

ADULT STUDY MATERIAL

TAKE A CLOSER LOOK

Study 2 - Sustainable Community



Canadian Lutheran
World Relief®

Written by Rev. D. Becker

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INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVES

Introduction

Study #2 is about *Sustainable Community*.

Canadian Lutheran World Relief (CLWR) has an integrative approach to development. It is the policy of CLWR to work in partnership with communities and local authorities to develop projects that have long-term effects and are sustainable. In this study you will have the opportunity to explore two such projects in more detail. The study will allow you to reflect on themes theologically; as well, it will raise challenges and themes affecting the developing and the developed world and relating to the development of a sustainable community. You will also be invited to explore how you can become involved in creating and maintaining communities that are an expression of peace with justice. The two accompanying videos, available on loan from CLWR, will add a visual perspective to this study.

Objectives

To explore:

- Genesis 2:18 – “The Lord God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone.’”
- *Just peace* – describing the conditions for a sustainable community.

To explore the relationship between humans and their communities – What makes a community sustainable?

- Right to land
- Right to health care and education
- Secure food and water
- Gender equality
- Human dignity for all – especially children
- Peace with justice

To explore our contribution to helping create a sustainable global community.

- How can we help by participating in the work of CLWR and by sharing our gifts?



SUGGESTIONS FOR THE FACILITATOR

Study 2, *Sustainable Community*, can be used as a one-session study or as a series. This can be determined by the intended use of the material and the availability of time.

The material is divided into 3 sections:

- “The Lord God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone.’”(Gen.2:18).
Exploring the concept of a just peace. God’s story with people is one of reconciliation and restoration. (Theological Reflection)
- What makes a community sustainable? Addressing the related challenges and themes.
- How can we contribute to/help in creating a more sustainable global community?
(Palestine: Health/Vocational Training/Scholarship; Ethiopia: Soil and Water Conservation (SWC) and Community Development (CD) Projects)

Each of these sections contains general information, stories, liturgy, questions and experiential opportunities.

The exercises and questions are flexible. Depending on how much time or how many sessions you have allotted to this study, your group may wish to use all or only a few of the exercises; your group may wish to discuss all or only a few of the questions. Explore the areas in each section that are of interest and that hold meaning for you and your group.

If your group uses this resource as a one-time experience, it would be important for the facilitator to be familiar with the entire study and choose something from each section to work with. In this way the whole picture receives attention. It would be helpful to conclude with the video(s).

This study can also be used as a three-session study with each session focussing on one of the segments. A more in-depth study of this important topic would be facilitated with this approach. The third or last session could conclude with the showing of the videos since these capture in visual form what has been addressed throughout the study.

CLWR hopes that this study touches your heart and offers you a deeper connection to God’s story of redemption and restoration. Peace based on justice describes well the conditions for a sustainable community. Hope is born when all people work together to overcome war, hunger, poverty, discrimination, injustice and division, and work at building sustainable communities. We invite you, by means of this study, to educate yourselves around this theme. How can we work together to build communities of peace? Lastly, we hope it motivates and inspires you to identify your gifts and resources and how you might share them as instruments of God’s compassion.

STUDY 2 - SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY

God has entrusted us to care for each other. In order to be faithful to this, we are challenged to live in a relationship with creation and each other that is sustainable for all, and one that respects and preserves life.

This study invites participants to explore community from a three-fold perspective:

- Relationship between God and the individual
- Relationship that individuals have with themselves (emotional, mental, spiritual)
- Relationship that individuals have with others (local community and global community)

These are all aspects of community. God created humanity and established a covenant with each one of us. In Baptism we celebrate this covenant and share it with the community. For a person to be in a healthy relationship with others (with community), we first need to be in relationship with God and ourselves. If we do not know God and ourselves, living within an external community becomes more challenging. Thus this study offers an opportunity for this three-fold exploration.

Litany of Celebration

Refer to appendix, p. 29



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SECTION 1

“The Lord God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone.’” (Genesis 2:18)

God’s journey with God’s people—a journey of redemption and restoration

Theological Reflections

From the beginning of time people have come to live in community. We know that we cannot live alone—that we need God and each other. It is important to have people to stand with us to offer us warmth, support and a place of refuge. Here we can rest and draw strength for the daily journey.

The blessing of community is human love and compassion rooted in God’s love and compassion for us. In community, we can share with each other a sense of hope, strength to sustain, vision and joy. Our western culture holds up as ideal the image of independence and self-sufficiency. We are to be strong so as not to need anyone else.

However, we are coming to the realization that we do need one another; that it is not good for us to be alone—in fact, we cannot walk alone. As we learn how to trust and be vulnerable with each other, we are also invited to do this with God—to surrender ourselves to God.

The first community that was established was that between God and humanity. Having the desire to welcome God’s love into our hearts allows a flame to be kindled within. This allows us to open our hearts to others in living lives of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Exercise 1

The leader or a participant may lead the prayer.

Litany: “Searching” (Adapted from *Searching for Shalom* by Ann Weems. © 1991 Ann Barr Weems.)

Gracious God:

We long for life to be merciful and just.

However, daily our streets are filled with deaths of the flesh and of the soul.

Daily we encounter the pain of broken hearts and broken bodies.

We long for peace and look for it in many places; in holy places.

However, printed prayers, churches and ethereal music do not guarantee peace.

Death continues and people walk in darkness.

However, the longing for peace won’t die.

The fire of hope keeps burning;

It keeps emerging like a new sprout.

And so in the shadow, in the darkness, some new light stirs. In the chaos, on the cross.

In the face of Jesus is the everlasting peace that passes all understanding.

Amen.

or

Exercise 2

You might choose to explore the meditation around the Prodigal Son (Adapted from: *God In All Things*, John Callanan, Doubleday, New York, 1993)

Find a comfortable spot. The leader can read aloud the Gospel story of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32). Allow yourself to picture the prodigal son with his father. Perhaps it was something like this...

The son does not accept himself. Maybe he has low self-worth. Or maybe others have suggested to him that he is not acceptable. For a while now he has felt uneasy and left out. He is not sure what to do with himself. The future holds much uncertainty for him as he is also doubtful about future prospects. What direction should his life take?

The more he feels separated from his family—his community—the more difficult and painful life becomes. To whom should he turn. He chooses a desperate action. Will his life ever be all right again? Will he ever belong to a community again?

Reflection

Think of the times that you have excluded, pulled back or withdrawn yourself from situations or people. During those times, God constantly held out a hand to draw you back. Sit for a few moments in gratitude for that.

On the farm, the prodigal's father is busy at work. He feels and sees the torment and pain of his son and so desires to reach him. He is sensitive and wishes for his son to be free from that which is burdening him. He also knows that his son has to make his decisions and choose his own patterns. One morning the prodigal son wakes up and goes to his father. Summoning up his courage he demands: "Father give me my share of the inheritance now."

The father responds in a most generous way. He takes count of his property and hands over half of his possessions. The younger son leaves on his way... spending... enjoying... trying to fill the void and inner emptiness.

Reflection

Explore the times that you have grabbed all around you, trying to fill the longing for connection with God and with others with worldly goods, and thus have become separated.

The prodigal son leaves home on his search for meaning and for a community that would nourish and nurture him. He finds instead isolation, pain and inner emptiness.

Reflection

Reflect on the times that you have held onto old hurts and had a difficult time receiving God's forgiveness.

As the younger son looks inside, he realizes that there may be a way out of his pain. He connects with the times that he has received forgiveness and felt forgiven in his own life. He remembers when his father used to hold him and the loving things his father used to say to him. These remembrances give him hope that there might be a way to return home. And with some trepidation, he begins to face towards home—the community in which he grew up.

