

Environmental and Social Disasters in Brazil: a Christian perspective

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By Elizabeth Sherrill

The New Year began with a series of disasters for Brazilians. Some were from natural causes such as flooding due to heavy rains which were aggravated by lack of human preparedness. Other disasters were man-made such as the bursting of the Brumadinho mining dam on the 25th January which released over 11 million cubic metres of toxic waste in minutes killing hundreds of people in its wake, and the fire which took the lives of 10 youngsters in a soccer team training facility, both of which featured heavily in the world press.



“As Christians, how can we react to what is basically a blatant disregard for human life?”

Brazil finds itself in mourning at the start of a new year with a new government that should have brought hope. To the contrary, the future looks grim indeed particularly as the new President has professed that care for the environment is an impediment to economic development - an archaic view which denotes an absolute lack of understanding of the meaning of sustainable development. A great despair at this enormous setback has taken over the environment and development community, both in governmental and societal spheres.

By prayer with activism

“Activism in the struggle to bring social justice and peace to the world is the mark

of true Christianity.” So is striving to care for Creation, which includes social justice. Both are intertwined with faith and hope. In response to this year’s dark beginning for Brazilians, Christians can help by prayer to bring peace and healing to those victimized by these tragedies and hope of a transformed and more just society, through activism to hold accountable those agents whose actions or omissions towards others caused such grievous pain and loss, ensuring that these are never again repeated.

Elizabeth Sherrill is an Environmental Economist with specialization in Ecology. She presently works for the Ministry of Science and Technology of Brazil and is a Daughter of the King (an Episcopal lay religious order for women).

Seeking Sanctuary: *Washington Cathedral supports immigrants in crisis*

By Martin Dickinson

The Washington DC area, is a magnet for immigrants and refugees from across the globe. They come from West Africa, Central America and many other parts of the world. The Washington National Cathedral's Congregation is responding to the growing crisis for immigrant families who are at risk of separation and deportation.

Nearly 2,000 undocumented immigrants facing deportation are held each night in area detention centers. Many have no legal representation. Family separations are a huge problem, with many migrants fearing for the future of their U.S. born children if they are deported.



“We pray with our immigrant neighbors in their churches, and we visit them in detention centers” says Claudia Russell, the Sanctuary Committee’s co-chair. “We believe in their goodness and humanity, and we share one bread and one cup.”

The Cathedral’s Sanctuary Committee and the Episcopal Diocese of Washington are taking a strong stand in support of immigrants.

The Episcopal Diocese has several West African and Central American congregations with concentrations of immigrants who are in danger owing to the U.S. Administration’s withdrawal of their temporary protected status (TPS). This status was granted due to violence or epidemics in their home countries. Those dangers in their home countries continue, yet the current Administration wants them out of this country.

Many unauthorized immigrants huddle in their houses afraid to go outside or to answer the door in fear of U.S. Immigration & Customs Enforcement police. A good many own homes and businesses, and many have U.S.-born children in college.

Seeking Sanctuary

Salvadoran immigrant, Rosa Gutierrez, recently took sanctuary in a Unitarian Church to avoid deportation. Immigration officials ordered her to be deported by December 10 2018 even though her attorney is petitioning the immigration court on her behalf. Rosa is raising three U.S.-born children on her own. The Cathedral Sanctuary Committee is helping care for Rosa and family in a sanctuary in a nearby Bethesda, Maryland, church building.

Ms. Gutierrez crossed the border in 2005, fleeing farmers who were threatening her with machetes. She could not imagine leaving her 11-year-old daughter and her sons, ages 9 and 6, the younger of whom has Down Syndrome. Gangs still prowl her El Salvador community where

special-needs resources are non-existent. “I feel powerless,” Rosa told the Washington Post, “but I trust in God for solutions.”

In addition to helping Gutierrez, the Cathedral Committee prioritizes visiting immigrants held in detention. Detainees wear prison garb and have little to occupy themselves as they await an uncertain fate. With immigrant family and friends afraid to enter the centers, the detainees suffer loneliness. Cathedral Committee members pray for detainees by name at monthly meetings held in Bethlehem Chapel in the Cathedral’s catacomb-like lower level. Many immigrant families attend the sessions, which take place in both Spanish and English.

Not Powerless

Commenting on the hardships faced by immigrant families, Washington Bishop Mariann Budde stated: *“We are not powerless in the face of such pain and suffering. Christ is with us to the end of the age, and the Holy Spirit, working in us, can do infinitely more than we could ask for or imagine. But Christ does need us. Ours are the hands with which he works, the feet on which he moves, the*

voices with which he speaks to this world.”

At its 2018 convention, The Episcopal Diocese of Washington took a strong stand, declaring opposition to policies that target undocumented immigrants for deportation and placing undue restrictions on refugees seeking safe haven in the U.S.

The 40-person Cathedral committee draws members from congregations across the diocese including West African and Central American parishes with high immigrant populations. The Committee partners with the area’s Sanctuary Congregation Network of many denominations, as well as with legal support groups such as the Capital Area Immigrant Rights Coalition.

Martin Dickinson is Co-chair of the Washington National Cathedral Sanctuary Committee

The Fourth Anglican Mark of Mission:

“To seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind, and to seek peace and reconciliation.”

The Impact of Climate change in Zambia

By Katete Jackson Jones

The seriousness of the effects of climate change may not make sense to those that enjoy a careless attitude towards the environment. People in the west may have little idea of the consequences of their own heavy pollution. Moreover, politicians sometimes seem unconcerned about implementing measures that would help protect the environment.

