

The Mustard Seed



Planting the things that make for peace.

God comes to us in the form of the vulnerable person who lacks the benefit of status and protection in an alien land. In the flesh of Jesus Christ of Nazareth God chose to sojourn in a particular way for the sake of all humankind...and restored the possibility of authentic community in which love and justice reign and peace prevails.

United Methodist Bishops' Statement on Refugees and Immigration, 1986

November 2014

Dear Great Plains Peace Advocates,

A few years ago on Christmas Eve, I worshipped in a church where children presented a different than usual Christmas pageant.



In this story, the mayor of Bethlehem – as soon as he heard about Mary and Joseph coming to his town – reserved the nicest suite in the local Holiday Inn. Welcome banners were

strung across the streets and the best doctor was asked to be on call to assist in the birth.

But what about the shepherds, the low-wage workers, the undocumented workers, the homeless, the sick – how could they get access to Jesus under these circumstances? God had different plans.

Today our Christmas celebrations and pageants are often romanticized. We talk about the sweet baby Jesus and how wonderful it is to be together with families and friends. Less time is spent remembering the harsh reality of having to stay overnight in a barn with the smell of manure, with flies and fleas around, with no running water, with the feelings of uncertainty and fear, being away from family and relatives.



God comes to us today – in the midst of a hurting world. In our own country, one of the richest in the world, there are thousands of families who will not be able to celebrate the Christmas season with their loved ones because of being separated through our broken immigration laws, violence, wars and diseases; more than one-fifth of all children in the U.S. live at the risk of hunger; the U.S. has the highest per capita incarceration rate worldwide with those imprisoned being disproportionately people of color because of unjust sentencing laws. And the list could go on. Worldwide there are over 50 million refugees and displaced persons.

Peace can only come when there is justice, when all have a voice and a place at the table. So as we sing our favorite Christmas hymns and enjoy our traditions for this time of the year, let us not forget that God chose to have his son born on the margins, among the poor and

outcasts, that Mary and Joseph had to flee with Jesus shortly after his birth, that they were refugees themselves. Let us recommit ourselves to work for God's peace and justice, for God's kin-dom here on earth.

Shalom – Salam – Paz – Peace,
Andrea

Prayer

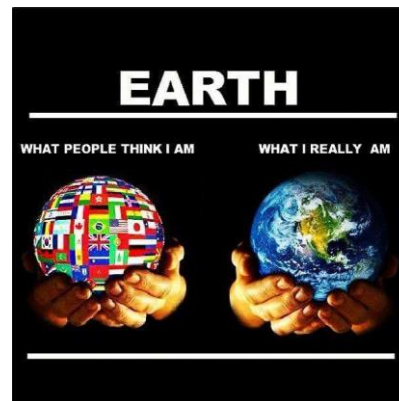
Heart of God, full of love, we give you thanks for all the blessings you have given us. Help us to share those blessings with others that we may all know that you are a God of mercy, a God of compassion, a God of love, a God of justice. Break open our hearts that we might embrace the challenge to build a community, a nation, a world where all are welcome. Amen.

Reflection Questions

(by David Wildman, Response Magazine, April 2012)

- What does it mean in today's context of global migration to reaffirm that we as church are an institution and community founded by people who left home and kept leaving home?
- Are we a church on the move or not? Are we a church that doesn't simply go to the margins but starts and thrives at the edges of societies and in border areas that threaten to divide people?
- What does it mean to be a church that doesn't simply itinerate its clergy but lives out the Gospel with legs that keeps inviting people to find and join Jesus in a common journey for justice?
- Instead of the church aligning with a fortress Europe or fortress America that builds walls, how do we learn to live out a migrant gospel that knows no borders?

- If the world is our parish and home is wherever we are, then what are ways we affirm God's homeland security has no borders but includes us all?