Reflection

Lord help us to have the strength and courage to realize and to believe that, if we turn back to the source of life in Christ Jesus, we may again be able to find meaning and hope for our lives and connection with those whom we love.

This action of turning toward home was exactly what the father had longed and prayed for. The desire of his heart was that he wanted his son back. One day, the father sees the faintest shape in the distance. We can only imagine the hope and the love that welled up in his heart. He runs toward his son and wraps his arms around him. The prodigal falls to his knees, not sure of his father's forgiveness. He looks into his father's eyes and sees only one expression... love... It is difficult for the younger son to allow himself to be forgiven. However, the expression of the unconditional love and acceptance of his father is like a healing balm.

Reflection

Allow yourself to rest in the knowledge that God loves and cares for you; that members of communities that you belong to also love and care for you.

Remember how, in the past, God continually has forgiven—and still does forgive—you for any transgressions, and restores you to wholeness.

Community can be destroyed when we become separated from those we love and those who love us, or when we become separated from God. This separation can be a result of emotional pain, communication breakdown, violations. Community is restored when we find our way home again, forgiven and restored. "It is not good for the man to be alone." Seek to associate yourself with others, for in community we grow and our lives are enriched.

God's story with people is one of redemption and restoration.

The concept of *peace with justice* describes life in its fullness. It punctuates the importance for the fulfilment of basic needs—physical, spiritual, economic, political and emotional. Only when these are addressed is there hope to effect changes in communities and thus in the world. Hope is born when all peoples work together to overcome war, hunger, poverty, discrimination, injustice and division in order to build sustainable communities.

Exercise

Reflect/Remember...

- People in your communities who have supported you. Example: family, co-workers, neighbourhood, church, school. Write them a thank-you letter. Offer a prayer of gratitude.
- People in your communities whom you have supported. Offer a prayer for them.

This journey of redemption and restoration is based on compassion.

"Be merciful just as your Father is merciful." (Luke 6:36)

Mercy—or compassion—is a way of life that is grounded in the way God is and how we are to live together in community.

For Jesus, compassion was an individual as well as a collective virtue, an alternate vision of how life could

be lived together both in the smaller communities that we find ourselves a part of (family, school, work, church, neighbourhood, friendships) as well as the global community to which we belong.

The inclusive vision incarnated in Jesus' table fellowship was an inclusive movement, negating the boundaries of the purity system. It included women, untouchables, the poor, the maimed, and the marginalized,* as well as some people of stature who found his vision attractive. (*Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time*, Marcus Borg, HarperCollins Publishers, New York, 1994, p.56.)

**marginalized*: those made or treated as insignificant

Living with such a vision would invite us to explore once again the theme of "covenant." Rather than focus on the "I" or on individualism, the concepts of peace, justice and covenant invite us to focus on relationship as the creative impulse that shapes the interaction within the communities we live in and the interaction between these communities.

The Exodus Story

This is a story not only about ancient Israel, but also about "us, too, the living."

What is this story about? Most basically, it is a story of bondage, liberation, a journey and a destination. It begins with the Hebrews as slaves in Egypt under the lordship of Pharaoh. ...For those enslaved it is a life of hard labour and groaning and meagre rations, with enough to survive on, but not much more. The story then moves through the plagues and the liberation itself. But leaving Egypt is not the end of the story. Coming out from under the lordship of Pharaoh brings the people into the wilderness and sets them upon a journey that lasts for forty years, and the destination of the journey is the promised land which symbolically is the place of God's presence.

As a story about God and us, what is it saying? ...It invites us to ask, "To what am I in bondage, and to what are we in bondage?" The answer for most of us is "Many things." We are in bondage to cultural messages about what we should be like and what we should pursue. We are in bondage to voices from our own past, and to addictions of various kinds.

The Pharaoh who holds us in bondage is inside of us as well as outside of us.

...If the problem is bondage, the solution of course, is liberation. In the story of the exodus itself, the liberation begins at night, in the darkness, before dawn. It means passing through the sea to the other side. It involves a passage from one kind of life to another.

...But liberation is not the end of the story. Rather, "the way out" leads to a journey through the wilderness. The wilderness is a place of freedom, where God is encountered and known. Yet it can be a place of fear and anxiety, where we erect one golden calf after another, and where we sometimes find ourselves longing for the security of Egypt. But the wilderness is also a place where we are nourished by God, by water from the rock and bread from heaven, and where God journeys with us in a pillar of cloud by day and a column of fire by night. Its destination is life in the presence of God. It is a journeying toward God that is also with God.

Thus, as an epiphany of the human condition and the solution, the story of the exodus images the religious life as a journey from the life of bondage to a life in the presence of God. ...God can liberate us, indeed wills our liberation and yearns for our liberation, from life in bondage to culture to life as a journeying with God. (*Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time*, p: 123-125)

This then is the basis for all human community. A journey with God in Jesus Christ means to be in community. It is not an individual path. Rather it involves discipleship.

It involves living in a community that remembers and celebrates compassion—a life lived in companionship with one another and with God. This life is rooted in the fact that we were created by God to not be alone; it is also rooted in God’s story with us—a story of redemption and restoration. Life lived together in this manner will challenge us to growth and transformation. “It means to give one’s heart, one’s self at its deepest level, to the post-Easter Jesus who is the living Lord, the side of God turned toward us, the face of God, the Lord who is also the Spirit.” (*Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time*, p. 137)

Exercise

Mapping Our Journeys (Adapted from *Birthings and Blessings*, Rosemary Catalano Mitchell and Gail Anderson Ricciuti, Crossroads, New York, 1991, p. 34-35.)

Read Hebrews 11:1-14

Complete the following questions:

(These questions are meant to be answered from a spiritual perspective—not literally.)

- The centre of my life is?
- I’m being called by God to leave the following behind? What am I moving away from? What part of my past might I have to leave behind?
- The place I am seeking looks like...? (list its characteristics.)

After completing these questions in silence, participants gather in pairs or small groups to share insights discovered through this process.

