



World Council of Churches

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There's a new world in the making

This document arises from the North American consultation on poverty, wealth and ecology sponsored by the World Council of Churches and held in Calgary, Alberta from November 6 to 11, 2011. This consultation that included representatives from Christian confessions in Canada and the United States of America along with representatives from other ecumenical organizations and local and global ecumenical partners took place at a time of deep global financial crisis and people's resistance around the world. It is directed to the World Council of Churches, its member churches and partner organizations and all who share in the ideals and goals of this conference.

This document borrows from indigenous Cree wisdom presented to us as the "Standing Stones." There are four primary quadrants represented by the four directions. It begins in the East where we welcome the rising sun, recognize our relationship to the Creator and confess our identity as part of Creation. It progresses to the South where we seek Wisdom from Scripture and from the teachings of our Elders. It then moves to the West where we ask for healing from the hurts we have caused and the hurts that have been done to us. It ends in the North where we give thanks for the many blessings the Creator has provided for us in our lives. These quadrants have been written as a prayer:

Following the "Standing Stones" there is a concluding call for vision and action.

Confession

We confess that the whole of Creation bears the marks of God. God is our Creator; we love God, all of Creation and one another. We see that God wants the world to be a circle where everyone has a place. However, in North America, we have failed to live out our love.

While we have failed to live out our love, corporations have pursued violent development grabbing air, land and water; drowning islands; desertifying lands; violating human rights; and creating conditions of war.

While we have failed to live out our love, international financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund, World Bank and World Trade Organization have enforced finance and trade policies which have indebted nations and forced them to service social and economic debt rather than their people and Earth.

In our limitless pursuit of individual and national wealth and power, we are complicit in a market system that exploits natural resources and people within and beyond our borders:

- When temporary foreign workers care for our children and grandparents, work on our farms, receive low wages, work long hours, live and work in harsh conditions, are vulnerable to abuse, have their human rights violated, fill other jobs that the common excuse says "no North American would do."

We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; and we have done those things which we ought not to have done.

- When companies designate landfills and chemical dumps in the neighbourhoods of poor and marginalized people;
- When US and Canadian corporations extract minerals and resources from other countries in

order to operate without environmental safeguards or labour codes, do not pay their fair share of taxes and royalties, and use paramilitary forces against protesters and to displace indigenous communities;

We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; and we have done those things which we ought not to have done.

- When those who have contributed the least to greenhouse gas emissions are the first to suffer the effects of climate change, and we demand that they reduce their greenhouse gas emissions without taking care of our own;
- When we have watched the increased reliance on the military to pursue national self-interest, defend corporate interests, and cause forced migration in the rest of the world;

We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; and we have done those things which we ought not to have done.

For too long, we have said and done too little. We have prioritized profit at the expense of clean air and water, devastated species and ecosystems, devalued people and their cultures, enriched the wealthy few and impoverished the poorest in our society and the global family.

These examples demonstrate the ecological debt we owe to the Earth and the ecological indebtedness of the rich to the poor. The cry of the Earth and the poor are one.

Wisdom

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. (Revelation 22:1-2)

We are compelled and inspired by this vision of hope with respect to poverty, wealth and ecology, a new vision of Earth and the people who are dependent upon its abundance.

The great tree, echoing the Genesis description of an idyllic garden, spans the river of the water of life. This image evokes not a singular tree but a vast, verdant forest that provides twelve kinds of fruit. In this way, the tree will bring food for all of God's people every month of the year. The vision of a redeemed Creation is one of a healthy Earth that will bring healing to the nations.

We have heard the wisdom of the worker, the scientist, the ancestor, the great tree, the river of the water of life. We have heard the wisdom of Your whole Creation calling us toward healing.

There is a new world in the making. You are working on behalf of Your people and restoring the good Earth You created. This world matters as do people's concrete struggles within it. It is our reminder to care for each other and all of Creation. You are a God of redemption, not of destruction and invite us to participate in redemptive acts.

Healing

Creator, You endowed all of Your Creation with dignity, including human beings, a shining strand in the glimmering web of life.