Shalom Sparks

(takes about 5 - 15 minutes to complete)

- **Participate in Giving Tuesday Dec. 2nd** UMC #GivingTuesdays is an alternative to our consumer driven shopping traditions of Black Friday, Local Business Saturday, and Cyber Monday. It gives us the opportunity to give instead of to get through supporting organizations and missionaries that have been researched and approved by the United Methodist General Board of Global Ministries. And 100% of all gifts made through The Advance are given directly to the designated project.

Give to projects that are involved in peace with justice work, e.g.

- **Mar Elias Peace Study Center #3020532**
Bringing students from different faith backgrounds together to learn about peace and reconciliation in Israel/Palestine
- **Interfaith Worker Justice #3020441**
Helping low-wage workers fight unfair and unsafe working conditions

- See more at: <http://www.umcmmission.org/Giving-Tuesday/Giving-Tuesday-Resources#sthash.LcWCY0LO.dpuf>

- Use the Just Giving Guide for your gift giving (<http://sojo.net/just-giving-guide>); give subscriptions to the Response Magazine or New World Outlook.

- Write a note or Christmas card to someone in your community that you usually do not have much contact with, it could be a cashier in the grocery store, a nurse in a nursing home, a teacher's aide or teacher in a local school, a police officer. Be creative.

Peace Possibilities

(takes about 30 to 60 minutes to complete)

- ❖ Read the just released **Hunger Report 2015** and start a conversation with others in your church about becoming a Bread for the World Covenant Congregation. Many of our churches are involved in food pantries and backpack programs. Bread for the World works on the underlying reasons for the need for these. <http://hungerreport.org/2015/> and <http://www.bread.org/help/church/covenant/>
- ❖ **God doesn't force us to be thankful in times of grief and despair** - Read the article about giving thanks in the face of happenings in Ferguson and invite conversations around racism in our country and what action we can take to make a difference. <http://www.sojo.net/blogs/2014/11/26/thanksgiving-and-ferguson-lost-translation>
- ❖ Participate in the United Methodist **Kairos Response boycott** of Israeli settlement goods <http://gp-email.brtapp.com/viewemail/221257#toc19>
The United Methodist General Conference voted in 2012 to call on all nations to ban products made in illegal settlements beyond Israel's internationally recognized borders. (Resolution # 6111 – Opposition to Israeli Settlements) <https://www.kairosresponse.org/Boycott.html>



The Mustard Seed newsletter is an electronic publication of Peace with Justice Ministries, Great Plains Conference of the United Methodist Church.

Vision Ventures

(takes a bit more energy and time!)

Pray for guidance for the new year and how you are called to engage in peace with justice work. Inform yourself. Find others in your church and community to work with. Encourage your church to get involved in an issue of injustice. Here are some possibilities:

- United Methodist KAIROS Response (responding faithfully and boldly to the situation in Israel and Palestine) <https://www.kairosresponse.org/>
- Faiths United Against Gun Violence <http://faithsagainstgunviolence.org/>
- Be Just. Be Green – Caring for God's Creation <http://www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/what-we-do/service-and-advocacy/mission-focus-issues/environmental-justice>
- Welcoming the Stranger – Resources for becoming an Immigrant Welcoming Congregation and supporting or participating in the Sanctuary Movement <http://gp-email.brtapp.com/viewemail/219470#toc16>

Feel free to contact me for more information. <http://www.greatplainsumc.org/peacewithjustice>

Looking ahead –

- * Legislative Days in Kansas and Nebraska <http://www.greatplainsumc.org/2015legislativedays>
 - Feb. 8-9, 2015 Legislative Event for Advocacy in Faith at Topeka First UMC: "Care of Creation"
 - Feb. 14th Ecumenical Legislative Briefing Day at Christ UMC in Lincoln: variety of workshops
- * XXIX Peacemaking Workshop "Eating (Jim) Crow" with Leonard Pitts, Jr. at First UMC in Lincoln, NE on April 12th

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