

From Canada in Love, Hope and Solidarity

Living letters in the context of
DOV – Focus on the US

To the Churches and Christians in the United States of America.

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

I come as a “living letter” from your northern neighbour Canada to accompany you and encourage you as you face extraordinary challenges in witnessing to Peace with Justice in a world overwhelmed by violence.

I come in unity, solidarity and peace through God’s grace. Other living letters have come to you from all over the oikumene in the wake of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. This witness of hope comes as we all face new realities of power and insecurity.

The churches of Canada and the USA have experienced moments of lively and intense fellowship, solidarity and common witness. We yearn for continued and renewed vigour in our life together as churches of Jesus Christ called to witness in these difficult times.

As close neighbours we see the United States of America as the world’s most powerful nation – economically, politically, culturally and militarily. As our church members filled the streets in Canadian cities, towns and villages to say no to war and to say no to global unilateralism, we knew that we were one with millions of U.S. Christians who were taking a strong prophetic stance for peace with justice. We give thanks to God for the courage of you who have struggled to witness to truth, justice and peace in a time when fear, insecurity and manipulated patriotism have paralysed so many.

We celebrate that we have stood together in common witness to the international community, and through the meeting with UN Secretary General Kofi Anan, lifted up a vision of what justice requires for Iraq post-invasion.

We celebrate the new energy and strong solidarity we shared when Canadian, U.S and Mexican church leaders met together in January 2004 to affirm a common call for Just Trade.

We recognize the cost born by church leaders, religious organizations and individuals in the USA who have challenged abuse of power and unilateralism cloaked in the veil of democracy, freedom, security and patriotism. Along with you we deplore discrimination and unjust treatment of others particularly our Arab and Muslim brothers and sisters. In our Canadian context we have also struggled to overcome the barriers of inter-religious division and forge new and stronger inter-faith solidarity. We together have a task to tell the truth in love and refuse to have domination, injustice and hatred justified in God’s name.

In Canada, our churches and indeed our whole society continue to live out the horrendous effects of colonialism and the domination of one nation over others. The legacy of injustice against Canada’s First Nation peoples is especially sharp for those Christians churches who were accomplices in the processes of colonization, cultural oppression, abuse of power and genocide, through a policy of assimilation that removed children from their communities. This is the violence for which we seek repentance.

The gifts that First Nations had to offer were suppressed in the colonization of Canada. The newcomers to the land did not respect their justice system, rich culture and languages that had existed since time immemorial. The removal of children from families and communities to residential schools, the punishment exacted for speaking their own languages there and the disruption of Aboriginal spirituality and tradition, are wrongs that cannot be excused. Churches have committed themselves to listening to truth telling about the effects of these wrongs on First Nations communities. Lamentation and repentance for what may have been carried out with good intentions but has had disastrous consequences in the

lives of the people has been a painful and yet spiritual experience for the churches. Through listening to the stories, through apologies and the establishment of healing funds to help restore language and culture the churches are taking steps towards rebuilding relationships that have been severely strained and in many cases broken. There is recognition that we all need healing as we engage in the long slow journey towards reconciliation. We are committed to seeking new ways of walking with respect and honour for the language, spirituality and culture of First Nations Peoples.

Our own bitter experience leads us to question the claims of those who impose solutions for the supposed “good” of others, when it is the powerful who end up with the land, the resources and the political control and those who are being “helped” are humiliated and dispossessed.

John 10:10 is especially telling for us – Jesus who not only proclaims that he has come “so that all may have life in all its fullness” but also that we must clearly acknowledge that there are others that come as thieves “who come to steal, kill and destroy.”

We come as neighbours who in our own context struggle to “choose life” in times of unbridled power, militarized hegemony and economic domination.

We hope that together we can break through barriers of isolation, and form bonds of unshakeable unity in justice and peace, so that as you make witness for the world God wants and has promised you will know that you are not alone.

“We are one body...

When one suffers all suffer.”

We have heard and been told by U.S. brothers and sisters that the struggles for global justice and peace go far beyond partisan politics or the policies of any specific administration – at stake is the very self-identity of the U.S.A.. The voice and prophetic witness of the churches is fundamental as you our mighty neighbour struggles to harness its power in response to God’s call:

*“To do justice,
love kindness
and walk humbly with our God”*

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