Sing

“Blest Be The Tie That Binds.” *Lutheran Worship* #295

Closing Prayer

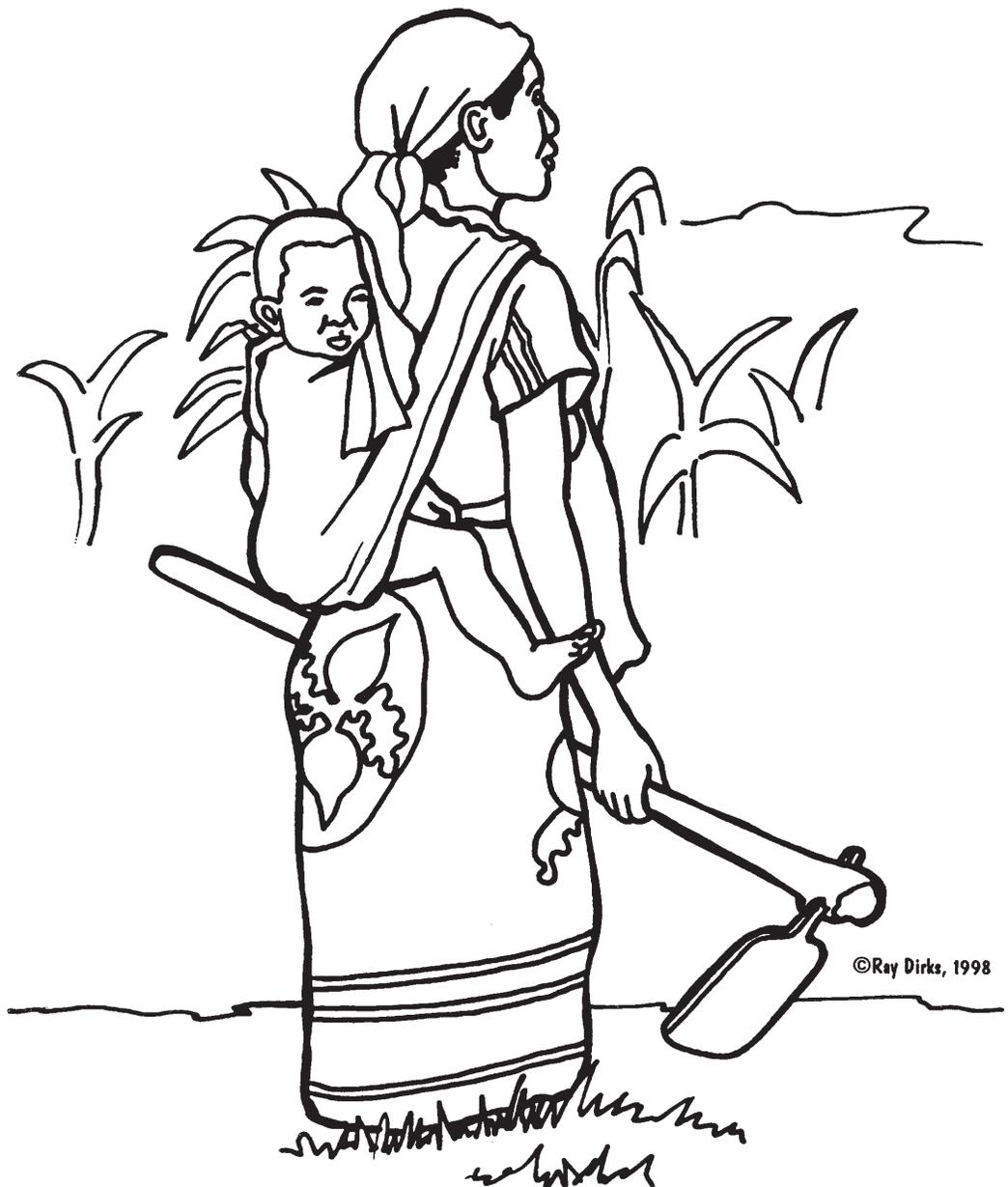
(in unison) (Adapted from *Birthings and Blessings II*, Gail Anderson Ricciuti and Rosemary Catalano Mitchell, Crossroads, New York, 1993, p. 123.)

Creator God, we call upon you. Be ever present with us. We ask for your presence within this community. In those places where we lie, challenge us with your truth. In those places where we find ourselves cold and indifferent, ignite within our hearts the flame of your love. In those places of judgement, share with us your trust and compassion. In those places where we run from our responsibility, make us discontent so that we might respond instead from a place of your Word and Truth, living from a place of love and compassion. Amen.

SECTION 2

What is community? What makes a community sustainable?

Addressing the challenges and related themes



Reading

“I Celebrate the Church of Jesus Christ.” See appendix, p. 30
(*This can be read by the leader or a participant.*)

In this section we will explore what we mean by community. We will address what makes a community sustainable. How is community created? How is community destroyed? Re-organized? How do we develop communities in our places—neighbourhoods, families, schools, churches, work places?

Community has many different definitions. Some people believe a community is built with the neighbours that surround them and the people they work with daily. Others define community as the people they encounter daily as well as their family and friends—people they depend and lean upon, even if they live across the country.

We will define community using the above definition as well as including the culture and the environment that surrounds people. Communities are continuously changing as technology becomes more easily accessible. Even in developing nations, it is becoming easier to have access to individuals living in different nations, or on the other side of the world, by simply picking up the phone or via email. The manner in which people are dealing with changes created through new technology, is shaping and changing the way communities develop.

Questions for Reflection

- a) Whom will you always regard as family or spiritual kin?
- b) Who in your life has reached out and chosen you to be part of a community?
- c) Whom have you invited to be part of your community?
- d) Whom do you cherish as a gift of God in your life?

What makes a community sustainable?

A community is not sustainable and cannot grow without accessibility to clean water and food, right to land and health services, education, peace with justice, human dignity for all—including children—and gender equality.

Canadian Lutheran World Relief (CLWR) has as three of its four strategic objectives:

- 1) To champion just and democratic civil society and community development
- 2) To support poverty reduction and the building of healthy and vibrant communities
- 3) To promote women as agents and beneficiaries of development

The programs of CLWR are guided to provide support for those sectors that have traditionally been the most disadvantaged in society.

Micro-credit programs have been one of the tools that a large number of the implementing partners have been using to improve the economic conditions of their community. They have also acted as levers to address gender inequities by providing the necessary means for women to regain economic power. Micro-credits have provided a way for those whose access has been denied by the traditional lending institutions to increase their chances to improve their situation.

In most of the programming, CLWR has put a strong emphasis on gender equality as a way of addressing the situations which many women in the world face today. (*Canadian Lutheran World Relief: Bulletin of Reports 1999/2000*)

Right to land and shelter

The exodus by the Israelites from Egypt may be the best-known migration of peoples fleeing persecution. Since the dawn of time people have fled their homelands, or their land has been taken from them by an outside force—either a disaster or conflict.

As a rule people do not leave their homelands willingly. There are compelling reasons which force them to do so: for example, their lives may be in danger or their liberties and security may be at risk as the result of natural or human-created disasters or a combination of both. These people are referred to as refugees.

The world refugee population is increasing at an alarming rate. In 2001, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the world refugee population was estimated at 22 million. The volatile nature of the world we presently live in causes many people to be vulnerable.

Refugee migrations are symptomatic of the crises which affect many regions of the world. We are presently witnessing much violence and upheaval around the world. Armed conflicts cause internal displacement and forced migration. Thus the pain and suffering of people grows daily.

Without access to right of land the concept of sustainable community remains an elusive one.

One refugee writes: “You have no initiative. If you are a refugee, you cannot initiate your own program. You can only wait and see what is going to happen. So, it is very frustrating. You cannot talk about tomorrow, because you are a refugee. You can only talk of what is here now.”

A school teacher explains: “When they call you refugee, of course you feel very bad. You feel very bad about it. So we find these things make people want to be in their own country.”

Refugees can and often do build a strong sense of community where they are, even though where they are living is only a temporary settlement. However, the longing and deep desire for their own secure land underlies their daily existence.

There are over 22 million refugees and another 8 million internally displaced people in the world. It is probable that the numbers will increase as the events that create the refugees continue.

Refugees will continue to require assistance. Amidst this chaos then, it is important to speak of new models, early warning systems, programs for justice and reconciliation to take place before the crisis erupts. Better development programs, consistent with social justice, equity and self-determination need to be supported by the global community.

Despite all the problems, one thing is clear: literally millions of lives have been spared because of the way the global community has responded up to now. Thus we must plan and provide for a just and more secure and peaceful world.

Right to health services and education

Many people who are poor, internally displaced or refugees do not have access to good health care. Because of this, the infant mortality rate is higher and life expectancy is lower. This drastically affects the quality of life for the individuals living within the community.

Health care for people who are poor, economically in need, internally displaced or refugees should not be any different than it is for the more advantaged living in the global community. In reality, most poor people

and refugees have access to and receive a far lower standard of health care and education. This has a huge impact on the quality of life for millions of people living in poorer communities worldwide.