Yet today, Creation is not the way it is supposed to be. We've seen the toxic pools, the gouged Earth, the forecasts of increased global average temperatures that will permanently change life on Earth. Climate change is the enveloping reality we live in.

We are alarmed by the increased concentration of wealth owned by a few. We know that poverty strips dignity away.

We have put our faith in what we have created – idols of gold and silver, luxury and consumer goods, markets and technology - rather than in You, our Creator.

Creator, enliven our imaginations to restore Your Creation. Heal our broken lives and communities.

Redeemer, save us from our greed, and the structures, policies and laws we've established that sustain and protect unearned privilege. We have heard the indictment in the gospel of Luke: "we take what we did not deposit, we reap what we did not sow." Already, we are taking more than Earth can offer, and returning more waste than Earth can absorb.

Save us from a "prosperity" gospel that neglects Your radical gospel of justice and hope for all.

Redeemer, grant us the courage to restore Your Creation. Heal our broken lives and communities.

Holy Spirit, come quickly. We are poor, we are rich; we are oppressed, we are oppressors. Reconcile us to one another, reconcile us with Earth. May the churches we represent be agents of reconciliation, centres for caring communities and shared sacrifice, models of an ethic of solidarity with future generations and our neighbours. Light us with a passion for justice, peace and solidarity.

Holy Spirit, breathe into us the passion to work together, to restore Your Creation. Heal our broken lives and communities.

Thanksgiving

We give thanks for young people who are inventing new forms of resistance to greed and injustice through forums like the Occupy movement and the "people's microphone."

We give thanks for the prophets among us who challenge our idolatry of the unregulated Market and who confront us with our addiction to the carbon economy.

We give thanks for the elders among us, who help us remember a time when it wasn't always like this; who call on the community's invisible heart to counter the Market's invisible hand; who help us to remember what a moral economy looks like.

We give thanks for the witness of those of our ancestors who have taught us our rightful place in Creation and who have spoken truth to power; who understood that Christ is found among those who are hungry, homeless, imprisoned and downtrodden.

We give thanks for our ecumenical partners who continue to deepen our common witness based on ecojustice principles of solidarity, sufficiency, sustainability and equity in the economy and Earth.

We give thanks for the power of being together, and for all those friends and allies who help us to remember who we are as a justice loving people.

Vision & Action

Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it. For there is still a vision (Habakkuk 2: 2-3)

We see a time of new beginnings, of Jubilee, when greenhouse gases in the atmosphere no longer threaten life, when the carbon economy has been transformed, and we no longer mortgage our children's future. We see a time when unsustainable development has been rejected in favour of just, participatory and sustainable communities. We see a time when Earth has begun its regeneration and like God with Noah, we have covenanted with God and Creation to never destroy it again.

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? (James 2:14)

We commit ourselves to lives of integrity and justice where we share all God's resources equitably, reduce our carbon footprint, seek right relationship in our economic transactions and strengthen the campaign for climate justice.

We call on churches, interfaith partners and all people of goodwill to work together to achieve this

timeless and compelling vision. In order to mobilize appropriate resources and as a first step we call on the World Council of Churches, its member churches and its sister ecumenical bodies to undertake a decade of action on ecojustice encompassing both ecological and economic justice.

We call on our North American churches to take action to transition from carbon-based to renewable energy, to narrow the gap between those of us who are rich and those of us who are poor, to respond to the needs of climate refugees, to hold their pension fund and investment managers accountable for the ethical implications of their investments and to advocate for policies that will restore ecological balance.

We call on businesses and industries to commit to principles of integrity by complying with human rights codes; by shifting investments from carbon-based to renewable energy; and by showing leadership in reducing the gap between the rich and the poor by paying fair wages and paying their fair share of taxes.

We call on our governments to govern with integrity by implementing a moratorium on further development of the tar sands; compelling corporations to operate with the highest available environmental and labour standards wherever they do business on the globe; prohibiting excessive interest rates; legislating an international financial transactions tax to begin to make restitution for ecological debt; reallocating budgets from the military and systems of death and destruction to systems that promote the abundance of life; working for a new financial architecture; and ensuring that commercial banking is clearly separated from investment banking (speculative investments and financial transactions).

It is the 11th hour. Make haste. The cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor are one.