faithful and to be loving and caring to our neighbors as well. The question then becomes, "Who is our neighbor?" Jesus answers that question in the parable of the Good Samaritan. Our neighbor is anyone that we find in need of spiritual, physical or emotional help. This was evident in Jesus' ministry here on earth. Jesus spent most of his life and ministry in the worst parts of the cities, associating with the marginalized, the weak and the outcast of the society. He ministered to those who had been condemned by society, and he cared for those who had been ostracized and otherwise forgotten. Jesus was a refuge for the alien, hope for the afflicted, and a source of comfort for the hurting. He was the reflection of God's love, mercy, justice and hope. As people of faith, as The Church, we can do no less than follow the example of a loving, caring and compassionate God.

God's infected and affected children continue to plead for people of faith to "come without delay" – to be the hand, the face, the heart and the touch of God to the lonely, the stigmatized and the discriminated. Whether for presence and compassion or for advocacy for medical access, the cry to the church is the same, "Please come to us without delay." May it be so!

WORSHIP AID – 'PLEASE COME TO US WITHOUT DELAY'

RESPONSIVE READING

God of health and wholeness, we thank you that you care about each of us— children, youth, young adults, those of us who are older. We thank you that you desire abundant life for all of Creation.

Lord, from the midst of our perceived abundance, plunge us deep into a sense of sadness at the pain of our sisters and brothers inflicted by war, prejudice, injustice, and indifference. Help us to learn again to cry as children until our tears baptize us into people who touch with care those we now touch in prayer. Today we especially remember in prayer the millions who have been robbed of health and wholeness because of HIV/AIDS.

God, we pray for those in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean. We pray for those in the U.S., North Carolina, and around the world. We pray that all those who endure the physical effects and stigma of HIV/AIDS may feel your loving and welcoming arms and sense our compassion, concern and solidarity as well.

We pray for those who are ill;

We pray for those who are dying;

We pray for mothers lamenting the illness of babies;
 We pray for children who have been left alone to become heads of families;
 We pray for partners watching a loved one slowly die;
 We pray for grandparents who now have young children to care for.
 We pray for those who are wrestling with ways to confront the stereotypes, stigma and prejudices fostered by culture and religion. Give them strength.
 We remember also and give thanks for those who are developing programs of prevention, education and advocacy. May their efforts be creative and effective and may we learn to be creative and effective from them.
 Help us, O God, to continue to pray, but also to act so that the conditions that foster HIV/AIDS will be changed.
 Help us, O God, to hear the cries of those who are pleading with us, "Please come to us without delay."
 Help us to respond faithfully like Peter and the other disciples, who without hesitation offered hands of healing and comfort to the sick and the dying.
 Help us to encourage our government's participation in acts of awareness and generosity and help us to call the pharmaceutical industry into acts of solidarity and compassion as well.
 Help us to find ways to contribute to the efforts of organizations in North Carolina and of partner churches to address HIV/AIDS.
 We ask these things in the name of Jesus, our Savior, brother and friend. Amen.

(Adapted from "Prayers of the People," The United Church of Canada, www.united-church.ca/beads/pdf/studyguide/3.pdf)

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

O God, we confess our sin in the midst of HIV and AIDS.
 We confess our fear, our selective compassion, and our conditional love.
 We have denied and avoided sisters and brothers, families and friends.
 We have become disconnected from our neighbors.
 We have become disconnected from our own sexuality.
 And therefore, we have become disconnected from you, O God.
 We have removed them from our midst to hospitals.
 Forgive us, O God.
 Bring us back to the center of your presence where you hold all who call upon your name.
 Help us to break the silence.
 Help us to reach out to restore the connections
 With all whom you love.
 We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

(From "World AIDS Day Worship Resources," www.presbyterian.ca/pwsd/hiv aids/sunday2.html)

SUGGESTED HYMNS

✓ O Christ, The Healer	UMH 265/PH 380/CH 503/NCH 175
✓ Lord, You Give the Great Commission	TH 528/MW 617/CH 459/UMH 584/ PH 429/GA 456
✓ We Meet You, O Christ	PH 311/CH 183/UMH 257
✓ We Cannot Measure How You Heal	GA 575
✓ Help Us Accept Each Other	AM 588/NCH 388/CH 487/PH 358/ UMH 560

w Hymnal Legend w
† UMH – United Methodist
† GA—Gather Hymnal (Roman Catholic)
† PH – Presbyterian Hymnal
† TH – The Hymnal 1982 (Episcopal)
† MW – Moravian Book of Worship
† AM – African Methodist Episcopal
† CH—Chalice Hymnal (Disciples of Christ)
† NCH—New Century Hymnal (UCC)

ADDITIONAL PRAYERS

Prayer and Reflection for Social and Economic Justice in the HIV/AIDS Era

God of liberation and justice, defender of the poor and marginalized, we seek Your guidance.
 Give us the vision and the confidence to become prophets when resources are looted.
 Let us hear the cry of the widows. Let us feed the orphans. Let us denounce injustice by the powerful.
 May we demand drugs for the sick. May we demand care for the abandoned.
 May we denounce wastefulness by the affluent. Forgive our silence. Forgive our complicity.

In Your mercy forgive our condemnation of people living with HIV/AIDS.
Forgive us when we deal lightly with the wounds of Your people.
Forgive the times when we have offered artificial solutions. Empower us to tackle corrupt systems.
Make us instruments of Your peace. Make us agents of Your transformation.
In the strong name of Christ we pray,
Amen.

(From Church World Service, "Offering of Prayers," www.nccusa.org/misioneducation/aids/document/HIV_GeneralPrayers.pdf)

AIDS and the Power of God's Goodness and Grace: A Responsive Reading

We gather in the name of the crucified and risen Christ,
Over whom death had no power and through whom there is life eternal.
We gather as a remembering and a caring community,
A community of faith and hope united by God's love.
We come to give thanks for those we love,
Those who have cared for us. Those who have brought joy to our lives.
Those we love and pray to be reunited with when the time is right.

God calls to us:

To care for one another, to be compassionate and merciful.
We celebrate God's goodness and grace,
In the love we give, receive and remember.
We experience God's goodness and grace
Through arms that embrace us when we are filled with fear.
We are the creation of one Creator God.
The child who cries is every child. The woman weakened and tired is every mother, wife, sister, daughter.
The man is every father, husband, son and brother.
AIDS leaves gaping wounds in the lives of those who have lost the ones they love the most.
God, give us the strength and courage to be present in the midst of loss.
Across the infinity of space and time a common heart beats in every breast,
Forbearing pain and clinging to hope we are brought to a deeper understanding of our common humanity.
We are a family of nations united by our common priceless humanity.
AIDS is a worldwide crisis in the midst of which there is no "we" and "they."
We confess that we are all affected,
When one of God's creation suffers we all suffer.
We know Jesus identifies with all who suffer;
Through our faith in Him, healing and wholeness take place.
In AIDS ministry there is giving and receiving;
Like a chalice filled and drained and filled again, we receive Christ and have Christ to give.
When we care for a person who has AIDS we show that we love Christ;
To touch, to bathe, to feed, to clothe the one who is ill is to do this unto Christ Jesus.
Today we are called to be a joyful, thankful people,
Upheld by God's goodness and grace which has the power to disarm AIDS.

In thankfulness we commit ourselves to being a caring, justice-seeking, nurturing community.
We covenant together in commitment to God and to one another.
We will be a caring community;
We welcome into our community and our church all persons whose lives have been touched by HIV and AIDS.
We say to all: "You are welcome here."
We will be a justice-seeking community;
We will oppose all forms of discrimination against persons with HIV and AIDS. We support the right of all persons with HIV and AIDS to housing, employment, services, transportation, accommodations and health care.
We will be a nurturing community;
We will care for one another and love one another. We will pray for God's creation.
We will be Christ's presence in each other's lives. We will be witnesses to God's unconditional love.
Through Christ's example we are made finer, gentler, stronger;
Through Christ, the Savior, and the power of God's goodness and grace we are set free to love, to seek justice, to become all God intends us to be. Amen.

ADDITIONAL HELPS

• QUOTES •

I have learned more about love, selflessness and human understanding from the people I have met in this great adventure in the world of AIDS than I ever did in the cutthroat, competitive world in which I spent my life.

Anthony Perkins

From the point of view of the pharmaceutical industry, the AIDS problem has already been solved. After all, we already have a drug which can be sold at the incredible price of \$8,000 an annual dose, and which has the added virtue of not diminishing the market by actually curing anyone.

Barbara Ehrenreich

Those who suffer from AIDS deserve better than to be branded as sinners outside our concern and to be forced to become some kind of latter-day lepers.

Theodore Bikel

AIDS and malaria and TB are national security issues. A worldwide program to get a start on dealing with these issues would cost about \$25 billion.