Another prerequisite for sustainable community is the availability of education. It is important to ensure that education is available for all—especially for children and women. In many countries, the ratio of girls to boys in the lower grades is 1:1. However, the higher one goes, the lower the number of female students. At a university level the number is often quite small. (See also the section: Human Dignity—especially for the children. p. 17.) In some communities many are illiterate.

Unless these basic problems are addressed and solved, the sustainability of many communities around the world will not be secured.

Secure food and water supply

A community cannot be developed and remain sustainable without accessibility to clean water and land. Many communities in developing nations suffer from lack of water and arable land. The people are forced to leave their land and their community to look for greener pastures. Sometimes natural disasters, such as famine, hurricanes or floods will drive communities in search of an area in which they can survive. This migration affects those who were once part of a stable community as well as the people in the areas where the migrants are trying to settle, even if only for a while. Overpopulation may result in an area that cannot handle the increased demands which additional people place on the land and environment that surround them.

(Study 1 in the *Take a Closer Look* series focusses on the theme of sustainable agriculture land and water. You are invited to explore that study for more details, if needed. Contact CLWR if you do not have a copy. There is also a video available which explores this theme.)

Gender equality

“If desperation is what it takes to spawn and sustain a revolution, then it’s not surprising that the women’s movement is one of the longest revolutions in human history. The face of poverty, after all, has been, and continues to be, overwhelmingly female: 70 percent of the 1.3 billion people in the world who live on less than \$1 a day are women.

... In fact, women perform nearly two-thirds of the world’s work. Yet they receive less than 10 percent of the world’s income and own less than one percent of the world’s property.” (What We Can Do: A 10 - Point Agenda for Global Action Against Poverty, p.24.)

Not long ago, women were not allowed to vote, had difficulty finding work outside of the home. If they found work, their salary was a fraction that of a man. They were restricted from entering certain professions such as medicine or law. Men held the power in the household. Universities did not accept women as students. The women’s movement officially began in the 1850s. The desire of women to change society sparked this movement. In 1917, women won the right to vote in Canada, and in the United States, they won this right in 1920. Still, after all of these years, statistics from 1991 indicate that the average woman earned 71 cents for every dollar that a man earned.

Many women experience violence in their communities. One in three women are sexually or physically violated in their lifetime. Often neighbourhoods do not feel safe for women to walk in after dark. This can create distrust and distance in relation to the community that these women live in. “Many people feel that North Americans have lost a sense of community and a balance between neighbours and the environment surrounding them.” (Jeanette Armstrong)

Within developing nations the economic contribution of women is more difficult to assess due to a lack of research and information. As a result of community-focussed development programs [such as those supported by CLWR], more women are becoming involved in business through the micro-credit initiatives. As well, women are beginning to share in the agricultural work of their husbands. Significant progress has been made within the last twenty years. This is due in part to conferences which have created much publicity and opportunity for education and dialogue, especially for women in developing nations.

In Africa, for example, infant mortalities have dropped significantly and education for women has increased by two to three times since the Beijing Platform on Action Conference on Women. (The Status of Women in Africa: United Nations Economic Commission for Africa)

Having said this, there are many situations where this is not the case—where women do not have a voice or much equality in their relationships and within their communities.

There is still a lack of women in the work force; it is difficult for many women to attain a proper education. Although some governments hold the view that women should have equal access to education, the reality is that, in many countries, half the number of women attend school, as compared to men. Women outnumber men by two to one with regard to illiteracy. Girls drop out of school more often than boys. In part this could be due to the fact that the burden of rural work often falls on the shoulders of the girls and the women. In some communities, parents don't want their daughters leaving the village to attend school.

Hope is present

In India, for example, donors now fund the establishment of local schools so that girls won't have to leave their communities to study. With NGO [non-governmental organization] assistance, social workers are working with families and communities to get, and keep, girls in school. Curricula and teaching methods are also being revised to make them more female-friendly. The result? Girls who live in poverty, and who previously seemed doomed to remain there, are now staying in school longer.

This kind of coordinated approach can work in other spheres of women's lives, from agriculture to banking to health services to decision making. Money invested in roads, communications, communal laundry facilities and village electricity would give women the time and energy to commit to their communities, their schools, and themselves with very positive effects. (from *What We Can Do: A 10 - Point Agenda for Global Action Against Poverty*, p. 26.)

The gap is large and still much needs to happen to achieve true equality for women. This rings true not only for the developing world, but also for countries such as Canada and the United States.

Human Dignity for all – especially for the children

Many people, both in the North and South, live in conditions of poverty. For many communities this means a great deal of insecurity. Often basic needs cannot be met. This can lead to the breakdown of family systems and community as a result of the despair and tensions that often accompany this condition.

Poverty is growing in the world and it knows no boundaries. For example: the number of people living below the poverty line was calculated in 30 African countries (The Status of Women in Africa). Ten countries had over 50% of the population living below the poverty line at US\$1 a day. Sierra Leone and Zambia had over three-quarters of their population below the poverty line. The poor in these and many other countries around the world live destitute lives. They are forced to rely on one another, their communities and the environment around them for daily survival. These, themselves, are in crisis and limited in the resources they are able to provide.

At the same time, there are different kinds of poverty. There is economic poverty, spiritual poverty, emotional poverty. Those who are economically poor often have spiritual and emotional resources that the economically rich have lost touch with.

A teacher told a story recently of an experience she had. She was in Mexico on a work-related trip and had sat down to lunch. As part of her lunch she had purchased a large piece of chocolate cake. Towards the end of her lunch time, she noticed a young boy watching her. He had inched his way up to her table and was eyeing her chocolate cake. She had decided not to eat it; she motioned to the little boy to come and have the cake if he wanted it. He ran away with it. At this point she asked us all a question: What would a child in North America typically have done? We thought a bit. Almost all of the class responded in the same way. A child here would probably have taken it somewhere safe and eaten the piece by themselves.

Having been touched very deeply, she shared the rest of the story. This child, who was obviously hungry, called the rest of his friends together and shared the piece of cake with them. All of us were touched by the beauty and grace of this action.

Often in the North, where we have so much, we are afraid that others will take what we have, so we have to protect it; we have been taught not to share, for we may be taken advantage of. Our lives are characterized much more by a sense of individuality than community. This child from the South was motivated by his strong sense of community and sharing. He had been gifted, and shared that gift with his friends.

This in no way excuses the global community from taking very seriously the challenge it has, to create a more sustainable community by finding economic balance for all communities. That many do not have enough to live on and to sustain them and their families is unconscionable.

Reading

“All The Children Of The World” (See the appendix, p. 31.)

Many children are forced into child labour. In 1938, this problem was recognized and addressed and the Fair Labour Standards Act (FLSA) was enacted. This Act prohibits children under the age of 18 from undertaking hazardous work such as mining, roofing, saw-milling, demolition, working with radioactive materials; children under 16 are barred from working in factories during school hours; children under 14, under this Act, are barred from most jobs with farming being the exception. Children under the age of 12 can only work on the family farm.

The reality is that child labour laws are inadequately enforced in many countries, including the United States and Canada.

Children in developing nations are often forced to quit or, in some cases, never attend school in order to find a job and help support the family. Without education, these children are unable to be children. Many are forced to become adults before they are 13. Illiterate children then pass on this cycle to the next generation.

India and Indonesia are two of the worst offenders of child labour (Child Labor Inquiry. Child Labor in India: Causes, Governmental Policies and the Role of Education. Mitesh Badiwala., c.1998)

It is estimated that as many as 60 to 110 million children are working in India. The income of these children contributes 30-35% to the income of a poor family, demonstrating the significance of this income.

