

World Day of Prayer International Committee Meeting

Seeking wisdom to care for God's creation (Genesis 1)

Foz do Iguaçu, Brazil, August 20-27, 2017

Talking Wisdom and Care @10 – Report

Session 1 - Women Leading Change

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Focus: Women's Leadership Development

Objective: To build our movement and strengthen our capacity to be present to the communities.

Purpose: To create leadership opportunity based on collaboration, ministry, professional work, personal skills, using wisdom, and care to guide our theological journey for environmental justice.

Key Words: Wisdom, Care, Theological Journey, Environmental Justice (EJ for short).

Key Biblical Text: Genesis 2:15 "Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden to tend and keep it". ("Tend" carries the idea of service, to "keep" is to "guard" and "preserve").

Introductory Remarks

Welcome to this special session where we are, hopefully, going to converse on the link between biblical teaching on creation & social justice, in regard to major environmental challenges of our time and context, and personally reflect on these questions:

- Is Environmental Justice a Christian value? How and why?
- What initiatives can we, as women leaders and change agents in our communities employ, to achieve the kind of change aimed at sustaining our environment as God charged us to do in Genesis 2:15?

This session is to enable us plot out the environmental future we desire, as well as the environmental legacy we want to bequeath to our youth. As women leaders, we are already playing meaningful roles in nurturing, providing, educating, managing, and supporting interventions at different levels in our society. We are already leading change in our various contexts and are being challenged to change attitudes and practices in the environmental crisis confronting the world right now.



I start on the premise that there is no one agreed-upon definition of Environmental Justice. All in all, the idea of Environmental Justice is simple - it means everyone should have the right to live in a clean and healthy environment. It is as much about people as it is about issues like pollution and climate change. What Environmental Justice does is to link the concepts of ecology and social justice. It highlights the strong relationship that exists between the ecological question, issues of justice, peace and defense of the rights of individuals and peoples. EJ calls for the fair treatment of all races, cultures, income classes and educational levels, with respect to the development and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies.

Fair treatment implies that no population should be forced to shoulder a disproportionate share of exposure to the negative effects of pollution, or other environmental dangers, due to lack of political or economic strength. In the EJ system, it is the poorest who lose their lands, who suffer the wars provoked

by the great powers over natural resources and whose lands are turned into dumps for the trash of the rich.

The poor are forced to leave their homes and lands in many parts of the world increasingly because of environmental causes like drought, floods, desertification, mud-slides, tsunamis, disappearance of species. Those uprooted by such disasters are increasingly referred to as “environmental refugees” or “climate change refugees”. It is the poor who most suffer the consequences of such ecological crisis.

The general belief therefore is that the quality of human life is tied to the quality of the environment.

The impact of human induced climate change disproportionately affects the poor and vulnerable who live in developing countries. They suffer the greatest effects of a global problem they have done least to create. These effects include major natural disasters, lack of food security, inadequate access to clean safe water and increasing health risk.

The Environmental Justice issue is not altogether straightforward. It has been said that environmental abuse directly and negatively affects human communities and also disproportionately affects lower classes in all countries, especially the poorer countries. While some subscribe to the view that putting human beings at the centre of environmental debate is a grave error... “because they are the perpetrators of environmental problems in the first place”; environmental activists maintain that some humans, especially the poor, are also victims of environmental destruction and pollution...”.

At this juncture, I invite us all to reflect on the concrete reality of our own lives and ministry as women of a global prayer movement and on the issues that affect our communities and environment. In our own corner of the world, we too need to take the time to study the reality of the world around us, to feel the suffering of the earth and how it is related to the suffering of the people. Possible examples of issues related to the environmental justice might include energy issues, mining, garbage, toxic waste, use of plastic bags and plastic bottles.

Conclusion: There is an African proverb that says: “When you pray, move your feet”. To this, we might add; not only your feet, but join hands, link arms and speak up”. Enhancing women’s leadership competences will lead to social justice, income generating projects, making healthy decisions and serving as role models to younger women. By doing so, we will be changing the world from where we are.