Jared Diamond

Following Christ's example closely, the Church has always considered the care of infirm people to be an integral part of its mission. I therefore encourage the many initiatives underway to overcome this sickness, especially by church communities, and I feel close to people with AIDS and their families, invoking upon them the Lord's help and comfort.

Pope Benedict XVI

• PERSONAL VIGNETTE •

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AND COUNTING...

BY JOHN PAUL WOMBLE

June 5, 2006 marked the 25th anniversary of the first reported cases of AIDS.

My father, John Sidney Womble was a Baptist minister, a loving and good father as well as a gay man. After he and my mother divorced he moved to San Diego, California. I stayed in North Carolina and continued to be raised a Southern boy. When I was 18 years old, I learned that my father was HIV positive. This man who was my hero, close friend and mentor was very, very sick. This man who believed his limits – and mine – were only confined by our ability to persevere, encountered the first thing in his life that he could not master or overcome – AIDS. He developed PML, a rare and horrific opportunistic infection that subsequently caused him to go partially blind and lose his ability to “appear” well. His worst fears were being realized – all of them: he was alone, sick, “weak” and dying. And the world around him thought by being gay he was perverted and “deserved” what he got. So, rather than live in pain with judgment abounding, he checked in to a hotel in Southern California, drank a bottle of Jack Daniels, took an overdose of sleeping pills and left a note that said, “Son – Let the official story be heart attack, sweet peace and goodnight!” He was 43 and I was 22.

Now you might think the story ends there, but that would be just to dad blamed easy....

I came out of the closet to my dad and my family years before his death, when I was sixteen years old. And my plight, as it were, was made exponentially easier by the path my father had blazed. I was not petrified of being gay nor hindered by a fear of touching or loving someone with AIDS. I was in fact probably overconfident – in some ways – and not afraid enough in others.

Now, don't get me wrong...losing my father and mentor also meant losing someone who might instill reasonable confidence and a steady hand in my development as a young man. Unfortunately somewhere between the ripe old age of 23 and 25, I managed to follow a little too closely in my dad's footsteps and I myself became infected with HIV. Like father like son, huh.

I had some great teachers and learned from the best, but my dad was in a class by himself! What did I learn?

Speak the facts;

Speak the truth;

And stand up in the arena – we are in the battle for our lives!

So, today in this arena let me say: I am 38 years old and have been HIV positive thirteen years. I have worked in the field of HIV/AIDS for many years and am now the Director of Development and Public Affairs for the largest AIDS service organization in North Carolina. And I am still in the fight of my life, for your life and the world as a whole...

25 years later, I find myself asking two questions: how can we endure in the face of this much loss, this much disease, this much pure grief? And what kind of future am I really trying to create?

In some ways the question of endurance is the easy part. I don't have a choice; we don't have a choice. We know that AIDS won't go away if we ignore it—we've already tried that, and the resulting death and destruction is the likes of which we never could have imagined. We cannot, we must not, be silent about AIDS. 25 years ago a small and frankly disliked group of young men in the US began to sicken and then to die, very quickly. But silence and lack of concern didn't make AIDS go away; silence has cost us the lives of 30 million unique souls. We must not stay silent. I will look to a future where AIDS does not exist. Until that day – until the cure – may we remember those lost, those living and those we must protect – and may God bless you AND be with us always.

• CONTACTS AND OTHER RESOURCES •

- W <http://aas-c.org/aasc/organization.html>—Alliance of AIDS Services Carolina serves the needs of HIV/AIDS patients in the Triangle area through compassionate and non-judgmental care, prevention, education and advocacy. In partnership with supporting and partnering faith communities, the Faith Ministries Program of AASC supports the Alliance mission in three ways: (1) by developing, training, and coordinating faith-based Care Teams, (2) by providing spiritual care and counseling to persons living with HIV/AIDS, their families, Care Teams and other care givers; and (3) by providing faith-based HIV/STD education to faith communities throughout the Triangle. This Alliance was formed by the merger of three groups, one of which was TRAIN (Triangle AIDS Interfaith Network), a one-time affiliate of the NC Council of Churches.
- W www.metrolinaaidsproject.org—Metrolina AIDS Project actively serves the Charlotte area by to improving the lives of individuals and families affected by HIV/AIDS and through services, education, and client advocacy, strives to prevent further spread of this disease. Founded in 1985, MAP is the Charlotte region's leading provider of comprehensive case management, support services, prevention education and direct financial assistance to people living with HIV/AIDS.
- W www.unaids.org/en—The Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS offers comprehensive worldwide data on the HIV/AIDS pandemic. This multinational body brings together the efforts and resources of ten other UN organizations, including UNICEF and the World Health Organization, to the global response to AIDS.
- W www.cdc.gov/hiv—The Center for Disease Control (CDC), a national health organization, seeks to prevent HIV infection and reduce the incidence of HIV-related illness and death, in collaboration with community, state, national, and international partners. The CDC's programs work to improve treatment, care, and support for persons living with HIV and to help build capacity and infrastructure to address the HIV/AIDS pandemic. They offer detailed and comprehensive statistics and resources on HIV/AIDS both nationally and locally.
- W www.unctv.org/aids/index.html— "The New Age of HIV/AIDS" is a recent program series produced by UNC-TV focusing on the state of the disease in North Carolina. The website includes transcripts, interviews, video playlists and other resources for learning about HIV/AIDS.
- W www.projectinform.org—Project Inform is a national, nonprofit, community-based organization working to end the AIDS epidemic. Its mission is to: Inform people living with HIV, their caregivers, and their healthcare and service providers about the treatment and monitoring of HIV disease; advocate to facilitate research towards a cure and appropriate policies, legislation and funding for HIV research, treatment and care; and inspire people to make informed

KEY FACTS

DID YOU KNOW?

- q In North Carolina, over 26,000 people are currently living with HIV/AIDS.¹
- q The infection rate is growing in many parts of the state, particularly among African-Americans. African-Americans are 22 percent of the state's population, but 71 percent of the state's HIV/AIDS cases.²
- q The annual death rate for African-Americans is 21.4 percent, compared with only 4.4 percent for Hispanics/Latinos, 4.0 percent for Native Americans and just 1.5 percent for whites. In other words, an African-American with HIV/AIDS is 14 times more likely than a white person to die from the disease this year.³
- q Worldwide, around 40 million people were living with HIV/AIDS in 2005. For that year, an estimated 4 million people became newly infected and about 3 million died from the disease. In the U.S., over 1 million people are currently living with HIV/AIDS, with about 40,000 people being newly infected each year.⁴
- q Highly active antiretroviral therapy (HAART), first introduced in 1996 and comprised of various drug "cocktails," has proven effective at both increasing the quality of life and prolonging the lives of those diagnosed with HIV/AIDS. HAART, however, remains very expensive, with average yearly costs ranging from \$8,000 to \$10,000 or more. Access to drugs is the most important health variable once an individual has been diagnosed with HIV/AIDS.⁵
- q Prior to July 2006, North Carolina had the most restrictive policy for the AIDS Drug Assistance Program (ADAP) in the nation. North Carolina provided assistance for life-saving AIDS drugs only to those who lived within 125 percent of the federal poverty guidelines (\$20,000 for a family of four, \$13,200 for a family of two). This means, for example, that a single mother with one child who earned \$16,600 per year (about \$8/hour) was ineligible to receive ADAP at the same time that those life-giving drugs cost more than her entire annual income. Hundreds were placed on waiting lists to receive medication, and many North Carolinians became ill and died as the state refused to provide access to life-saving drugs to those in poverty.⁶
- q Due to the extensive advocacy efforts of grassroots organizations on behalf of North Carolina's HIV/AIDS population, however, the 2006-2007 fiscal year budget includes language which allows the state to raise the guidelines and provide ADAP to those living within 250 percent of the federal poverty guidelines. While this is an important step, there is still no guarantee that everyone who falls in this income range will receive ADAP, since the state has clearly indicated that only those living within 125 percent will receive priority status. The North Carolina General Assembly explicitly did not add any more state money. Limited federal funding means that there is often a waiting list to receive ADAP, and people on the waiting list are forced to choose between spending on medications or other necessities.⁷
- q Every state that borders North Carolina continues to provide access to HAART medication to people who live within 300 percent of federal poverty guidelines.⁸

1. NC Policy Watch, "The Raging, but Ignored Epidemic," www.ncpolicywatch.com/cms/?p=4020.

2. State Center for Health Statistics and the Office of Minority Health and Health Disparities, "Racial and Ethnic Differences in Health in North Carolina: 2004 Update," www.schs.state.nc.us/SCHS/pdf/RaceEthnicRpt.pdf.

3. Ibid.

4. UNAIDS, "Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic, 2006," http://data.unaids.org/pub/GlobalReport/2006/2006_GR-ExecutiveSummary_en.pdf.