A 1995 report indicated that 42% of children in Ethiopia were working. This work included crop cultivation and street peddling.

The increase in child prostitution is another symptom of the increasing levels of poverty in our communities.

Canadians are being forced to come to terms with their own dark past in regards to children. In the past, much pain has been inflicted on people due to our intolerance of differences within communities. The aboriginal community has been torn apart and shattered because of residential schools. Children were separated from their parents, families and communities when they were six years old. They were forced to speak English and were severely punished if they were caught speaking their mother tongue, or if they continued to show interest in their own roots and culture. The native community is still in the process of coming to terms and healing the deep wounds inflicted by these residential schools. Children were abused physically, sexually and psychologically. First Nation families still have to struggle to re-establish themselves and to develop a sense of their own community as a result of this horrendous injustice and loss of culture and community. This is a clear example of how community is destroyed. It depicts also the painful journey of re-organization.

In order to have sustainable communities where all—especially our children—experience human dignity, we need to address the whole arena of poverty, the distribution of wealth and the use of the world's resources. A family that is well-fed, clothed and has access to land and shelter contributes to sustainable community and thus a more secure and sustainable world for us all.

Peace With Justice

Isaiah 9:2,6

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light ...
 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be
 on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor,
 Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

In order for communities to be sustainable they need to be living in a place of just peace; allowing all to live in a just, equitable way, recognizing each other's human, religious and political rights. All parties need to feel that they are free, and that they can co-exist together. Peace—the absence of war—without justice is not enough to create sustainability. This is clearly demonstrated by the story of the Palestinian people.

(See Section 3, p. 23, for the story.) Peace has to serve justice.

“We know that our responsibility is down in the grassroots. And the grassroots have to be reconciled. That is the prophetic voice—where an Israeli child will see that his or her security is in the reconciled Palestinian child. And the Palestinian child will be liberated, and also that security is in the reconciled Israeli child and neighbour. Both of them will feel that this country will be a promised land of milk and honey for Palestinians and Israelis. This is the only way for peace, and the only way the community can hold it together.” (Bishop Munib Younan, National Bishop of the Lutheran Church in Palestine)

The third module of *Take A Closer Look* will explore the theme of “Sustainable Peace.” Thus this section will not delve into this subject in depth. The point that needs to be made is that sustainable communities are communities in which all members of the society have access to freedom and a place where differences can co-exist together.

Reflection

I Used to Think... Now I think...

- 1) Regarding Right to Land:
- 2) Regarding Health Services and Education:
- 3) Regarding Secure Food and Water:
- 4) Regarding Gender Equality:
- 5) Regarding Human Dignity for All—Especially Children:
- 5) Regarding Peace with Justice:

(Adapted from: *Birthings and Blessings II*, Gail Anderson Ricciuti and Rosemary Catalano Mitchell. Crossroads, New York, 1993, p. 96.)

Litany of Confession

(See Appendix, p. 32.)

How are communities destroyed and re-organized?

“[I] will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile.” (Jeremiah 29:14b)

In the Hebrew scriptures we get a detailed description of a people whose community has been destroyed. They were far from their homeland. Relentlessly, they kept calling out to God to save them and to redeem them. They wanted to return to a place of security and peace.

There are many ways that a community can be destroyed. The separation can be spiritual, moral, emotional or physical. It can have aspects of all of these qualities. Community is destroyed when an individual or a group feels separate, feels as if they are not at home in their own being or in their physical community.

Many people are exiled from their bodies because of eating disorders or childhood abuse. Families are in exile from one another when children refuse to come home, or parents disown children, or siblings deny one another a welcome. In some churches, people have been sent into exile and forbidden full participation because of their marital status, theological insights, or gender. Some people are in exile from themselves, mentally anguished or emotionally unable to understand or to accept who they are. Ethnic groups are exiled from social or work situations because of their skin colour or creed. People are exiled in their own homes, gripped by fear of crime and drugs and afraid to venture into the street. (*May I Have This Dance?* Joyce Rupp, Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame, Indiana, 1992, p. 157.)

The Israelites were exiled for two generations. Two things happened. Some became part of the new culture. They built their homes and found work in Babylon; some even began to worship the Babylonian gods as opposed to being faithful to their Jewish tradition.

Other Jews refused to accept Babylon as their home. In their hearts they held the vision of home that was harmonious with their heritage, and they longed for the day that they could return home. (Joyce Rupp, *May I Have This Dance?*)

Throughout scripture we encounter a God who loves us, longs to be in a relationship with us and calls us home. The Creator wants to help us to re-organize our lives out of exile or bondage so that we can once again be part of a sustainable community. Over and over again we are invited to explore our lives and the

communities that we are a part of and see if there are parts of us within these communities that need to be called back home.

If God could create the ideal kingdom on earth, I imagine God would treat every citizen with love, compassion and caring. To help re-organize communities that have been destroyed (whether we are intimately connected to them, across the miles, or internal), requires the same of us. It requires this whether the person is a farmer in a far-off land growing coffee beans for our morning coffee, a refugee displaced from his/her home due to conflict and strife, or a member of our family. By acting, we can participate in bringing God's kingdom to earth and help in creating sustainable communities of peace.

“The Lord says... I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you, . . . plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”
Jeremiah 29:10-11

Water Brueggemann writes:

The poet in exile sings his people to homecoming. And that is a theme to which the exiled church in America is now summoned. The gospel is that we may go home. Home is not here in the consumer militarism of a dominant value system. Home also is not heaven, as though we may escape. Home, rather, is God's kingdom of love and justice and peace and freedom that waits for us. The news is we are invited home... The whole Church may yet sing: “Precious Savior take my hand. Lead me home!” (Walter Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination: Prophetic Voices in Exile*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986, p. 130.)

Questions

- 1) How do you develop communities in your own places:
 - Neighbourhood
 - Family
 - Place of work
 - School
 - Church
 - What is your relationship to yourself?
- 2) What makes your communities sustainable and meaningful? (You may wish to explore this question from an emotional, physical, spiritual and moral perspective.)
- 3) What is the underlying motivation for the creation of the communities that you are a part of? What is it that bonds the community? What motivates the individual actions of people living within this system?
- 4) Have there been times when you have cut yourself off from the support of community?
- 5) Try to connect with the world of those who are poor, homeless, the refugees. Can you share something of your abundance with them?

How communities are organized and function is sometimes different between the North and the South. The values and beliefs that motivate the behaviour of individuals differs. In the North, we may tend to put more emphasis on the individual. The expression of a people coming together to form a community may flow more easily in the South. We in the North sometimes do not recognize that we need each other and that we can no longer journey independently. In the South, through hardship and pain, people may experience their need of each other. They come to experience that when they come together (often having to share something of themselves, or make a compromise, or maybe even give something), the whole that is created, is far greater than the sum of the individual parts. Also through experience, they know that what affects one person in the community affects the entire community.

In the North, we tend to see ourselves as self-sufficient and able to do it on our own. We are often

motivated by fear of losing something: ourselves, our possessions. Sharing, allowing ourselves to be vulnerable, and believing there is enough for everyone, if shared justly, is a great learning experience, looming before us as we begin to understand what it means to live in a global community.

Reflection

Begin by sitting in silence and darkness, remembering the places within that need to come home. Have each member of the group light a candle and pray Psalm 61. Continue with the following prayer:

Leader: God of exiles, reveal to us the part of ourselves in exile, the part that is wandering and needs to come home.

People: God of exiles, hear the cries and groaning of the homeless, the orphaned, the refugees and the imprisoned of the earth. Keep us closely united to them through our compassion and our actions.

