

Healing: Hope in Action Assembly Message

[The 32 member churches of CWM plus ecumenical partners and guests met on Jeju Island, Korea, from June 18 – 23 2016. This Assembly message as the next contribution in our theological understanding of mission in the context of Empire. It comes in a succession of documents and meetings and builds out of the Assembly in Pago Pago in 2012 where we affirmed the Language of Hope. We have progressed here to bringing a statement affirming and committing to the healing power of hope in action to all those who struggle under and against Empire.]

CWM's 2016 Assembly theme 'Healing: Hope in Action' takes us to the heart of the Gospel and the biblical witness of the transforming presence of God amongst us in a world so broken in need of God's redemption. The churches witness to and proclaim Life in all its fullness. Our message is one of hope, healing, liberation and transformation of all life, life in all forms, complexities and ways. The Church is called to lift up hope for God's redemption amidst a world whose realities and systems mean pain and in which injustice flourishes at the hands of violent systems, ideologies and movements. In partnership with Christ, Christians must speak out against the Imperial powers and forces of death and assert that there can be neither hope nor healing at the hands of Empire.

The Assembly was hosted by the Presbyterian Church of Korea and met on Jeju, Island of Peace. Meeting in Korea took us to a context of deep division, inflicted by the forces of Empire since 1945. Assembly gathered at the Jeju Peace Park. This stands amidst the mass graves of those whose aspiration for self-determination was met with bloody and brutal denial at the hands of their own national forces and their allies. The politics of Empire remain in power today with the construction of the Gangjeon Village Naval Base despite strong local and international protests. The April 4 uprising and the Gangjeon Naval base left scars on the Jeju people. The need for reconciliation and healing is profound. The militarization of Korea, of North East Asia shows us the power of Empire and the cost for those who would seek to be in mission to counter Empire's tactics and claims that so deny the security of peace, the sanctity of all life, and the sovereignty of God.

We gathered in the shadow of so many 'routine' atrocities and oppressions: The slaying of those whose gender, ethnicity, orientation, political ambition or vulnerability makes them expendable and disposable; the forced displacement and migration of millions; the prominence and impact of nationalist ideologies and politics and the hunger and poverty of over 2 billion people across the world. What is done to children of God, by other children of God is also done to the Creation of God. Individuals, communities, nations, species are each under global threat of Climate Change because of the despotic demonic destructive urges of Empire.

We sit between the signs of the times, our reading of Scripture and our calling to act in hope.

Comfort, comfort my people ... Isa 40: 1

CWM member churches instinctively shape their mission as showing love and concern, reaching out to bring hope and comfort to a world badly in need of Christ's love and peace. Healing Hope in Action seems to send churches to care for the less fortunate. The church in mission often seeks ways of bringing comfort. But Assembly sat overwhelmed, disturbed and un comforted as the stories and systems of generations of exploitation were shared from our contexts and the Bible. We felt the full horror of violence perpetrated on children of God because of their poverty, gender, their race or sexual identity, and because of the intersection of those things. We shuddered under the weight of histories of hurt and exploitation exemplified by testimony from South Africa and Palestine. We were challenged by persons, complexities and realities it would be more comfortable to deny or avoid. CWM's vision of Healing Hope in Action may begin in a practice of comfort, but it cannot stay there. Mission is to bring change, not just comfort. Furthermore, our reflections and discussions kept

acknowledging that there have been occasions when church practices have caused pain even as the church has sought to bring comfort.

CWM affirms healing as the missionary mandate given to us by Christ. We commit to a vision of healing that seeks to change the structures that make us and our world sick while also comforting those who hurt.

A cry is heard in Ramah – weeping and great mourning ... Jer. 31:15

The testimony of the Halmoni, the Korean women forced to be sex slaves for the Japanese Army in the Second World War shows the difficult path churches must walk. These women fought hard against imperial powers which seek to keep hidden the rape and assault on these women's dignity. Many have kept silent for a long time but find little comfort in their silence. Once they took the uncomfortable step of breaking their silence and uttering their hurt and rage something like healing began. Thus CWM must take uncomfortable steps as it persists in a vision of mission to bring healing in the midst of the industrial hurt Empire is doing to God's children and God's earth. No one should be surprised if the places and people to inspire this healing comes from those who are precisely and deliberately denied it most. People, churches and movements are challenged to harbor and not cast out. At those intersecting margins voices stir to lead us in fresh direction if we heed them. CWM's theme Healing Hope in Action challenges fresh commitment to this. But, it also demands we discern and disavow the cheap narcotic versions of hope, healing and grace that Empire and some patterns of church have offered.

CWM affirms the urgency of no longer silencing those who are victims of Empire, but listening to and acting on their cries. We commit to further solidarity with peoples' liberation movements and the Wounded and Resurrected Christ as we live in the midst of Empire and Climate change.

They [false prophets] led my people astray, saying "Peace" when there was no peace, and "He is building a wall" when they were the ones who laid the plaster. Say to those who laid the plaster that it will fall. When the flooding rains appear and I send hailstones, it will collapse, and the storm winds will break it apart. The wall will certainly fall. Ezekiel 16: 10 – 12

The stories of those who have suffered the violence of poverty, patriarchy and ethnicity and the violence of militarization and war in Korea, in Vietnam, West Papua, Orlando in Palestine enabled us to dismantle the narrative that all is well. These stories reminded us that the voice of God is not to be found in the sites of power. We came to realize that the presence of God is to be found in the places of pain and our hope and salvation will come from those very people we set out to save. We denounce a theology of prosperity that seeks to equate material wealth with the blessing of God. Such theologies only cloud the unjust systems of wealth creation and place the blame for poverty at the threshold of the poor, blaming the victim for their own victimization. We denounce a theology of election that literally and figuratively erects walls between people, and literally occupies the lands of places like Palestine, Korea and West Papua. Such theologies, particularly when backed by state power have led to violence, repression and even genocide We denounce Imperial theologies of mission that conquer persons, land and cultures in the name of God.