5. See "Ten Years of HAART HIV/AIDS Treatment" by Matt Pueschel in US Medicine: The Voice of Federal Medicine, <http://www.usmedicine.com/dailyNews.cfm?dailyID=285>. See also "Study Shows AIDS Drugs Cost Effective, Care Underfunded," www.biologynews.net/archives/2006/02/28/study_shows_aids_drugs_costeffective_care_underfunded.html.

6. The Access Project, "North Carolina ADAP Contact and Eligibility," www.atdn.org/access/states/nc/nc.html. See also NC Policy Watch, "State Lawmakers Need to Face Up to the Shame," www.ncpolicywatch.com/cms/?p=4020.

7. North Carolina General Assembly, "Budget Fiscal Year 2006-2007," www.ncleg.net/Sessions/2005/Bills/Senate/PDF/S1741v8.pdf.

'PEACE I LEAVE WITH YOU' WAR & CONFLICTS

PENTECOST SUNDAY, YEAR C

Lectionary Texts: Gen 11:1-9 Psalm 104:24-34, 35b John 14:8-17, 25-27 Acts 2:1-21 Ro 8:14-17

Focus Text: John 14:8-17, 25-27

⁸ Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." ⁹ Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?" ¹⁰ Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. ¹¹ Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves. ¹² Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. ¹³ I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it. ¹⁵ If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you for ever. ¹⁷ This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees [the Spirit] nor knows [the Spirit]. You know [the Spirit], because [the Spirit] abides with you, and [the Spirit] will be in you."

²⁵ "I have said these things to you while I am still with you. ²⁶ But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. ²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid."

NRSV

ADDITIONAL TEXTS

The LORD looks down from heaven; [the LORD] sees all humankind. From where [the LORD] sits enthroned [the LORD] watches all the inhabitants of the earth— [the One] who fashions the hearts of them all, and observes all their deeds. A king is not saved by his great army; a warrior is not delivered by his great strength. The war horse is a vain hope for victory, and by its great might it cannot save... Our soul waits for the LORD; [the LORD] is our help and shield. Our heart is glad in [the LORD], because we trust in [the LORD's] holy name. Let your steadfast love, O LORD, be upon us, even as we hope in you.

Psalm 33:13-17, 20-22

In my distress I cry to the LORD, that [the LORD] may answer me: "Deliver me, O LORD, from lying lips, from a deceitful tongue... Woe is me, that I am an alien in Meshech, that I must live among the tents of Kedar. Too long have I had my dwelling among those who hate peace. I am for peace; but when I speak, they are for war."

Psalm 120:1-2, 5-7

Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you? You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder. And you covet something and cannot obtain it; so you engage in disputes and conflicts. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, in order to spend what you get on your pleasures.

James 4:1-3

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Matthew 5:9

SCRIPTURE COMMENTARY

BY FATHER DAVID MCBRIAR, O.F.M.
ECUMENICAL OFFICER, DIOCESE OF RALEIGH

Lectionary Texts for This Week:

Genesis 11:1-9

Robert Alter, in his endearing and enduring work, *The Five Books of Moses* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004), identifies the Tower of Babel as a "monotheistic fable." (p 58) The tale has often been interpreted as an attempt to scale the heights of heaven. But according to Alter, the story is against the overwhelming confidence of humanity in its own power, in this case, the power of its technology. As in the Garden of Eden, we want to "be like God," dissatisfied with our creatureliness. Confusion and chaos result in this struggle for power.

Psalm 104:24-34, 35b

This is a magnificent hymn praising God's creation, wisdom and power. Again, God is the center of this hymn, not man/woman. Our gaze is toward God. The marvels of creation stir the psalmist's rhapsody on God's goodness. Just as God's spirit (30) is the source of all life in nature, so is God's Holy Spirit the source of all supernatural life. In the *sensus plenior*, this "Holy Spirit" has been applied by tradition to the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity. It is the Holy Spirit Jesus promised to send his disciples.

John 14:8-17, 25-27 (Focus Text)

Chapters 14-17 in John's gospel contain the body of Jesus' Last Discourse. Raymond Brown, in his *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1996, pp. 352-358) says that this discourse is comparable to Matthew's Sermon on the Mount. The Johannine Jesus is still in the world and no longer in the world. He seeks to console those he must leave. But, at the same time, he wants to encourage them, much as a parent to his or her children when the time for leaving arrives. It is here where Jesus identifies the one who will be "alongside them." It is the Paraclete. The Paraclete dwells in all who love Jesus and keep his commandments and is with them forever. (353) The Paraclete is in an adversarial relationship to the world because what the Paraclete inspires is peace, whereas the world fosters discord.

Acts 2:1-21

Acts uses the imagery of Moses on the mountaintop with its mighty wind and tongues of fire to paint the picture of the new Sinai. This Pentecost is the renewal of God's covenant. But now there are nationalities that will receive the covenant as a result of the fearless evangelizing of the disciples of Jesus. Even the Gentiles will be made God's people. This Pentecost is more momentous than Sinai. To be noted for our purposes is the oneness of the nations. No one nation has priority, rather all have been gifted and all in turn must recognize that giftedness.

Romans 8:14-17

Paul calls us to live, not according to the flesh but according to the spirit. Here again, the dichotomy is made between this world and the Kingdom, the peace that Jesus brings and the peace the world cannot bring. Living according to the spirit of Jesus is to fulfill our adopted status as God's children. This is what God has predestined and it is our claim on God's mercy and love.

PASTORAL REFLECTION

BY FATHER DAVID MCBRIAR, O.F.M.

As a Franciscan friar, surely you will indulge me if I begin this reflection with a legend from *The Little Flowers of Saint Francis of Assisi*. It's the story, "How St. Francis Taught the People of Gubbio to Feed their Wolf," a strangely humorous account with layer upon layer of meaning.

In a nutshell, the people of a little Italian town named Gubbio have a problem. The bloody remains of some of their townsfolk start showing up on the streets of their beautiful city when people awake in the morning. Since the citizens of Gubbio are a very proud people, they are convinced that a stranger passing through must be responsible for the terrible crime. Nevertheless, they begin to lock their doors at night. When more deaths follow, the same denial: no one in Gubbio could be responsible for such a thing. And then, someone sees a wolf wandering the streets one night after everyone has retired. The people realize that a wolf is living in the dark woods on one side of their fair city. Of course, this could not be their wolf because they never asked this wolf to come to Gubbio. Immediately, they begin to find ways to dispatch this creature.

After a number of futile attempts, the people get desperate enough to approach the holy man of Assisi who has a reputation for being able "to talk to animals." St. Francis "speaks" to the wolf and gives the people what appears to be some strange and not entirely welcome advice. He tells the people of Gubbio that they must "feed" their wolf. At first, the people are not impressed with this suggestion and begin to wonder why they ever approached the holy man in the first place. But then, something miraculous happens. Bit by bit, people begin to leave food out for the wolf as he prowls the streets of their town.

The violent deaths cease, and it is not long before every man, woman and child has learned how to "feed their wolf." As a result, the people of Gubbio are transformed. They become more easy-going, less arrogant human beings.

Is this just a sweet legend that makes us smile, made more for Disney than for real life? Or, is the story a life-mirroring parable? The people of Gubbio are haughty folk who blame their troubles on strangers, refusing to acknowledge that the problem is their own. Is the wolf their way of life? Does everyone have a hungry wolf inside?

What's yours? What needs to be changed, healed, and tamed in your life? What's ours? What needs to be healed in our nation's life? What is its "wolf"? What about your community? Your city? Is the invitation of St. Francis the invitation to everyone with a wolf inside? Perhaps his invitation is to first acknowledge what you fear. In this way, perhaps you may come to a new and healthier understanding of yourself, of your country, of your church, and of your community. Maybe it is when we acknowledge the enemy, even feed him or her, that it is then that we tame the enemy.

As I write (August 10, 2006) war is raging in Iraq, Lebanon, Israel, Syria, and the Occupied Territories. Killing continues in Afghanistan and the Sudan, and the United States and Britain are on heightened alert for a terrorist attack. We are living in a society which believes that our safety can only be achieved through domination, or others will seek to dominate us first. The world is not at peace. Moreover, on the home front, our cities continue to be torn by racial and economic discrimination. Is a living wage possible? Is health care for all possible? These are human issues and as such they claim our individual and our communal response. If we are to fulfill our vocation as believers, as faith filled people, our churches and synagogues and mosques must ask: "What does the city need? How can we help?" We can't be paralyzed by the magnitude of the task.

