

HEALING A BROKEN WORLD

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because the Lord has anointed me.
He has sent me to preach good news to the poor,
to proclaim release to the prisoners,
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to liberate the oppressed,
and to proclaim the year of the Lords' favor.*

Luke 4:18-29

These are the words Jesus read from the prophet Isaiah in his hometown synagogue following the 40 days he spent being tempted in the wilderness.

This is Jesus' inaugural statement of his mission. "Today, this scripture has been fulfilled just as you heard it." And, it is his "Great Call" to mission. As followers of Jesus, we are also anointed (baptized) to share Christ's mission to preach good news to the poor, to liberate the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor – **to heal a broken world.**

To heal a broken world is one of Jesus' core missional imperatives. And, it is clearly related to Jesus' other core mission imperatives to love God and neighbor and reach new people.

The urgency for every United Methodist congregation and leader (clergy and lay) to actively embrace and engage the imperative to heal a broken world has never been greater. I have been overwhelmed, nearly paralyzed, by the unrelenting crescendo of social injustices and pressing human needs that have arisen in the past few months. These issues threaten the very sanctity of God's good creation and Jesus' prayerful vision that God's kingdom would come on earth as it is in heaven.

The Ebola virus outbreak rages unchecked in West Africa. ISIL's distorted form of Islam threatens an already unstable Middle East. Conflict in Ukraine has destabilized relationships between the United States/Western Europe and Russia. The shooting of black teenager, Michael Brown, in Ferguson, Missouri ripped open the ugly wound of racism that continues to divide our country and revealed the alarming trend of militarizing our police forces. The people and nations of the world are unwilling to address the causes of climate change and the impending disaster of an increasingly uninhabitable planet. Civility in society, politics and even the Church has been sacrificed on the altars of ideological purity and self-centeredness. One in six households in the United States is food insecure; poverty continues to erode human potential and productivity across the globe.

The United States' failure to enact immigration reform has exasperated the border crisis as the abused, exploited, threatened children of Central America seek refuge and hope. You could certainly add to this list of places where the followers of Christ have opportunities and responsibilities to heal a broken world.

The crisis on our border with Mexico is particularly poignant for Char and me. As the debacle of thousands of Central American children being detained at the border or interred at locations across the United States reached fever pitch, Char and I were vacationing with our two oldest grandchildren, Dashua and Cailum. Every time I looked into the faces of the children captured in the television reports, I saw my own grandson. Cailum was born in Guatemala and was adopted by our middle son and his spouse, Stuart and Christine. Except for the grace of God, he could be one of the children risking all to cross the border to freedom and a new start.

Cailum was an immigrant when he arrived in Indianapolis, Indiana. As was my grandfather when he settled in western North Dakota, as are most of all of our foremothers and forefathers. Cailum is now a legal citizen of the United States. When we travel with Cailum, I can often tell that some view him as an alien, a foreigner, even "illegal." But, Char and I love Cailum. His parents love their son. Our hearts are completely obedient to God's command to "love him like one of your own." (Leviticus 19:34, *The Message*)

The issue of immigration and immigration reform evokes strong emotions and legitimate concerns. Today, over 12 million undocumented persons live in this country. Most of them have come because, like you and me, they seek life and dignity for their families. They grow, harvest, prepare and serve our food, clean our offices and hotels, build our houses and highways. They often live in the seams and shadows of this country, even as they contribute, like every immigrant population before them, to the building of a strong, prosperous nation and better, more diverse communities of faith.

The delay in enacting comprehensive and compassionate immigration reform is a travesty of justice. And, most grievous to me, is the apparent disregard, even disdain, for the children. Our country has a long-held commitment to care for all children, regardless of race, culture or legal status. The children of undocumented immigrants are in this country through no choice of their own. Often, the unaccompanied and undocumented children amassed on the border have reluctantly been sent by their parents who simply want to save their lives. Those children are the future of this country and must be nurtured to realize their full potential. Denying them access to due process, social services and public education will only serve to undermine the country's future.

Paul's letter to the Ephesians reminds us, as Christians, that we were once without Christ, "being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and foreigners to the covenants of promise, having no hope..." But now we are, "no longer strangers and aliens, but citizens with God's people and members of God's household." (Ephesians 2:12 and 19)

It is always the children who suffer most. Poverty and its related diseases always take their greatest toll on the children. It is our youth that are being killed by the epidemic of gun violence. It is the children losing their futures while warehoused in detention or refugee camps. It is the children who will inherit a world forever affected by climate change. It is always the children who are the victims of a broken world.

Healthy, vital congregations consistently address the economic, social and political issues in the communities in which they serve. They seek the holistic development and transformation of their local communities and the global community. Every one of the national and international issues I have identified in this article has its local expression and local implications.

Dakotas United Methodism has always been on the forefront of healing a broken world. This is one of the things we do well! There has never been a more urgent time for us to live into this identity and legacy. I invite you to fervently pray for God's healing presence in all the places that are so broken. And, I encourage your bold witness and advocacy. May all our prayers and actions reflect the rich blend of compassion and mercy, solidarity and justice that is the core of the Methodist Movement's passion for social holiness.

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