Leader: God of exiles, help us to see more clearly the aspects of our own culture that keep us captive. Grant us vision, courage and the strength to stand up for the values of the Gospel.

People: God of exiles, be the clear voice that calls the church home to truth and justice. Give our leaders compassionate hearts and open minds so that no one needs to be alone in exile. Amen.

(Adapted from Joyce Rupp, *May I Have This Dance*, p. 162-163.)

Exercise

View the video: *Sustainable Community: Ethiopia*

or

Sustainable Community: Middle East

A Question to Ponder

Will we have hearts that are large enough, love that is intense enough and imaginations that are wide enough to enter upon that Gospel way, without delay or excuses, to where we are called to live and serve as a people who are reconciled?

“Attentive to building up the human family, how can we remain unaware that every people has its own genius? And so many people on earth today reflect the mysterious figure of the suffering servant; humiliated, ill-treated, with nothing to attract us, it is our diseases that they bear. (Happy are those who have done all they could in recent years to bring about the freedom of their peoples! Who will uphold these freedoms in places where they are still quite new?)” (Brother Roger of Taizé)

SECTION 3

How can we contribute to making the global community more Sustainable?

- Palestine: Health/Vocational Training/Scholarship
- Ethiopia: Soil and Water (SWC) and Community Development (CD) Projects

Litany of Confession: See appendix, p. 33.

In this section you will have the opportunity to explore the components of a sustainable community by taking a closer look at the Health/Vocational Training/Scholarship Program in Palestine, which is supported by CLWR. As you inform yourself about this project and how it is making a difference to people, as you contribute to the work of CLWR, you help in making the global community more sustainable. People can have a livelihood, and we can help make this happen. We are called upon to share our wealth. It is interesting to ponder that in some societies one is considered to be an outcast until one shares one's wealth.

“Vision without action is a daydream. And at the same time, we have a vision and we have to act. And when we act, we act on behalf of world Christianity because we are the local expression. We act on behalf of all the Christians of the world. Because we want to be the voice of our people, of Islam, to you, and your voice to our people and to Islam.” (Bishop Munib Younan)

The main five areas of involvement of the Department for World Service (DWS) in the Jerusalem/West Bank Region are the Augusta Victoria Hospital, Secondary Vocational School, Village Health Clinics, Sheltered Workshops for the Blind and Scholarships.

Augusta Victoria Hospital (AVH) moved forward in its strategic efforts to recruit high quality physicians, thus strengthening the medical and surgical programs. AVH witnessed an overall 13% increase in utilization for inpatients. The total of admissions for the year was 4,126 and the total number of inpatient hospital days was 15,416. Dialysis treatments increased by over 50% from 1,545 sessions in 1998, to 2,352. The Palestinian refugees from UNRWA (UN Relief and Works Agency) continued to be the majority of referrals (72%) to AVH.

The Village Health Clinics (VHC) program provides primary health care and health education to the population north of Jerusalem and west of Ramallah on the West Bank. The five village clinics serve a population in excess of 40,000 people from a catchment area of approximately 25 West Bank villages. The cooperation and integration of the VHC and AVH continued in 1999. The Secondary Vocational School is designed to provide appropriate vocational training to Palestinian youth and other target groups in the Holy Land.

The Sheltered Workshops for the Blind (SWB) continue to provide employment opportunities for approximately 30 blind workers at the Mount of Olives and Bethlehem workshops.

Finally, the LWS Scholarship program continued to grant scholarships to meritorious students. The number of recipients has been reduced to 25 in 1999, in order to provide more significant financial aid to the students. (*Canadian Lutheran World Relief: Bulletin of Reports 1999/2000*)

What makes a community sustainable?

History

The Arab/Israeli war dates back to 1948-49. During those clashes the refugee problem was created by the creation of the state of Israel.

For the last 1200 years the Palestinians and the Israelis have been contesting this land.

In 1967, Jordan attacked Israel at the time when the city of Jerusalem was divided by a physical border. In

the wake of that war, Israel captured eastern Jerusalem and the West Bank. Shortly thereafter, Israel annexed the areas of east Jerusalem. In the eyes of Israeli law, Jerusalem is part and parcel of Israel. This is not the case among the Palestinians. They view it as being a military conquest that is imposed upon them against their will. In the 32 years that have transpired since the Six-Day War, virtually everything that Israel has done has been geared to consolidating its exclusive rule over the eastern part of the city. The Palestinians have not remained passive. What has occurred is a constant war, sometimes breaking out into violence but, more often than that, a war of deeds and struggles where each side tries to deny the legitimacy of the other side.

After the 1967 war the concept of identity cards was created. There are numerous kinds of identity cards within the Palestinian community. The blue identity cards refer to Palestinians who live in the Jerusalem vicinity. This area came under Israeli jurisdiction after the 1967 war. Now, beyond that is the West Bank and Gaza. These people were given orange identity cards. In the mid-90s, the Israelis passed a law by which everyone who is an Israeli resident—this includes the blue identity carrier—is entitled to join the Israeli insurance scheme. Because the Israeli insurance scheme did not have an arrangement with the hospital in the Palestinian area, they were not given the choice of coming to the Augusta Victoria Hospital.

Right to land and shelter

“Land is honey; land is food; land is our roots. Without our land, we are nothing. This is why land is very important for us, not only from a materialistic viewpoint, but from a spiritual one of being attached to life and land. Land is life for many Palestinian people. And so you could imagine how much pain the establishment of the state of Israel has caused for the Palestinian refugees.” (Michel Bahbah, in charge of Patient Services and Outreach at the Augusta Victoria Hospital in Jerusalem.)

The Palestinian refugee issue must be politically solved. Education and social work are not enough. A Palestinian infrastructure that gives the refugees a tenure (not leaving them in refugee camps) is a must. All refugees must have right to their land.

“We cannot solve the Palestinian issue without solving that. Housing is not a luxury. If one owns his or her own house and has a job, they can stay in the country. But ones that don’t have it, they have to rent; the rent is high. They are sometimes more expensive than Winnipeg or Toronto. So many opt to immigrate.” (Bishop Munib Younan)

Right to education and health care

The Lutheran church has a large school system where they have five schools with 3,000 children. Thirty-one percent of these children are Muslim, 6% are Lutheran and others are from other Christian denominations. The intention is to help give the children a good Christian education. Secondly, they are educated to be moderates; thirdly, they have a crucible—a co-existence together; fourthly, they are given a quality education.

Many Palestinian students are negatively affected when it comes to education. The standards in the school system are sometimes below standard. Especially those that were in prison were negatively affected. They were often tortured and they suffered a lot; this will leave scars for a lifetime.

Within the Vocational Training School, 30-45% of the students are refugees. The non-refugees often come from very poor and needy families. That is why the tuition fees are kept relatively low.

The Augusta Victoria Hospital (AVH) was originally established to serve the Palestinian refugees after the 1948 war. It was established only for the refugees in order that they would have access to quality health care, the same as any other Palestinian within the community. This was done jointly with UNRWA. The hospital is

involved not only in health care, but also extends services for educating the refugees. Thus, the hospital has continuously empowered the refugees by improving their quality of life.

“The refugees have been extremely grateful for the fact that they have a venue to go to where they don’t have to pay exorbitant amounts of money to get the same quality of health care. Yes, our patients know to come here wanting health services. They even come here when they need guidance to be referred to some of the services we don’t have. We also have a very close working relationship with the United Nations. We provide the social support for some hardship cases they refer to us. And so this is really a main address for refugee health care and it has been for the last 50 years.” (Hospital Administrator: Dr. Tawfiq Nasser)

The Village Health Clinics are composed of five centres which serve approximately 40,000 people. People come to them for treatment and health education. They treat patients with, and teach patients about, diabetes, heart disease, hypertension, kidney problems. As well, they have a baby clinic where babies are checked monthly until they are two years of age. Mothers are instructed on how to feed their babies and when their babies should have vaccinations.