One example of response is given by Tikkun, which means "reconciliation." The Tikkun community of Christians, Jews and Muslims ask, "Where is our strategy of generosity? Don't people have an enormous capacity for goodness and generosity? Can't we recognize the humanity of the other? Can't we repent and atone for the long history of insensitivity and cruelty to the other side?" What has proved unrealistic time and again – whether we are talking about the U.S. policy in Vietnam and Iraq or Israeli and Arab policies in the Middle East – is the fantasy that one more war will put an end to wars. The path to peace must be a path of peace. This is the belief, the hope, the challenge of Tikkun. Our well-being depends on the well-being of everyone else. This is not only the peace for which Jesus prayed, it is at the same time the path to that peace. There is within every man and woman the power for good. We Christians call this the Holy Spirit. This Spirit was poured out upon us at the creation of the world when the Creator breathed into us a soul, making us in the very image of the Creator. Jesus calls this "breath of God-life" the Holy Spirit. It is given to us, each of us and all of us. The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus, is our Consoler, our Advocate for peace. The world does not give us this peace, if by the "world" we mean the spirit of domination and power, the spirit of aggression and control.

Are we the new people of Gubbio, haughty folk who blame our troubles on strangers, refusing to acknowledge that the problem is ours? Has the wolf become our way of life? What needs to be changed, healed, and tamed in our own lives, our nation's life, or in our congregations? Is the invitation of St. Francis the invitation to everyone with a wolf inside? Perhaps his invitation is to first acknowledge what we fear. This may be the beginning of claiming that same Holy Spirit which is Jesus' spirit of peace and reconciliation.

WORSHIP AID – 'PEACE I LEAVE WITH YOU'

RESPONSIVE READING

Child 1: Do you come in peace?

All: What do you have to do with peace?

Child 2: Will there not be peace and security in my lifetime?

Child 1: Cries of fear are heard—terror, not peace.

All: We hoped for peace but no good has come, for a time of healing but there was only terror.

Child 2: The Lord is Peace.

Child 1: This is what the Lord says: "I will grant peace in the land, and you will lie down and no one will make you afraid."

All: We will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O Lord, make us dwell in safety.

Child 2: I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant. I will establish them and increase their numbers, and I will put my sanctuary among them forever.

All: We will submit to God and be at peace with God; in this way prosperity will come to us.

Child 1: My people will live in peaceful dwelling places, in secure homes, in undisturbed places of rest.

All: Better a dry crust with peace and quiet than a house full of feasting, with strife.

Child 2: For to us a child is born, to us a son is given. . . . And he will be called . . . Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end.

All: The punishment that brought us peace was upon him. Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to the people on whom God's favor rests.

Child 1: Christ came and preached peace to you: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

All: LORD, you establish peace for us; all that we have accomplished you have done for us.

Child 2: As God has sent me, I am sending you. Blessed are the peacemakers.

All: How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace.

Child 1: All your daughters and sons will be taught by the LORD, and great will be your children's peace.

Child 2: You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands. Mercy, peace and love be yours in abundance.

All: Amen.

(adapted from "Peace in the Home," Abuse Prevention Emphasis Day 2005, wm.gc.adventist.org/AbusePreventionEmphasisDay/2005%20Abuse%20Prevention%20Day/APED2005.htm)

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Spirit of God, forgive us. For two thousand years, we Christians have failed to live the Gospel message of Jesus Christ.

Instead of sharing with our sisters and brothers, instead of feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and healing the sick, we have stored up treasures and sent from our door the vulnerable, sick, hungry and homeless.

Instead of forgiving, we have sought vengeance, retribution, harsh punishment and death. We have asked the state to kill in our name.

Instead of fighting against injustice, we have dominated, discriminated and demeaned; we have benefited from the economic oppression of our neighbors.

Instead of loving our enemies, we have demonized them. Instead of peace, nonviolence and reconciliation, we Christians have unleashed in your name: violent crusades, slavery, the Holocaust, and nuclear war. We have killed through landmines, depleted uranium, bombing runs, smart weapons and economic sanctions.

We confess that we have neglected our prayer life and community building. We have lost our way and are not the people you called us to be. Accept our prayer and restore us. In your mercy, forgive us. Forgive us. Forgive us. Amen.

(edited, by Janet Chisholm, Vice Chair of Episcopal Peace Fellowship, from "Lenten Fast from Violence 2005," World Council of Churches, www2.wcc-coe.org/dov.nsf/0/88fedfe1d5295b9ec1256fd300352f8c?OpenDocument&TableRow=6.4)

SUGGESTED HYMNS

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| ✓ Let There Be Peace on Earth | GA 731/CH 677/UMH 431 |
| ✓ For the Healing of the Nations | CH 668/MW 685/GA 719/UMH 42/
NCH 576 |
| ✓ Comfort, Comfort You My People | PH 3/MW 264/NCH 101/LW 28/TH 67/
GA 326/CH 122 |
| ✓ Blest Be the Tie That Binds | AM 522/CM 359/BH 387/PH 438/
MW 680/LW 295/NCH 393/UMH 557/
CH 433 |

w Hymnal Legend w

- | |
|---|
| † UMH – United Methodist Hymnal |
| † PH – Presbyterian Hymnal |
| † TH – The Hymnal 1982 (Episcopal) |
| † MW – Moravian Book of Worship |
| † AM – African Methodist Episcopal |
| † CM – Christian Methodist Episcopal |
| † CH—Chalice Hymnal (Disciples of Christ) |
| † BH – Baptist Hymnal |
| † NCH—New Century Hymnal (UCC) |
| † GA—Gather Hymnal (Roman Catholic) |

ADDITIONAL PRAYERS

Prayer for Peace

O God, Creator of the universe, who extends your concern over every creature and guides the events of history to the goal of salvation, we acknowledge your strong love when you break the resistance of humanity. In a world torn by strife and discord, you make us ready for reconciliation. Renew for us the wonders of your mercy. Send forth your Spirit to work in the intimacy of hearts, that enemies may begin to dialogue, that adversaries may shake hands and peoples may encounter one another in harmony. May we all commit ourselves to the sincere search for true peace which will extinguish all arguments, for charity which overcomes hatred, for pardon which disarms revenge. In the name of Christ, Amen.

(adapted from Pope John Paul II, "Prayer for Peace," www.usccb.org/liturgy/prayersforpeace.shtml)

Where All Can Speak Gently and Truthfully

Loving God,

In the not so distant past, matters of war and peace have caused much division and pain in our churches.

Please guide us through our discussions about war, the draft, and conscientious objection.

Help each of us to be prayerfully open to your calling in our lives. Remind us to be in continuous prayer for one another so that we can support and respect one another even when we do not agree.

May our churches provide a rare sanctuary in our society where people seek to genuinely understand and love one another.

Help us to create a place of safety for differences of opinion. Let this be a place where all can speak gently and truthfully without fear of judgment and hate.

Teach us how to be united by your love even when we are not united in our opinions.

Amen.

(by Audrey Osborne Mazur, from "Lenten Fast from Violence 2005," World Council of Churches, www2.wcc-coe.org/dov.nsf/0/88fedfe1d5295b9ec1256fd300352f8c?OpenDocument&TableRow=6.4)

Prayer in Time of War

Eternal God, in whose will is our enduring peace, we find ourselves again in the wilderness of war. With hopes dashed on the rocks of failed diplomacy among nations filled with distrust and fear, we cry out to you for mercy.

With memories of a fragile peace now lost, we ask for courage to face the uncertainty of a world vulnerable to unimaginable death. God, in your mercy, save us.

Loving God, we confess our complicity in the misunderstanding and hostility which have brought us to this tragic hour. Forgive our callousness to the hurts of others and our contempt for the heritage that shapes their lives.

Hear the lament of our hearts for anything and everything worthy of peace which we have neglected on the road to war. God, in your mercy, forgive us.

Righteous God, in whose sacred justice both mercy and truth embrace, forbid that we fail to see in all persons, including those we now call our enemy, the grandeur of your image and likeness.

Across the chasm of our separation, open our eyes to our common humanity pronounced good by your voice at the dawn of creation. God, in your mercy, reconcile your people.

Saving God, sustain us in the things necessary for a just peace in the aftermath of this conflagration. Deliver us and all others from the use of wanton weapons of wrath which promise only to poison the earth and fan the expanding fires of human hatred.

Deliver us from the temptation to imitate what we say we deplore and from cowardice to embody the costly freedom we seek to defend. God, in your mercy, save us from the enemy within our hearts.

Healing God, guardian of those in harm's way, hold close our sons and daughters who serve our nation in this conflict fraught with contradiction. Return them soon and safely to us and the land of their hopes and dreams.

In obedience to your Son, Jesus Christ, we pray as well for those who are at enmity with us in this struggle and who are sons and daughters beloved in their own land. Return them soon and safely to their families and the land of their hopes and dreams. God, in your mercy, hasten the end of this war.

Eternal God, One in the communion of the Holy Trinity, by the power of your Holy Spirit transform your world into the global family you created us to be.

We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, whose promise we remember in faith: "Peace I leave with you: my peace I give to you. I do not give as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not let them be afraid." Amen.

