

The Arusha Call to Discipleship

Justice and dignity — done the right way

Arusha Call # 4:

"We are called to joyfully engage in the ways of the Holy Spirit, who empowers people from the margins with agency, in the search for justice and dignity."

BY JASMINE CHANDRA

Justice is a complicated issue. We might say that we would like justice and dignity for all, but we would also like to have a say in what that justice should look like.

We might want to support Black Lives Matter, but not looting or violence or hatred.

We may believe that Indigenous people have a lawful right to use the land and resources, but get uncomfortable when it affects development, job markets, or other people's livelihoods.

We might like to care for the poor and marginalized in our midst, but we don't want to enable bad habits or poor life choices.

We may be against slavery and oppression, but our choice of products and our clothing labels say the contrary.

The Church has often responded to injustice by passing resolutions, by preaching sermons, and by writing articles. It's a start.

But the call for justice, which has been linked to right living and right worship since the time of Amos and Isaiah, involves more than resolutions.

It requires engagement with the Holy Spirit. And engagement with the Holy Spirit means letting go of the outcomes. It means following the lead of the Holy Spirit and giving the power and the agency to those who are most affected by injustice — those who are on the margins.

In their book "When Helping Hurts," Fokker and Corbett write "One of the biggest

mistakes North American churches make — by far — is applying relief in situations in which rehabilitation or development is the appropriate intervention."

In other words we look for the quick fixes, instead of focusing on long-term personal investments and changes.

I would venture that churches and communities make this mistake in small and big ways because it is easier for us to be in control — for us to decide what people on the margins need — rather than to give them the power to lead development and to tell us what the solution may look like.

It also allows us to maintain an arm's distance and a certain safe separation that keeps us from having to feel the stings of injustice, abuse, poverty, or oppression.

This fourth article in the Arusha Call to Discipleship suggests that our search for justice and dignity would follow the ways of the Holy Spirit — ways that empower people on the margins.

So when we consider the justice issues around us or when new ones come up, our first thought should be for the ones most affected and what we might do to give them the agency and influence they need.

The most obvious way of doing this is to get to know those on the margins, to make friends, to learn from them, to feel with them.

Following this way may be a bit messy, it may involve some discomfort, but we pray that the Holy Spirit will lead us and turn this searching for justice and dignity into a joyful experience for all!

The Rev. Jasmine Chandra and her husband, Terence, operate the Central Saint John Community Ministry. Find their blog at penniesandsparrows.org.



CAROLYN VON UNPLASH

The text of the Arusha Call:

As disciples of Jesus Christ, both individually and collectively:

- We are called by our baptism to transforming discipleship: a Christ-connected way of life in a world where many face despair, rejection, loneliness, and worthlessness.
- We are called to worship the one Triune God—the God of justice, love, and grace—at a time when many worship the false god of the market system (Luke 16:13).
- We are called to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ—the fullness of life, the repentance and forgiveness of sin, and the promise of eternal life—in word and deed, in a violent world where many are sacrificed to the idols of death (Jeremiah 32:35) and where many have not yet heard the gospel.
- We are called to joyfully engage in the ways of the Holy Spirit, who empowers people from the margins with agency, in the search for justice and dignity (Acts 1:8; 4:31).
- We are called to discern the word of God in a world that communicates many contradictory, false, and confusing messages.
- We are called to care for God's creation, and to be in solidarity with nations severely affected by climate change in the face of a ruthless human-centered exploitation of the environment for consumerism and greed.
- We are called as disciples to belong together in just and inclusive communities, in our quest for unity and on our ecumenical journey, in a world that is based upon marginalization and exclusion.
- We are called to be faithful witnesses of God's transforming love in dialogue with people of other faiths in a world where the politicization of religious identities often causes conflict.
- We are called to be formed as servant leaders who demonstrate the way of Christ in a world that privileges power, wealth, and the culture of money (Luke 22:25-27).
- We are called to break down walls and seek justice with people who are dispossessed and displaced from their lands—including migrants, refugees and asylum seekers—and to resist new frontiers and borders that separate and kill (Isaiah 58:6-8).
- We are called to follow the way of the cross, which challenges elitism, privilege, personal and structural power (Luke 9:23).
- We are called to live in the light of the resurrection, which offers hope-filled possibilities for transformation.

• This is a call to transforming discipleship. This is not a call that we can answer in our own strength, so the call becomes, in the end, a call to prayer: *Loving God, we thank you for the gift of life in all its diversity and beauty. Lord Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, we praise you that you came to find the lost, to free the oppressed, to heal the sick, and to convert the self-centred. Holy Spirit, we rejoice that you breathe in the life of the world and are poured out into our hearts. As we live in the Spirit, may we also walk in the Spirit. Grant us faith and courage to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Jesus: becoming pilgrims of justice and peace in our time. For the blessing of your people, the sustaining of the earth, and the glory of your name. Through Christ our Lord, Amen.*