The staff in these clinics also know about the social, psychological and economic problems. Sometimes they come to the clinics just to talk. They want someone to listen to them and to understand them.

Gender Equality

The role of the woman in Palestinian society is considered to be more or less equal to the role of the man. The women are working in the fields; they are working in the house and looking after the family. Many men are educated, as are many of the women. However, some of the educated women are not given the opportunity to work.

There is a definite difference between women working inside a refugee camp and those working outside of the camps. This becomes obvious on an economic and social level. People who live outside of the camps have better economic opportunities. Within the camps the women are, in many cases, obliged to work to assist and help look after their families.

“We live in a very difficult situation. I am a working woman. I finish my work here. I have to go home to cook for my children. I should get myself ready to teach my children. I don’t work because I want to work, but I work because I am obliged to work and to assist my family. Many of the responsibilities are over the head of the women; and as much as the husband is cooperative, still the responsibility is much higher with the working lady.

“We seek for more open opportunities, more liberalization, more opportunities on the educational level. Also, we have universities, but not everyone is able to be a member of these universities if you are not well-off financially. Sure, there is an opportunity to be at the school, but still you cannot enter it. We can improve our situation by improving our educational level. We hope that the future will be better than the situation I am living in.” (Kindergarten teacher in a refugee camp: Sahar Adawi)

Human dignity for all – especially children

Before the creation of the Augusta Victoria Hospital many of the Palestinian refugee children were not cared for. No one was there for them; many used to die. The AVH offered a place to look after the refugee children—a place to diagnose and to feed them.

In the refugee camps, many of the basic needs that should be available for children are not found. This includes such things as safe places for children to move and play. Also, the general health situation is considered to be bad. Many of the children suffer from different kinds of breathing illnesses.

Peace with justice

Many Palestinians see themselves as victims of the victims. Some, especially within the church, believe their agenda with the Jews to be one of seeking a just peace. One way this can be accomplished is by means of education. The Lutheran church schools are doing this in a strong way.

“Other futures we don’t have, but to co-exist together in a just, equal way. Not one stronger than the other, not in an exclusive way, but in a way where everyone will really feel that they are free, that they will live together and they can really work together and witness together.” (Bishop Munib Younan)

The entire Arab world considers the return of East Jerusalem, which was seized by the Israeli army in the Six-Day War of 1967 and annexed by Israel soon after, as vital to the acceptability of any peace agreement.

One Palestinian woman wonders: “How come the Israelis talk about peace and they don’t let us Christians come to the Holy Sepulchre to celebrate Easter? If they really want peace, and they claim to really want peace, they should allow all Palestinians to have access to their holy places in Jerusalem.”

“Perhaps each side would want the other to evaporate, but neither side has explained any way to accommodate the views of the other. So, at the end of the day, I believe that Jerusalem is an eminently viable city where, under terms not terribly different from those we live with today, we will be able to live with much more peace, much more mutual respect, much more dignity, much more equity in the running of everyday life. In a city that will be a much better approximation of the city of peace that the prophets envisioned. Educating people both in Israel and abroad, that in Palestine we are condemned to live with one another. Having been condemned to do so, we can turn this place into a paradise, or prison; it all depends on us.” (Daniel Seidemann, Jewish lawyer working as an advocate for the Palestinians.)

How is community restored? reorganized?

“I think that people will have to become more theoretical. The heritage is not a political heritage, but a very mundane one. Jerusalem indeed belongs to God and to history and to King David and to Jesus and to Mohamad, and to the Jewish people and to the Catholic church and the Protestant world and the Islamic world, but Jerusalem is also a city. I know that may sound high level, but the stones in Jerusalem obey the law of gravity. Recognizing that Jerusalem is also a city, you also recognize that—before it belongs to the list that I gave you before: God, history, humankind etc.— Jerusalem belongs to the 630,000 people who are born, sweat, live, give birth and die here. And that recognition will bring about a cognitive revolution whereby we have to find ways, at a very mundane level, to share the city. Jerusalem is going to be one city with two peoples and three religions, or it will be a living hell for all of the people who are living in it. And there is no third way.

Make sure that when you see the temple mount, understand that it is sacred to somebody else. And when you see the church of the Holy Sepulchre, in an area that perhaps King David walked, you’re sharing the same sacred turf and your dreams and their dreams can co-exist side by side without necessarily breaking down into bloodshed. That’s happened too often in the past.

I think both peoples are going through a long process of convalescence. And that process involves the painful humanization of the other side. The pain of the Palestinian side is real. The Israeli’s understandable. The injustices are not imagined. Sometimes exaggerated, but certainly not always. And I think both sides are now in the process of realizing: we can remain who we are while recognizing the humanity, the pain, the suffering and the injustices inflicted on the other side. It’s happening. It’s happening very slowly, and it is by no means an easy process. And I think in that lies the real hope for the future.

The story of Jerusalem is also the story of community. If there is any message, it’s for whoever comes

here—try and tell the story well to your own communities. Telling it well means that there are 630,000 people living in a city that is very dear to humanity. It's very dear to Judaism, Christendom and Islam. It's very dear to people throughout the world which is very easy to abuse. Give us a hand in making this a little bit more similar to the celestial Jerusalem that was envisaged in the three great religions. That can only be served by paying deep respect to the narratives of all the people who live here and by telling the truth about the city—even when it's painful—and with a little bit of grace.” (Daniel Seidemann)

If you would like information on the Ethiopian Soil and Water Conservation (SWC) and Community Development (CD) Project, please refer to Study #1: *Sustainable Agriculture: Water*. If you do not have this Study, you may obtain it by contacting the office of Canadian Lutheran World Relief.

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WHAT YOU CAN DO

- 1) Support the work of Canadian Lutheran World Relief. By doing so you are ensuring that development programs have a focus on sustainable community.
- 2) Enter into the world of those who are in exile, the refugees, the imprisoned, the poor. How might you connect yourself more closely with these people both near and far? Can you share something of your spiritual or economic abundance with them? Can you include them in a regular time of sharing prayer?

Closing Prayer

(in unison), (adapted from *Birthings and Blessings II*, p. 168.)

Loving God:

Guide us from death to life.

From lies to Truth.

Guide us from despair to hope,

From fear to Trust.

May our hearts and our world be filled with peace.

May we dream, pray and work together to build a world where all can live in peace with justice. Amen.

Benediction

(Adapted from *Reaching for Rainbows*, p. 140.)

Enter into the world that our loving Gracious God has created for us. Go and share the story of God who is Light, Truth and Compassion, who sent Jesus Christ that we might be reconciled to God and each other. Go, living with God in your hearts—the Lord and giver of life. Amen.



APPENDIX

Due to copyright law, the materials in this section may NOT be duplicated.

However the materials may be made into an overhead for ONE TIME USE; or they can be read by the leader or a participant of the study group. If a reading requires two readers, the copy could be shared.

These suggested readings are provided for use at various points in the study. The study leader may wish to substitute other appropriate pieces for the particular group or situation.

Litany of Celebration

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Leader: Praise the name of God, who has breathed life into our bodies.

People: Praise the name of God, who gave us a garden!

Leader: Praise the name of God, who saved us from the flood.

People: Who gave us a rainbow,

Leader: Who sent us a dove,

People: Who promised to be our God,

Leader: For we would be God's people.