(from "A Service for Peace In a Time of War," United Church of Christ, www.ucc.org/worship/ways/peaceliturgy.pdf)

ADDITIONAL HELPS

• QUOTES •

It is easier to fight for one's principles than to live up to them.

Alfred Adler

Peace is the work of justice indirectly, in so far as justice removes the obstacles to peace; but it is the work of charity (love) directly, since charity... causes peace.

Thomas Aquinas

We have grasped the mystery of the atom and rejected the Sermon on the Mount. Ours is a world of nuclear giants and ethical infants. We know more about war than we know about peace, more about killing that we know about living.

General Omar Bradley

We used to wonder where war lived, what it was that made it so vile. And now we realize that we know where it lives, that it is inside ourselves.

Albert Camus

The non-violent technique does not depend for its success on the goodwill of the oppressor, but rather on the unfailing assistance of God.

César Chávez

There is no squabbling so violent as that between people who accepted an idea yesterday and those who will accept the same idea tomorrow.

Christopher Morley

• PERSONAL VIGNETTE •

THE RUTBA HOUSE—A MODEL OF LOVE

BY JONATHAN WILSON-HARTGROVE

When the United States invaded Iraq in the spring of 2003, my wife Leah and I were part of a Christian Peacemaker Team delegation that went to Baghdad to be with the people there while the bombs fell. We knew no way to stop the bombs from falling. But we believed that part of what it means to follow Jesus is to stand with those who are suffering as they suffer. So we followed Jesus to Baghdad.

It wasn't long, however, before Saddam's police decided they didn't want Christian peacemakers in Baghdad any more than the U.S. Army did. So we were deported in three taxi cabs by way of the highway that goes to Jordan through the western desert of Iraq. Close to a town called Rutba, one of our cars hit a piece of the shrapnel that littered the road after nearly two weeks of bombing. A tire blew and the car careened into a side ditch. But those of us in the other two cars were driving so fast that we didn't notice our friends were no longer behind us. By the time we returned, we found the car overturned and splattered with blood and our friends gone.

What we didn't know then was that a car of Iraqis had seen our friends in the ditch by the roadside and stopped to pick them up. They carried them into the town of Rutba and found a doctor who spoke perfect English. "Three days ago your country bombed our hospital," the doctor said. "But we will take care of you." He sewed up two of our friends and saved their lives.

When we found our friends and heard this story, I thanked the doctor and asked what we owed him for his services. "You do not owe me anything," he said. "Please just tell the world what has happened in Rutba." We came back to the U.S. telling that story every chance we could get. The more we told it, the more we realized that it was a modern day Good Samaritan story. The people who were supposed to be our enemies had stopped by the roadside, pulled our friends out of a ditch, and saved their lives. In the midst of a terrible war, God had sent some Iraqis to show us what love looks like.

After returning from Iraq, we moved to Durham, North Carolina to start a house of hospitality in the summer of 2003. We said we wanted to try to practice in our daily lives the love we had seen in Iraq. So we called our little experiment the Rutba House.

What we do here day in and day out is hardly as dramatic as rescuing enemies from a roadside while bombs are falling. But the drama of Rutba was not the important thing. What mattered was the gift of love. We've tried to find ways to shape our community life together around receiving and sharing God's love.

So we remind ourselves of how much God loves us by reading Scripture and praying together each morning and evening. We celebrate the supper in which Jesus gave us his body and blood while we were living as his enemies. We share our space, our money, our meals and our stuff with one another. We take Jesus at his word—"my peace I give to you"—and try to live together in unity. We fail at this pretty often, but we are reminded of the forgiving love that got us into this thing to start with. And we try to live in that love.

We invite others into this little experiment. Neighbors join us for dinner and we make space for a couple of people who are homeless to come and live with us. Almost always these are people who struggle with addiction. They help us see how many of our own struggles could be named "addiction." We struggle together, believing that God still loves us even when it looks like everything is falling apart. We try to live as Sarah and Abraham learned to live—"by faith."

Not long ago a kid from our neighborhood stole some money from a community member's wallet. It certainly wasn't the first time this had happened, but in this case, we were almost sure we knew who had done it. We confronted her and found the money she'd taken in her sock drawer. We talked with her about why stealing is wrong and we talked about repentance. Then the woman she had stolen from said she forgave her. But the kid just stood there crying, overcome by grief and fear.

The next day I watched as the woman from our community returned from a local pool with a carload of kids from the neighborhood. As they filed out of the back seat, there was the kid who had stolen the day before, laughing with all the rest. As the Book of Isaiah says, her tears had turned to laughter. She skipped across the street with an inflatable alligator float under her arm, and I thought about how forgiveness has the power to transform. I remembered those good Iraqis who gave their enemies a ride to Rutba. And I thought of a God who returned to the company of those who betrayed him to say, "I give you my peace."

• CONTACTS AND OTHER RESOURCES •

- W www.nccouncilofchurches.org/areasofwork/issues/peace/peace_issue.html—North Carolina Council of Churches' "Peace" page, providing the Council's focus, upcoming event notification, and many useful links.
- W www.ncpeacejustice.org—North Carolina Peace and Justice Coalition, a movement-building coalition whose primary purpose is to coordinate and support the work of existing groups and build linkages and solidarity across the many issues of peace and justice. The Coalition links the wars abroad with the assaults at home, and U.S. militarism to the corporate economic interests it serves.
- W www.ncpeaceaction.org—Peace Action, the North Carolina affiliate of the effective national organization. From the 1963 treaty to ban above-ground nuclear testing, to the 1996 signing of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, from ending the war in Vietnam, to blocking weapons sales to human rights abusing countries, and eliminating funding for new nuclear weapons, Peace Action and its 100,000 members have been, and continue to be, at the forefront of the international movement for peace.
- W www.cpt.org—Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) offers an organized, nonviolent alternative to war and other forms of lethal inter-group conflict. CPT provides organizational support to persons committed to faith-based nonviolent alternatives in situations where lethal conflict is an immediate reality or is supported by public policy. CPT seeks to enlist the response of the whole church in conscientious objection to war, and in the development of nonviolent institutions, skills and training for intervention in conflict situations. They have maintained violence reduction teams in places such as Gaza/West Bank, Bosnia, Columbia, Iraq, and along the U.S.-Mexico border.
- W www.mcc.org—Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) is a premier relief organization with a particular historical emphasis on the task of peacemaking. MCC seeks to demonstrate God's love by working among people suffering from poverty, conflict, oppression and natural disaster, serving as a channel for interchange by building mutually transformative relationships. MCC strives for peace, justice and the dignity of all people by sharing its experiences, resources and faith in Jesus Christ.

W www.peacetaxfund.org—National Campaign for a Peace Tax Fund is dedicated to the implementation of taxation policies that allow conscientious objectors to pay all of their taxes towards peaceful, non-military government expenditures. It seeks to grant conscientious objectors the right to refrain from paying for war, just as they already have the right to refrain from fighting in war.

KEY FACTS

DID YOU KNOW?

- q According to the National Priorities Project, the war in Iraq has cost the U.S. over \$315 billion. The average cost per person is \$1,065, per hour is \$10.18 million, and per day is \$244 million. The taxpayers of North Carolina have paid \$8.5 billion for the war in Iraq. Taxpayers in Charlotte, for example, have contributed almost \$700 million, while Raleigh taxpayers have paid almost \$350 million. In addition, the war has cost Asheville over \$60 million, Boone \$7.5 million, Person county \$35 million, and Union county \$170 million.¹
- q As of July 2006, 57 native North Carolinians have been killed in the Iraq war. Fort Bragg in Fayetteville, NC, is home to one of the largest military bases in the U.S. with about 46,000 active-duty soldiers.²
- q Governments around the world continue to allocate vast amounts of resources toward military expenditures. There is an enormous gap between the resources allocated for war-making and those directed toward peace-making. For example, the Pentagon has requested \$440 billion for 2007. This does not include war spending or spending on our nuclear arsenal; a more accurate estimate of military spending is about \$600,000,000,000 (that's \$600 billion!). This amount exceeds the combined military spending of the next 25 countries. This is also more than eight times the amount spent on all non-military security tools, including diplomacy, foreign aid, nonproliferation, and homeland security. By contrast, the annual budget for the U.N.'s largest peacemaking body (Department for Political Affairs) is about \$60 million, or one ten-thousandth of one percent (0.0001) of our military budget. Also, the \$1.4 billion designated for international aid in the form of the Child Survival & Health Programs Fund represents a mere 0.2 percent of our military budget.³
- q The United Nations Development Program estimates that the basic health and nutrition needs of the world's poorest people could be met for an additional \$13 billion a year, about half of what we spend each year simply maintaining our vast arsenal of nearly 10,000 nuclear weapons.⁴
- q According to the White House's proposed budget for 2007, defense spending will increase by about \$30 billion—7 percent—from 2006. The Department of Defense will then account for over half of the U.S. Government's discretionary spending. According to the ONE campaign, if we were to increase international assistance by \$27 billion—an amount equal to just 4.5 percent of military spending, we would be able to: prevent 10 million children from becoming AIDS orphans, help get 104 million children into grade school, provide water to almost 900 million people around the globe, and ultimately save almost 6.5 million children under the age of five from preventable deaths.⁵
- q The Selective Service will recognize objections to serving in the armed forces for either religious or moral reasons. According to Selective Service guidelines, conscientious objectors must object to military service on principles that are central to one's life. The reasons may be religious or moral but cannot be based on not wanting to fight in a particular conflict or simply not wanting to get hurt or killed or simply because one does not like the present government. However, the government's stance is deeply problematic for those adhering to the Christian tradition of Just War, who must constantly evaluate the morality of particular conflicts, particular military strategies, tactics, and targets towards particular military objectives as the condition of their participation.⁶

1. National Priorities Project, "Local Costs of the Iraq War," updated May 8, 2006, www.nationalpriorities.org/warcitycost.