In this regard, let the following questions guide us in our conversation to seek ways and means to empower ourselves and our communities through education, training, outreach and action:

1. What are the principal environmental problems where you are? Who benefits from them?
2. How do these problems affect the lives of the people in your context / region?
3. What groups work to address these problems?
4. How might we become involved in addressing problems of Environmental Justice in our region?

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Session 2 - Women Leading Change

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Introduction:

- The introductory write-up set the tone & highlighted the key issues of the conversation
- The attendees were cross-cultural in nature, and included delegates from Africa, Asia, Caribbean, Europe, and the Pacific

The conversations were informed and informative and key among the Environmental Justice issues in our daily lives to express our care were the following:

1. The need to mobilize women to improve the air quality in carbon-monoxide, generator-infested Nigeria.
2. The organization of protests and petitions against reservoirs in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.
3. Lebanese women are concerned about the destruction of the Cedars of Lebanon through “the cutting down of mountains and rocks into gravel for building purposes.” This activity is often carried out by politically and financially influential people. Villagers have been blocking routes to the mountain regions by lying down as human shields but the protests cannot be sustained for long and so the activities continue when they leave. No sustainable solution in sight.
4. In the Philippines the actions include tree planting, cleaning of the coastal lands and the segregation of rubbish.
5. In the Bahamas, waste disposal and the removal of damaged abandoned littered all over and surpassing the human population, are the issues they are mobilizing around.
6. In the Fiji, the multiple issues of the use of non-degradable plastic shopping bags, stone crushing industries that create flooding during the rains. Petitions stopped the activities for while only. The struggle continues with church women holding vigils to sensitize the public. There is also the issue of over-fishing. Workshops were organized to create awareness on fallow periods, fish sizes, and periods of abstinence to allow the fish to multiply. Chinese farms create deforestation and are destroying the Fijian organic farming culture.
7. Shell-fishing along the shore and the proliferation of shopping plastic bags are destroying the environment and creating floods, those are the major issues women are fighting against. They are engaged in replanting trees to prevent land erosion.
8. In Thailand the main EJ issue is the discontinuation of normal seeds and the enforced use of fertilized seeds that can be supplied by one influential Chinese business man. Strongly supported by the Government. The women are mobilizing on boycotting the products.
9. In Slovenia, the multiple issues they are campaigning against and mobilizing for include: Home gardening in small groups that exchange seeds and carry out sensitization exhibitions, including hybrids; campaign against child labour; once a year they carry out cleaning and collect plastic bags for recycling.
10. In South Africa, women and school children collect and hand over plastic bags & broken bottles to Super Markets for recycling.
11. EWNI are teaming up with those already working on Environmental Justice Issues.
12. The German WDP want to begin at home- by changing some of their office practices by using recycled paper, ecological ink, no more use of white paper and encourage their women to do same.

13. In DRC, deforestation and the use of wood and charcoal for fuel are the major challenge they are up against. One major response to the use of plastic shopping is turning them, through crocheting, into ornamental objects- bags, table mats, hats.

Conclusion:

The two conversation sessions did a number of things worth noting here:

- They illustrated how understanding and defining Environmental Justice is essential for the implementation of their options.
- The conversation helped assess the current level of understating of the Environmental Justice issues they are facing and their effects on human lives, like the health effects of common mining technological techniques and carbon monoxide gas from numerous generators. It enabled the attendees to share their experiences on organizing around the issue, thereby revealing the numerous ways women around the globe are organizing against Environmental Injustice.
- The sessions laid down a rich foundation within the World Day of Prayer family movement for further action after listening to some good practices to be replicated if and when faced with similar situations, and by so doing, contributing importantly to the promotion of Environmental Justice at every local level where the World Day of Prayer women are leading the way for change.

Website: www.worlddayofprayer.net