

# The Mustard Seed



## Planting the things that make for peace.

Advent 2016

***“For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests on his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”*** Isaiah 9:6

Dear Great Plains peace advocates,

Fear, division, hate, exclusion... those are terms and feelings that are all around us these days. An urgent call for unity is voiced by many. But how do we define unity? And who are the ones calling for unity? Definitions of unity talk about a “singleness or constancy of purpose or action” or “mutual agreement, harmony.” How can we agree and be united when so many want to exclude whole groups of persons, want to treat people differently depending on their race, gender, gender orientation, socio-economic status, religion, cultural background?

As peace advocates, we see integrity as more important than unity. Being a person of integrity means to be honest and live according to strong moral principles.

In our baptismal vows, we accepted “the freedom and power God gives us to resist evil,

injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves.”

As peace advocates, we need to show up. We need to be present. We need to speak up. We need to be witnesses for our God who calls us to be faithful and to share God’s love with all God’s beloved children.

It is easy during the Advent and Christmas season to focus on our own families and friends, to stay away from controversial issues, to just want ‘peace’. But what kind of peace is this? We sing about the “little town of Bethlehem” and to many of us this brings warm and comforting feelings. But do we think about the people living in Bethlehem today and how they suffer daily with us being complicit in causing their suffering?



We give offerings to help “those poor people” but do we engage in getting to know them, in supporting them in their struggles, in realizing that our silence, our complicity in the systems that are in place and that are being established cause unspeakable pain and suffering?

United Methodist Hispanic Youth shared in a statement what they are experiencing:

“our hearts hurt and we are disappointed that our United Methodist Church and its Council of Bishops remains silent in the face of the growing wave of

violence against people of color, women, undocumented persons, Muslims, immigrants and the LGBTIQ community. In the face of the growing wave of vandalism to Latinxs and African-American churches, our leaders have remained silent. President of the Council of Bishops Bruce Ough sent a letter to congratulate the President-elect and to offer prayers without acknowledging that the homophobic, racist, xenophobic and misogynistic speech of Mr. Trump has given rise to a growing wave of active violence against our people...We feel ignored and abandoned by the leadership of our church."



M.A.R.C.H.A. Youth Council

***Jesus said: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." (Luke 4:18+19)***

The task before us seems enormous and there are times when we want to give up, when we feel our little small voice will not make much difference. The following words from Mother Teresa encourage us:

People are often unreasonable, illogical, and self-centered. Forgive them anyway.

If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives. Be kind anyway.

If you are successful, you will win some false friends and true enemies. Succeed anyway.

If you are honest and frank, people may cheat you. Be honest and frank anyway.

What you spend years building, someone could destroy overnight. Build anyway.

If you find serenity and happiness, others may be jealous. Be happy anyway.

The good you do today, people will forget tomorrow. Do good anyway.

Give the world the best you have and it may never be good enough. Give the world the best you have anyway.

You see, in the final analysis it is between you and God. It was never between you and "them" anyway.



***"God doesn't call you to be successful, He calls you to be faithful."***

- Blessed Mother Teresa

Peace advocates are urgently needed in our time. I want to thank you for all you are doing across the Great Plains Conference to further peace with justice.

God calls us to be bold, to be courageous, to step out of our comfort zone. We have the awesome assignment of working for the Prince of Peace.

Peace – shalom – salaam, *Andrea*

# Shalom Sparks

(takes about 5 - 15 minutes to complete)

- Make a conscious effort to greet people on the street, in the grocery store etc., especially people with whom you generally do not have much contact. See Christ in each human being you meet. Be aware of what is going on around you and speak up when someone is treated in a hurtful way.
- Ask your pastor to regularly include a prayer focus on persons that are oppressed in our communities, in our state, our country and around the world.
- Look for one positive story/happening each day and share with others.

# Peace Possibilities

(takes about 30 to 60 minutes to complete)

- Participate in Giving Tuesday through the ADVANCE. Learn about organizations/ ministries working on peace with justice issues. <http://www.umcmission.org/giving-tuesday/resources>



One example is the Mar Elias Peace Study Center, Advance #3020532. At this center, students from different faith backgrounds are brought together to learn about peace and reconciliation.

It was founded by Archbishop Elias Chacour whom many of you met last year when he spoke at our Annual Conference and visited Wichita and Lincoln. Here you can see and listen to his message in June 2016 at our Annual Conference in Topeka: <https://vimeo.com/169727341>

- Make an effort to care for your spiritual grounding during these challenging times. Read a good book, learn from peace builders who came before us, join with others who feel passionate about an area of injustice, pray and know that God is with us always.
- Inform yourself about the situation at Standing Rock.



The mainstream media has mostly reported in an inaccurate and one-sided way. Several United Methodists from the Great Plains Conference have personally joined the peaceful water protectors. Staff from the General Board of Church and Society and from the General Commission on Religion and Race were there. And right now, Harriett Olson, General Secretary of United Methodist Women joined them.

Contact the White House by phone or sign a petition and ask for protection of our indigenous sisters and brothers and their access to clean water.

[http://act.350.org/sign/dont\\_leave\\_dapl\\_to\\_trump/](http://act.350.org/sign/dont_leave_dapl_to_trump/)

- Promote the 2017 Micah Corps internship. The first round of interviews will happen the end of January. Talk to young people you know. Information can be found at <http://www.greatplainsumc.org/micahcorps>.



# Vision Ventures

(takes a bit more energy and time!)

- Sign up for one of the Ecumenical Legislative Days in Kansas or Nebraska and invite others to join you.

February 11, 2017 Ecumenical Legislative Briefing Day at Christ United Methodist Church, Lincoln, NE ([www.nelegisbrief.org](http://www.nelegisbrief.org))

February 12-13, 2017 Kansas L.E.A.F., Topeka, KS

- Get a group of people together to watch the refugee webinars on our Great Plains website. Then brainstorm how your church can get involved in supporting and welcoming refugees. The latest webinar can be found at: <https://vimeo.com/191683253> Shafiq Jahish from Afghanistan and Dekow Sagar from Somalia share about their experiences.



To learn more about Ministry With Refugees in the Great Plains Conference, go to: <http://www.greatplainsumc.org/ministrytorefugees>



## Additional Possibilities

- Several United Methodists across our conference are discerning how their communities can get involved in the Sanctuary Movement. In the 1980s, churches and faith communities were

involved in this movement granting safety to Central American refugees fleeing civil wars. In the last few years, a growing number of faith communities have taken this up again to stand in solidarity with immigrants facing deportation. Congress has failed to move ahead with immigration reform. Our current immigration laws are deeply flawed and unjust with a thousand families being torn apart daily through deportations. If you are interested to learn more, please contact me.

- If you are passionate about God's Creation and how we care for it, consider joining our Great Plains Creation Care Team. Meetings are usually by phone conference. <http://www.greatplainsumc.org/creationcare>
- Peace with Justice Ministries is making scholarships available to attend Ecumenical Advocacy Days April 21 – 24, 2017 in Washington D.C.: *Confronting Chaos, Forging Community with a focus on the challenges of, and solutions to, racism, materialism and militarism.* <http://advocacydays.org/2017-confronting-chaos/>

If you are on Facebook, please "like" the Peace with Justice – Great Plains Conference facebook page.



\*\*More information can be found at:

<http://www.greatplainsumc.org/peacewithjustice>

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