2. Iraq Coalition Casualty Count, "US Fatalities by State," <http://icasualties.org/oif/USMAP.aspx?hndState=North%20Carolina>. See also NC Peace and Justice Coalition, "Soldier's Families to Hold Anti-War Rally at Ft. Bragg," <http://www.ncpeacejustice.org/article.php?id=123>.

3. Foreign Policy in Focus' report, "A Unified Security Budget for the United States, 2007," May 3, 2006, www.fpiif.org/fpiftxt/3253. See also the U. S. Department of State's "Fiscal Year 2007 International Affairs Budget Request," February 6, 2006, www.state.gov/s/d/rm/rls/iab/2007/html/60199.htm; United Nations Department of Political Affairs, "DPA's Budget and Trust Funds," www.un.org/depts/dpa/budget.html; "Groups Urge Overhaul of Pentagon Budget" by Jim Lobe, May 4, 2006, www.antiwar.com/lobe/?articleid=8940.

4. "Learn Hunger Facts," Bread for the World, www.bread.org/learn/hunger-basics.

5. "Issues," One: The Campaign to Make Poverty History, www.one.org/Issues.html.

6. Mennonite Central Committee's "Conscientious Objection Quiz," www.mcc.org/us/co/quiz.

'SHE HAS SHOWN GREAT LOVE' GENDER EQUALITY

PROPER 6, YEAR C

Lectionary Texts: I Kings 21:1-10, 15-21a II Samuel 11:26-12:10, 13-15 Psalms 32 & 5:1-8
Galatians 2:15-21 Luke 7:36-8:3

Focus Text: Luke 7:36-8:3

³⁶One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table. ³⁷And a woman in the city, who was a sinner, having learned that he was eating in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster jar of ointment. ³⁸She stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair. Then she continued kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment. ³⁹Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him—that she is a sinner." ⁴⁰Jesus spoke up and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." "Teacher," he replied, "speak." ⁴¹"A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. ⁴²When they could not pay, he cancelled the debts for both of them. Now which of them will love him more?" ⁴³Simon answered, "I suppose the one for whom he cancelled the greater debt." And Jesus said to him, "You have judged rightly." ⁴⁴Then turning towards the woman, he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. ⁴⁵You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing my feet. ⁴⁶You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. ⁴⁷Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little." ⁴⁸Then he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." ⁴⁹But those who were at the table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" ⁵⁰And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

^{8:1}Soon afterwards he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, ²as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, ³and Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources.

NRSV

ADDITIONAL TEXTS

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved. I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.

Philippians 4:1-3

There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

Galatians 3:28

I am grateful to God—whom I worship with a clear conscience, as my ancestors did—when I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. Recalling your tears, I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy. I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you.

2 Timothy 1:3-5

SCRIPTURE COMMENTARY

BY REV. JEAN RODENBOUGH,
PRESBYTERY OF SALEM, GREENSBORO

Luke does a peculiar thing with this passage about the woman who washes Jesus' feet and anoints him with precious oil. In the other three gospels, this story appears just before that of Jesus' Passion. In Luke's Gospel, however, the story not only carries a different focus, but is placed instead in the midst of Jesus' ministry before he goes to Jerusalem in the final days of his life.

There are other differences as well in Luke's account from that of the others: the naming (or not naming) of the characters; the description of the woman as someone in the city who was a sinner, echoed by the Pharisee in his derogatory reference to her; Luke's emphasis on gratitude in contrast to the theme of extravagance highlighted in the other three versions; and the portrayal of the women who figure in the verses that follow this story. We note that the woman in the other gospel accounts performs a priestly and prophetic act, that of anointing Jesus and foreshadowing his coming death, whereas Luke reshapes this story as an extreme example of penitence, forgiveness, and resultant gratitude. The emphasis here is on Jesus' act of forgiveness rather than on the woman's actions toward him. This account turns upon a submissively grateful act because of her absolution from an undesignated sin rather than an extravagant act of anointing which is emphasized in the other gospels.

The woman in Luke's story thus becomes a literary tool. Her response to Jesus and the way she receives his forgiveness is held up as a model for others. It is Jesus' redemptive response that points toward his crucifixion and resurrection, rather than the woman's act of anointing, so that the focus moves from her to Jesus as central to the action. Jesus then tells the woman her faith has saved her and sends her on her way with a benediction. In Mark and Matthew, Jesus lifts up this woman's act as one which will be remembered forever. Luke denies her that honor, and John omits that final declaration about her as well. This woman thus joins the ranks of anonymous and silent women, spoken for, but not given speech.

To give Luke credit for what he did accomplish in this story, however, there are some significant features embedded here. For example, there remains the depiction of Jesus as advocate and defender of women, whatever their background. He does not object to this alleged sinner touching him, a gesture that can defile a righteous man. In the version we have here he senses her love pouring out with her tears. We see him accept the anointing power of her gratitude for his forgiveness, symbolized by the ointment. She has received him, as he has received her. When he points out to his host the contrast in how each of the two has welcomed him, we are given a lesson in offering inclusive love to all who come to Jesus through us without showing distinction or discrimination.

To consider briefly the verses following this incident, in the listing of women who accompanied Jesus and the disciples, Luke unwittingly opens the door to an error of interpretation in future biblical scholarship. The proximity of the two passages strengthens that false understanding. One of the women in that group, "Mary, called Magdalene", named in reference to the seven devils cast out from her, becomes permanently linked to the woman in the previous story who was in all likelihood a prostitute. In truth, there is no justification for such an interpretation, other than tradition. Perhaps the most unfortunate aspect of Luke's version of this story, however, is the depiction of a subordinate role for women in Jesus' life. They are portrayed as serving him and the male disciples, a role which church tradition then perpetuates by denying women an equal status in the church hierarchies which developed afterward.

PASTORAL REFLECTION

BY REV. JEAN RODENBOUGH

When I applied to divinity school thirty years ago, I was asked by my interviewer, "Why don't you just be a good church member and serve the church that way?" That is, I was being advised to continue the traditional role of being a supportive woman to the men doing the "real work" of ministry.

Ignoring that advice, I enrolled, and when I graduated and sought a call to ministry, the response was, "We don't think our congregation is ready for a woman minister." Times are better now for women seeking calls to ministry, but the lunch line for service continues to be blocked by male church leadership. They stand with locked arms, holding off women from breaking through to many kinds of opportunities for ministry. But, we continue to hold up the model of that woman who broke in line and interrupted the order of the day. We find that Jesus is still there, ready to speak up for us. Now, we too have a voice, advocating parity for women in professional service to the church.

Yet there remain injustices, even apart from the damage to women's status in the church. Paraphrasing George Orwell in *Animal Farm*, "all are equal, but some are more equal than others."

Injustice prevails in attitudes that reflect our social environment as well, where racism, poverty, health care inadequacies, corporate greed, insular thinking, security and other ills still exist. The church has work to do to include everyone in its outreach ministries, its membership rolls, and leadership rosters. The same is true in our civil society.

During the efforts to pass the Equal Rights Amendment twenty-five years ago, the N.C. Council of Churches established a committee to work for passage of the Amendment in this state. Women and men together were mutually supportive in advocating for the Amendment through workshops, candlelight vigils, marches, articles, and lobbying our state legislators. Education on the significance and value of such an Amendment took place in Sunday Schools, women's study groups, and other gatherings. When the Amendment failed, all who had labored so diligently realized that they must find another way to address the still-present need for women's equality in all aspects of life: religion, education, economics, health, politics, and racial issues. About a dozen women who had been serving on the Equal Rights Amendment Committee decided their work wasn't over, and the group refocused as the Equal Rights Committee. These outstanding women, who contributed so much to their churches and communities, remained at the front of advocacy for women's rights in North Carolina. Several years ago they were collectively honored through interviews conducted with them. A dramatic presentation of their experiences and their opinions, *Coffeehouse of the Spirit*, was created by the late Sister Evelyn Mattern of the Council staff, who had guided them through their many efforts. This committee acted in the name of Christ to recognize and proclaim the right of women to serve on equal terms with men within and outside of the church.