We were challenged to deepen our understanding of healing beyond the selves and see how it must embrace the structures. We recognized that injustice is built into our political and economic systems; therefore, these systems make us vulnerable, sick and unwell. Consider the implications of unemployment, lack of opportunity, lack of access to health services, malnutrition and hunger, inability to participate in decision making processes, loneliness, alienation and loss of meaning. The consequences for persons, communities and nations are not the result of personal failings but are

indeed the products of the social structures in which we live and have our being. Healing is another face of justice and we cannot seek justice and well-being unless we seek to dismantle these structures and contribute to building alternate ones. This is the hoped for healing, this is hopeful healing for which we cry.

CWM affirms our counter-cultural calling with a vision of peace that dismantles all divisive walls. We, commit ourselves to dismantling all theologies, ideologies and narratives that do not contribute to the fullness of life of all creation.

Give an account of the hope that is within you ... 1 Peter 3: 15

Can there be hope? Can there be healing? And yet we have heard many hope filled stories from the regions of the CWM and our compatriots from other movements in which the churches are supporting and upholding contributions of peace building with the Earth, in the market place and among people of different class, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religious backgrounds and professions in order that all may have abundant life with rights and dignity. If hope is to be kept alive it will be in counter stories and memories that combat the silencing narratives of Empire.

Voices from the margins have challenged the church to have sufficient faith and hope to respond concretely to the cries of the abject and the groaning of the Earth. We look to wisdoms like Sangseng in the Korean context or Ubuntu in the African [Bantu] 'I am because we are'. These are ethical understandings of what makes us human and emphasize the importance of building right relations with one another and all of God's creation. Thus we are called into relationships through which all of us are changed, that our understanding of healing points to a conversion which is lifelong and leads us into ever new connection with our neighbours, the Creation and the Creator. In this way the self and the other are embraced, and in this embrace is hope for healing.

The way to healing will open, when we reject any forms of life-destroying force in our communities, churches, nations and globally. Healing begins when values are placed on seeking justice, peace and reconciliation; care for the Earth, and in upholding the central role of adults, and children and young people working in partnerships in the struggle for just peace in community life. Women in particular, bring to this ethic the cultural values and virtues of caring, harmony, respect, sacrifice, hospitality, generosity, benevolence, magnanimity and love; faith in a God of life who makes all things possible for the wellbeing of God's people and the Earth.

If Hope in action is to be seen it will be seen in such frontier pioneering ministries as peace building. If it is to be taken over such frontiers then it will be by working alongside the pioneering people in whose bodies and relationships, communities and economies something new is being fashioned from the nothing empire affords them. These frontiers are at the margins of our communities, but they are also the thresholds for healing and transformation.

This account of hope sends CWM into tasks of counter imperial challenge, practice and thinking. We have discerned these critical areas as the arenas for such struggle. They are the areas of Children and young people, Evangelism, Climate Change, Economic Justice, Inclusive community, Inter-faith and ecumenical relations, Worship and discipleship, Militarisation and Human Trafficking. Each of these areas is an arena of harm and healing because they are pressure points in the struggle between empire and life and we must go on to articulate what this means in these contexts and more.

CWM affirms these nine critical areas as our places of Counter-Imperial challenge. We commit to developing effective, practical ecumenical methods that affirm life in fullness through these areas

as actions that bring hope and healing through missional congregations, member churches and beyond.

Go and do likewise ... Luke 10: 37

We recognize that this ethical principle of the fullness of all life should be the starting point of our theology. We see in Christ Healing hope in action. Our witness then is to nurture the flourishing of life we see God inspires as Creator, Christ and Spirit. We have borne witness in our body as an Assembly and as churches that hope is stirring and healing is at work. Empire is being resisted, creation is being nurtured, new relationships are bringing change, political processes are being challenged and the vulnerable are witnessing to liberation and transformation.

Yet, we need to remember that Healing is not easily in our gift and it takes time. We also need to remember how easy it is to harm, for the bad to go to the worst. We have not fully grasped how to speak authentically about healing when our institutions, leadership and practices are so compromised by the pain we cause. There is a journey of conversion ahead of all of us. We cannot lead from positions of power but only with falling in step with those whose pain horrifies and commissions us. We will walk then with the exploited worker, trafficked child, dancing queen, defiant woman, murdered protestor, shot down Black youth, exploited earth and radical Jesus that we might embody, enact and encounter in the face, belly and mind of Empire healing hope in action.

Let us understand that we announce a hope that is always at risk, but we are not the only voice in the wilderness. Let us join with those communities confronting all that deny life and seek with them the transformation Christ proclaimed as *life in its fullness for all*. We do so calling on all member churches and all our ecumenical partners to commit anew and again to a witness that challenges and denounces all that Empire stands for and seeks. God's mission of justice and mercy calls us towards life-affirming communities that offer hope and healing, and invigorate us in the common and global struggle for justice. Let us not shirk from the cost of discipleship, let us go in discomfort and in pain, and in peace and partnership to follow Christ, demonstrating how the kingdom comes from the margins of our world.