People: Praise the name of God, who led us out of bondage,

Leader: Who parted the Red Sea and sent us manna,

People: Who sent the prophets,

Leader: Who called us from chaos to shalom.

People: Praise the name of God, who sent the Son,

Leader: All praise to God almighty!

People: Praise the name of God who stills the waters,

Leader: Who gives us bread,

People: Who kills the fatted calf,

Leader: Who raises us from the dead;

People: Who never ceases looking for lost lambs,

Leader: Who saves us from self-righteousness,

People: Who heals our broken bodies,

Leader: Who calls us from our Sadducee and Pharisee religiosity,

People: Who challenges us to throw the first stone,

Leader: Who gives us a cup of cold water,

People: And asks us to do the same for others,

Leader: Who calls us in Christ out of darkness into a new Light;

People: Who gives us in Christ a new commandment:

Leader: Love one another.

People: Praise the name of God who weeps with us and laughs with us and calls us to believe.

Leader: Praise the Lord God almighty!

I Celebrate the Church of Jesus Christ

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I celebrate the church of Jesus Christ, where two or three or thousands gather together in the Lord's name and touch this world with the amazing good news that somebody cares, that God joins us in community so that someday this world will be loved to wholeness.

I celebrate this community, where people say Yes in the face of No, where they light candles in the darkest night, where healing and compassion leave no time for self-righteousness, and the life-sustaining love of Christ is evident in the life of the believers.

I celebrate the church, where we dare to stand up, where risk runs rampant, and you and I and all Christ's disciples are called upon to follow even when it costs us something, something precious like our friends, like our respectability, like our future with the company.

I celebrate the church, where we are called from half-heartedness to commitment: commitment to a God who calls us to change, to change our direction, to be reborn to a way of life where others are significant.

I celebrate the church, where every child of God is hailed as unique and valuable, where arms are opened to the world's outcasts, where the tired, beaten, disillusioned world is invited in and surprised by a life-giving word that Christ accepts the children, all the children of the world.

I celebrate the injustices righted, the protests made on behalf of the battered. I celebrate the awareness and awakening to humanity's suffering, the pain alleviated, the scars erased. I celebrate the mercy and forgiveness, the tears wiped away, the hands held, the gifts given, the children treasured and nurtured, the races won, the failures met.

I celebrate healthy grieving for lost children. I celebrate the life-enhancing hope that brings the piecing together of the scattered. I celebrate the celebrants. I celebrate the church of Jesus Christ, whose supportive community holds me when I'm tempted to give up, enfolds me when I'm hurting, affirms me, reaches out to me, gives to me, receives from me.

I cannot live abundantly without this community, God's church, where turning to one another and working and rejoicing with one another is a way of life—a way of life God chose for us, a gift God gave us, a mission that we share; a mission that cuts across barriers, racial and cultural, national and international; a mission that unites local and regional, men and women, young and old. I celebrate this way of life that takes me and mine from the center of things and focuses on ours and theirs. I celebrate the trust we hold, the spirit we share, the attitude of partnership. I celebrate that love lives among us, that God's spirit pervades our being, our community. I see God's face within the lives of these celebrants. I hear God's voice in the vision of men and women who call us to a better way, a higher hope.

For God works miracles in common clay pots, changing caterpillars to butterflies and water to wine, changing seeds to oak trees and night to day, changing winter to springtime, changing lives from ordinary to abundant. We as God's celebrants dance through the world together listening to God's music, responding to God's word, praising God with clapping hands and moving feet, praising God with justice and mercy and humbleness, praising God with changed lives.

Let's celebrate the church of Jesus Christ where the wonderful wildness of God breaks through common clay pots and fills us with a holy spirit that overflows and we see rainbows, many-splendored colors, light in pitch darkness—and everyday is a festival of faith.

All The Children Of The World

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Leader: What about the children of this world who are not filled with life's joys? What about the children who are have-nots—who have not food, have not clothing and medicine, have not warm shelter, and have not parents? What about the abused or neglected child? What about the child who lives in darkness?

Reader: Gabriela Mistral, Nobel prize-winning poet from Chile, has written: "We are guilty of many errors and many faults, but our worst crime is abandoning the children, neglecting the fountain of life. Many of the things we need can wait. The child cannot. Right now is the time his bones are being formed, his blood is being made, and his senses are being developed. To him we cannot answer 'Tomorrow'. His name is 'Today'."

Reader: Luchi Blanco from Cuzco, Peru has said: "Nor clothes, nor language, nor color, nor nation can change the soul of the child; in kissing, in crying, and in song the children of the world are one."

Reader: These words were spoken when UNICEF (The United Nations Children's Fund) received the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1965: "Feeling is growing everywhere...that we are in reality one family in the world...to create a peaceful world, we must begin with the children."

Leader: The United Nations has declared that every child in this world should have certain rights:

The right to affection, love and understanding.

The right to adequate nutrition and medical care.

The right to free education.

The right to full opportunity for play and recreation.

The right to name and nationality.

The right to special care, if handicapped.

The right to be among the first to receive relief in times of disaster.

The right to be a useful member of society and to develop individual abilities.

The right to be brought up in a spirit of peace and universal brotherhood.

The right to enjoy these rights, regardless of race, color, sex, religion, national or social origin.

Prayer

God of all nations, God of all children, we ask for your mercy on behalf of all the children who do not run in the sunshine but live out their lives in dark corners. Forgive us for not seeing; forgive us for not looking. Be with us as we search for new beginnings in caring for these children. We pray that one day every child might sleep through the night in peace. Amen.

Litany of Confession

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Leader: O God, your people were upon our doorstep, beaten and stepped upon,

People: And we did not see them.

Leader: You screamed their agony into our ears,

People: And we did not hear them.
 Leader: Your people bled upon us,
 People: And all we could think about was removing the stains.
 Leader: Your people cried to us for sanctuary,
 People: And we locked the church door.
 Leader: O God, we seek to comfort
 People: Ourselves;
 Leader: O God, we seek to help
 People: Ourselves;
 Leader: We seek to trust
 People: Ourselves;
 Leader: God, forgive us.
 People: O God, your people were abused and chained and passed over. Your people were shoved and demeaned
 and ridiculed.
 Leader: And we could not risk seeing or hearing.
 People: And we could not risk seeing or hearing.
 Leader: O God, your people were treated as lepers,
 People: And we could not risk touching them.
 Leader: Give us the justice
 People: That we could not give others.
 Leader: Give us the mercy
 People: That we would not give others.
 Leader: Give us the closeness to you
 People: That we tried to keep from others.
 Leader: Give us the Good News
 People: That we hoarded.
 All: O God, save your people—both outcasts and church!

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Leader: O God, we have said that we “love” our brothers and our sisters, but we confess it is very difficult to put meaning behind that word.
 People: We have traded righteousness for success and security, for power, and for popularity.
 Leader: We have said that we “love” our brothers and sisters but we have not translated that into food and clothing and housing.
 People: The good that we would do, we do not; and the bad that we would not do, we do.
 Leader: We have said we love God, but if we do not love our brothers and sisters whom we have seen, how can we love God whom we have not seen?
 People: We confess that there are times when we do not worship the God of Abraham, but we worship the

approval of others, or our own reputations, or our work, or our family, or money. O God, forgive our unfaithfulness. Forgive our following after false gods.

Leader: O God, there are those who thirst for the Living Water.

People: We pray that we may be strong enough to come forward with a cup of cold water for our brothers and sisters.

Leader: In the name of Christ who ministered unto those in need, we pray.

People: Amen.