In viewing the status of women throughout the world, we find an even more disturbing picture of what needs to be accomplished. In 1995, I attended the United Nations' Fourth World Conference on Women, in Beijing, China. Women came from all parts of the world to allow their voices to be heard in the forums. An amazing atmosphere of trust developed as we came to realize our common hopes, dreams, and problems. We sought to carry our concerns and demands to the ears of those making the crucial decisions and forming the declarations that would come out of this historic gathering. The truth was out: women across the world in all societies were discriminated against, left out of decision-making processes, and numbered with the poor and the voiceless. Not a place in the world could declare truthfully that women and men were totally at par, recognized fully as equals in every way. Nor could any place say that women were provided equal entry into every government, business, or education endeavor, or into the many faith institutions around the world. Every faith had its bias against women's leadership.

While it is not the calling of governments to be communities of faith, it is incumbent upon those of us who do belong to such communities to insist upon just treatment of all. Within the church, we can do no less than continue to work for full inclusion of women and all those who have been placed outside the circle. If we are the representatives of Jesus witnessing to his teachings, we must seek to emulate the way that he relates to those who come to him. We can seek to be as accepting, as welcoming, as strong an advocate for God's justice and peace as the One who is featured in the gospels we read and study. We begin locally, here in North Carolina, but what we do has wider effects beyond our state boundaries. Whether we live in rural or urban settings, small towns or larger communities, we are invited to the lunch counter with Jesus and to be heard.

WORSHIP AID – 'SHE HAS SHOWN GREAT LOVE'

RESPONSIVE READINGS

One: Come and celebrate God who calls women to tend the flame.

All: Did not our hearts burn within us?

One: Come and celebrate the courage of women who heard their call and, with a fire in their bones, stepped out of the shadow.

All: Did not our hearts burn within us?

One: Come and celebrate the lives of women who, even in their mountaintop experiences, never forgot their valleys.

All: Did not our hearts burn within us?

One: Come and celebrate the work of women who recognized the risen Lord in the breaking of bread and in the opening of scripture.

All: Did not our hearts burn within us?

One: Come and celebrate the perseverance of women who are still struggling to have their gifts recognized by their churches.

All: Did not our hearts burn within us?

One: Come and celebrate women who paved the road to ordination for others and encourage us to work for those who will follow.

All: Did not our hearts burn within us?

Amen.

(by Su Yon Pak, from "Celebrate the Gifts of Women," PCUSA, www.pcusa.org/women/celebratethegifts/celebrate06.pdf)

A Litany of Remembrance

Let us remember and give thanks for faithful women of God, that their lives may inspire ours.

For Miriam, prophet who led the women of Israel in rejoicing at their deliverance from Egypt;

For the unnamed woman who acted as prophet and anointed Jesus before his burial;

God of abundant life,

We give you thanks.

That we may claim our gifts of leadership and have courage to announce your truth by our words and actions,

God of graceful power,

We offer our prayer.

For women mystics of the Middle Ages: for Hildegard of Bingen, Teresa of Avila, and Julian of Norwich, who used many names and images to praise you and tell of your goodness and love;

God of abundant life,

We give you thanks.

That we may know you more deeply and praise you as one God with many names;

God of graceful power,

We offer our prayer.

For the women of this country who fought against slavery and worked for justice for all people: for Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Eleanor Roosevelt, Rosa Parks; for the women who struggled for women's rights: for Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony;

God of abundant life,

We give you thanks.

That we may be empowered to strive for justice and peace among all people;

God of graceful power,

We offer our prayer.

Amen.

(Adapted from "Litany of Remembrance" by Rev. Dr. Ruth A. Meyers, *Women's Uncommon Prayers*, Geitz, Burke, Smith, editors, Council of Women's Ministries of the Episcopal Church USA, Morehouse Publishing, 2000, p. 340.)

SUGGESTED HYMNS

- | | |
|---|--|
| ✓ Christ, From Whom All Blessings Flow | UMH 550/AM 529 |
| ✓ Faith of Our Mothers | CM 430/AM 193 |
| ✓ Help Us To Accept Each Other | CH 487/UMH 560/PH 358/
AM 558/NCH 388 |
| ✓ Of Women and of Women's Hopes We Sing | CH 686 |
| ✓ We Are Your People | NCH 309/PH 436/MW 514 |

w Hymnal Legend w

- | |
|---|
| † UMH – United Methodist Hymnal |
| † PH – Presbyterian Hymnal |
| † MW – Moravian Book of Worship |
| † AM – African Methodist Episcopal |
| † CM – Christian Methodist Episcopal |
| † CH—Chalice Hymnal (Disciples of Christ) |
| † NCH—New Century Hymnal (UCC) |

ADDITIONAL PRAYER

Truth and Falsehood

IT IS NOT TRUE that women should feel and experience that being a woman is of secondary value to the community.
THIS IS TRUE that women are created women, in the image of God, co-workers with God in caring for life, in struggling for the liberations of humanity and for a world order that respects each one's dignity.

IT IS NOT TRUE that women--and men--must remain divided by sexism, racism, economic injustices and imperialism.
THIS IS TRUE that all women and men are called to be in solidarity with each other's struggle for dignity and justice, to learn from one another and to challenge one another as sisters and brothers in critical and prophetic solidarity.

IT IS NOT TRUE that becoming a refugee is acceptable and inevitable for millions of women and their children.
THIS IS TRUE that the whole people of God are called to denounce militarism, to challenge the root causes of poverty in the name of the God of Hagar, who as a refugee was the first person who dared to give God a name.

IT IS NOT TRUE that women should accept rape and incest, battering and humiliation, as the fate of women.
THIS IS TRUE that Jesus Christ has come into the world to heal the broken community between women and men, to restore our sense of self, dignity and inclusion.

IT IS NOT TRUE that young girls should not be given the opportunity to learn to read, to write, and to analyze the developments of their countries.

THIS IS TRUE that everyone is called to respond to the gift of life and to the needs of our community with all our heart, all our soul and all our reason.

IT IS NOT TRUE that sexual slavery, bondage and prostitution cannot be counteracted or eliminated.

THIS IS TRUE that Jesus Christ has come into the world to overturn the tables of injustice, that women and men, empowered by the Holy Spirit, should challenge poverty and patriarchal culture.

IT IS NOT TRUE that women and men cannot live in mutual and just relationships, respecting one another's integrity and personhood.

THIS IS TRUE that God the Creator has given us the responsibility and trust to care for all of creation in humility and faithfulness, to work and to love as co-creators of God.

Amen.

(from the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program, www.pcusa.org/peacemaking/worship/genderjustice.htm)

ADDITIONAL HELPS

• QUOTES •

The emotional, sexual, and psychological stereotyping of females begins when the doctor says, "It's a girl."

Shirley Chisholm

You don't have to be anti-man to be pro-woman.

Jane Galvin Lewis

Just as we fooled ourselves that the end of discriminatory laws would soon lead to racial harmony, so we thought that increased access to education, advancement and male-only arenas would erase the attitudes that have led some men to treat women like children, fools and punching bags.

Anna Quindlen

As all advocates of feminist politics know, most people do not understand sexism; or, if they do, they think it is not a problem. Masses of people think that feminism is always and only about women seeking to be equal to men. And a huge majority of these folks think feminism is anti-male. Their misunderstanding of feminist politics reflects the reality that most folks learn about feminism from patriarchal mass media.

bell hooks

• PERSONAL VIGNETTE •

THE CHANGING ROLE OF WOMEN IN NORTH CAROLINA CHURCHES

EDITED, FROM THE WOMAN'S COFFEEHOUSE OF SPIRIT, COMPILED BY EVELYN MATTERN, S.F.C.C.

The following is an anonymous true story about a Presbyterian woman's experience within her church.

We started going to the Presbyterian church when I was in sixth grade. I loved it, everything about it. I knew early on that I wanted to work there. I can remember late at night preaching sermons as I went to sleep and, when the minister was preaching, saying things in my head, finding ways to say it better than he did.

As I grew up, I first thought, "I'll need to be a minister's wife, that's what I'll need to be. I'll have to go find me a minister to marry." Then it became, "Oh, I'll be a missionary, because women can be missionaries." Then our church hired a Director of Christian Education, so I was going to be a Director of Christian Education. That's about where I was when I went off to college. In college, our campus Director of Christian Education went to seminary, and I also met my first associate female pastor. Immediately, I said, "That's going to be me."