Chama district in Zambia has been hit by heavy rains. Unlike the previous years when some areas did not receive enough rain, this year the areas have had devastating floods which have destroyed crops, houses, bridges and

barns that contained the remaining grain for the year. Chama is a remote district with a population of over 103,894 inhabitants (2010 census) spread out along the Luangwa North Valley.



The Primary school in Chief Tembwe has been flooded with water destroying books and other teaching materials. The school is situated near the construction site of the St Mary's Girls boarding school, a project of the Anglican Children's programme aimed at withdrawing and preventing girls from Child marriages – a vice that has contributed to a high school drop out for girls in the area.

The village houses are made of mud with wonderful thatched grass rooves but due to floods, they have collapsed leaving villagers stranded.



The government of Zambia through the Disaster Management Unity department tried to dispatch some food and tents but due to the high numbers affected, they were not enough.



Photos courtesy of Copyright Hon. Davison Mung'andu, Member of Parliament, Zambia

Surviving the harsh reality of climate change

Currently people need food, clothes, tents, school books and building materials to build strong houses.

Remember the people of Chama in your prayers so that the much needed help may come their way and survive the harsh reality of climate change.

Katete Jackson Jones is Archdeacon of Lusaka, and Volunteer Director at Street Kids, an organisation that aims to prevent and withdraw between 150 - 200 girls from child marriages per year by providing them with shelter and education.

www.streetkids-zambia.com

Rise up together!

By Canon Rev. Naim Ateek



Young Palestinian boy watching his house being demolished by an Israeli bulldozer in occupied East Jerusalem

Here, in Palestine and Israel, in the land of the resurrection, the Palestinian people suffer on a daily basis from injustice related to the Israeli military occupation of Gaza and the West Bank (including East Jerusalem). It has come to the point that the Palestinian people are tired, worn out, and there seems to be no prospect for a just solution. There appears to be no hope in this land, the settlements continue to expand, the wall and its checkpoints remain, and the Israeli Government is encouraging their soldiers to rule by the sword.

Effective Action

Kumi Now brings together dozens of Palestinian, Israeli and International organisations, of all faiths and none, to gather around **action** which is **just** (respects international law), **inclusive** (everyone can be involved and is respected), and most importantly; **nonviolent**. The actions for each week are simple (for example: sending paper dolls to the Knesset), and most take less than half an hour to do. Kumi Now has created a community working towards the same goal of highlighting injustice and ultimately forging a just peace in this land. Together, by taking part in this initiative, we can put an end to the suffering of the Palestinian people and restore hope today in Palestine and Israel and for the sake of everyone who lives in the land. To find out more about Kumi Now please visit www.kuminow.com.

Canon Rev. Naim Ateek is Chair of the Sabeel Board (www.sabeel.org)

It is difficult to see where the change caused by the earthquake recalled in Matthew 28 could come from. The UN and its associated entities are powerless to help, having had funding withdrawn by the current North American administration whose support for the State of Israel remains unconditional. Other international agencies make grand statements and issue reports about breaches of international law or human rights legislation, but nothing practical is happening for the people who are being oppressed.

Kumi Now takes its name, and biblical starting point, from the new testament story in Mark 5:21-43 where Jesus calls a little girl believed to be dead to 'Kumi' or 'Rise Up'. Encouraged by the power of the message of the resurrection, we at Sabeel chose the Aramaic word "kumi" (rise up) which is also the same word in Arabic and Hebrew, to start an initiative which aims to bring about the resurrection moment for the Palestinian people and care about the plight of the persecuted.



How to Revive Justice in Your Parish

By David Crosson

The Church of St. Mary the Virgin is a traditional Episcopal parish in a wealthy, relatively homogeneous neighborhood of San Francisco, Diocese of California, USA. St. Mary's was once a model congregation for hands-on social justice ministries, but in the past two decades had reverted to more traditional models of "outreach" and financial support. Yet, by January 2019, over sixty parishioners were participating in justice ministries at St. Mary's. How did that recommitment to justice ministries occur?

Lay-led ministries only

In 2016, our deacon and a small group of parishioners met with organizers from Faith in Action Bay Area (FIBA) to explore the potentials of faith-based community organizing. This led to a series of lay-led "listening sessions" within the parish. In November 2017, a new rector, the Rev. David Erickson, enthusiastically endorsed exploring justice ministries at St. Mary's. "He requested only that the ministries arise from, and be led by, the laity."

About thirty people attended the first parish-wide justice meeting in January 2018. Since then we have explored ways to engage personally with the homeless and address housing needs. We have experienced a mentoring program with foster care youth and have joined night walks supporting victims of violence in the largely Latino Mission District of the city. Parishioners have joined other faith communities in accompanying dozens of incarcerated immigrants and their families in legal proceedings. We currently are exploring a relationship with a remarkable group of students working for justice in public high schools.

"It easy to work as busy as Martha, rather than to be transformed by that work, like Mary."

As a parish we must continue to listen for the still, small voice of God in the justice that we are called to live.



Top Tips

1. Although the rector need not initiate the ministries, s/he must certainly invite people to hear and live their personal calls.
2. New ministries that challenge existing parish paradigms must originate from within, and be led by, the laity.
3. Don't over-organize or over-structure. Invite and support people in doing whatever the Holy Spirit calls them to do.
4. Justice requires us to enter into relationship with people and communities outside our normal experience and comfort zone.
5. An outside (preferably faith-based) organization can provide critical training, support, and networks for justice work.
6. It remains difficult for many to talk about the Holy Spirit as an active agent working through us.

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