I entered seminary and began dating a man who would eventually become my husband. While in seminary together, we each did our internship at the same church in Tennessee. I did one year, and he did the next. We were both studying feminist theology, and we had the exact same job title, exact same pay, everything. I was put under the direction of the associate pastor, who was a female and a great mentor to me. I was put in charge of the youth group. I did very little in the pulpit and went on some home visitations with her, but not much. At the end of the summer, I was given a beautifully hand made card, with pictures of me and the youth group, and a t-shirt.

The next summer, my boyfriend, doing the same internship, was put under the care of the senior pastor—a man, so it was not totally inappropriate—but that also meant that he was in the pulpit every Sunday. And he did visitation with the senior pastor and very little youth work. At the end of the summer, he was given an official letter of thanks from the session. How we were reinforced in that same position was very curious. I got the warm fuzzies but nothing formal or official. He didn't get the warm fuzzies but got the formal. We thought about how we would both have liked both kinds of affirmations. Later, when we were married, even serving as co-pastors, we saw those kinds of reinforcements over and over.

One year, after I participated in the installation of a pastor in our town, one woman came up to me and said, "It was really neat to see a woman up there. You know, when you were up there, I thought: one day maybe our church should try to have a woman associate." And I said, "Oh, I look forward to the day when you have a woman head of staff." You would have thought I had hit her in the face. Her smile dropped, she took a step back, and the conversation finished. She walked away as if I had insulted her. It was as if there was only one box for a woman to be in.

A church in Chapel Hill has a female head of staff and often has female interns from Duke Divinity School. One Sunday they had a male as a guest preacher. One five year old leaned over and whispered, "Mom, can men be ministers too?" Often a parent will tell me a story about a child imitating me, for example, by wearing a scarf like a stole and saying, "Look, I'm like pastor P____." That may mean that little girls—and little boys too—grow up knowing not only that they could be ministers, but that they could be whatever they want to be, and create their own image of what that is.

• CONTACTS AND OTHER RESOURCES •

- W www.nccouncilofchurches.org/areasofwork/issues/gender/gender_issue.htm—North Carolina Council of Churches' gender page. This link describes the Council's focus on this issue as well as providing resources, links to similar sites, and a short explanation of "Why People of Faith Should Care."
- W <http://wnc-woman.com>—Western North Carolina Woman, a print/online publication of Infinite Circles, Inc. The mission of Western North Carolina Woman is to celebrate the inherent strength, wisdom, and grace of women. The print publication and the resources available on the website provide a hub through which women can be interconnected, interdependent, and interactive. Articles and columns focus on creative problem solving and the sharing of ideas, information, inspiration, and joy.
- W www.ncwu.org—North Carolina Women United, a coalition of progressive organizations and individuals working to achieve the full political, social, and economic equality of all women across North Carolina. NCWU works to build women's power through grassroots activism, community organizing, legislative advocacy, and engagement in the political process.
- W www.doa.state.nc.us/cfw/cfw.htm—North Carolina Council for Women & Domestic Violence Commission, an advocacy agency that is housed in the state's Department of Administration. This agency advises the governor, the North Carolina legislature, and the state departments on the special needs of women in North Carolina by: identifying and

assessing needs; collecting and distributing information about the status of women; acting as a resource for local Councils/Commissions for Women; collaborating with other groups and individuals working on behalf of women; identifying and assessing statewide needs, including domestic violence; and assuring that necessary services, policies, and programs are provided to those in need and strengthening existing programs.

- W www.ncjournalforwomen.com—The North Carolina Journal for Women, an online publication providing women with inspirational, informative and intriguing content. The Journal serves women who come from diverse backgrounds across the region and is dedicated to those who serve as the backbone of families, organizations, communities, and companies across the state.
- W www.rcwms.org The Resource Center for Women and Ministry in the South weaves feminism and spirituality into a vision of justice for the world. While it began to support and connect women who understand their lives and work as ministers, RCWMS now provides a wide variety of programs on feminism, faith, creativity, spirituality, and justice.
- W www.nwhp.org—National Women’s History Project, an educational nonprofit organization. NWHP’s mission is to recognize and celebrate the diverse and historic accomplishments of women by providing information and educational materials and programs.
- W www.womensorganizations.org—National Council of Women’s Organizations, a nonpartisan, nonprofit umbrella organization of groups that collectively represent over ten million women across the United States. The only national coalition of its kind, NCWO is a tax-exempt organization with twenty years’ experience uniting American women’s groups. It was established in 1982 in response to the expiration of the deadline for ERA ratification. The NCWO’s ERA Task Force was established in 1999.
- W www.un.org/womenwatch/daw—United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women is grounded in the vision of equality of the United Nations Charter and advocates the improvement of the status of women of the world and the achievement of their equality with men. Aiming to ensure the participation of women as equal partners with men in all aspects of human endeavor, the Division promotes women as equal participants and beneficiaries of sustainable development, peace and security, governance and human rights. Its website contains a vast collection of resources centering upon women’s issues around the world.

KEY FACTS

DID YOU KNOW?

- q Using data from the 2000 Census, the American Association of University Women calculates that in North Carolina, the median annual income of women with a high school education is only 74 percent of men’s earnings with the same level of education. The NC wage gap actually increases when comparing those with college-level education; here, women’s median annual income is only 68 percent of men’s. The current wage gap in NC is 36th-worst in the nation. At the current rate, NC will not achieve pay equity across gender lines until 2048.¹
- q North Carolina is one of only 15 states that has refused to adopt the Equal Rights Amendment, which holds that “Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex.”²
- q Worldwide, men continue to earn much more than women who are doing equal work. In the U.S., the Equal Pay Act was signed in 1963, but the wage gap has been closing at an extremely slow rate. In 1963, women who worked year-round on a full-time basis made 59 cents on average for every dollar earned by men. In 2004, women earned 77 cents to the dollar. That means that the wage gap has narrowed by a less than half a cent per year. Using the annual growth rate of women’s earnings over the last 10 years, it is projected that the U.S. will not achieve earnings equality until 2056.³
- q Economist Evelyn Murphy, president of The Wage Project, estimates that over a lifetime (47 years of full-time work) this gap amounts to a loss in women’s wages of \$700,000 for a high school graduate, \$1.2 million for a college graduate, and \$2 million for a professional school graduate.⁴
- q The world’s resources are very unevenly distributed, not only between countries, but also between men and women within countries. While it is estimated that women perform two-thirds of the world’s work, they only earn one-tenth of the income, and own less than one per cent of the world’s property.⁵

- q In 1979, the U.N. General Assembly adopted the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which is commonly referred to as an international bill of rights for women. Consisting of a preamble and 30 articles, it defines what constitutes discrimination against women and sets up an agenda for national action to end such discrimination. The Convention defines discrimination against women as “...any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.”⁶
- q As of March 2006, 182 countries, representing over 90 percent of total U.N. membership, are party to the Convention. However, the U.S. has not ratified CEDAW, one of the few nations in the world not to do so. Nations such as Afghanistan, China, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Mexico, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and South Africa have all ratified the Convention.⁷
- q By accepting the Convention, nations commit themselves to undertake a series of measures to end discrimination against women in all forms, including:
- To incorporate the principle of equality of men and women in their legal system, abolish all discriminatory laws and adopt appropriate ones prohibiting discrimination against women;
 - To establish tribunals and other public institutions to ensure the effective protection of women against discrimination; and
 - To ensure elimination of all acts of discrimination against women by persons, organizations or enterprises.⁸

The Bible and Gender⁹

The collection of 66 books written over a period of 1,000 years that we know as the Bible does not speak to the range of issues affecting women in a unified voice. Women are portrayed (primarily by male authors) in a variety of ways, some positively and some negatively. The contemporary task of interpreting these issues, including gender equality, through the lens of Scripture often proves daunting, and many churches remain silent or muted on these issues. Great discernment and wisdom must be exercised when interpreting challenging texts. However, for all of its complexity, the Bible remains consistent and clear on several key theological points. First, both women and men are created equally in God’s image. Second, God is neither male nor female; God is not gendered and must not be represented as male or female. When it comes to Christology, we cannot attribute male gender to Christ’s divine nature, but only to his human nature. Thus, gender itself is not determinative of a person’s ability or fitness to represent God.

1. American Association of University Women, “Gains in Learning, Gaps in Earnings,” www.aauw.org/research/statedata.

2. Equal Rights Amendment, www.equalrightsamendment.org.

3. National Committee on Pay Equity, “The Wage Gap Over Time: In Real Dollars, Women See a Continuing Gap,” www.pay-equity.org/info-time.html.

4. Ibid.

5. UNICEF, “Gender Equality: The Big Picture,” www.unicef.org/gender/index_bigpicture.html.

6. United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women, “CEDAW,” www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

9. Adapted from Rebecca Merrill Groothuis’ article, “The Bible and Gender Equality,” www.cbeinternational.org/new/pdf_files/free_articles/groothuis_bible_genderequailty.pdf.