

# The Arusha Call to Discipleship

## Our deep, essential ties to God and to one another

The World Council of Churches' Conference on World Mission and Evangelism met in Arusha, Tanzania, in March 2018. From this meeting the more than 1,000 participants, who were all regularly engaged in mission and evangelism, issued the Arusha Call to Discipleship.

At our own national church General Synod in 2019, resolution A-129 was passed that we affirm the Arusha Call; encourage bodies within the General Synod to integrate this call into the guiding principles of baptismal living for the shaping of national ministries; and commend the Arusha Call to dioceses for study and inclusion in their considerations of evangelism, witness and discipleship.

For one year, Spiritual Development Team members and others will offer reflections in the New Brunswick Anglican on the 12 points within this call. This is Call # 7, written by Kurt Schmidt.

Let's take this seventh call and consider three special emphases in it, in the reverse order of their appearance:

1. We are called as disciples to belong together in just and inclusive communities. Happily for us, our vocation as disciples requires that we work with and alongside others.

We are not in this discipleship game alone; it is a corporate reality and responsibility. Indeed, we are blessed to have (and require) company, literally those with whom we share bread as we journey together.

Here we might also call to mind the ubuntu theology promoted by Desmond Tutu — the recognition that our humanity is fully and properly understood only in the context of our relationships with others.

Or, as Shawn Branch pointed out in a previous article in this series: "We do this, together, because we were designed for community and connectivity."

2. We are called as disciples to belong together in just and

inclusive communities. Here is where some hard work may be required.

In our circles of encounter we are tasked with reaching out to, inviting in, and truly welcoming others.

These others will inevitably include people from the margins of society, people who may be very different from us in temperament, thinking, outlook or ability, and/or people who may just rub us the wrong way.

But it is not enough simply to gather ourselves into diverse groups of tolerant acceptance. Our effort(s) to live justly and inclusively — that is, rightly — must flow from a life of deep prayer.

Or, as Jasmine Chandra reminded us in another previous article in this series: "It requires engagement with the Holy Spirit."

This spiritual engagement will then show forth in mutually transforming and transformative relationships. It will manifest as mercy, forgiveness, and even the exuberant, delighted celebration of the diversity of beauty in God's creatures.

In other words, it will mean that we recognize, realize, and actually live out what Gregory Boyle calls our "radical kinship" — our deep, essential ties to God and to one another.

And this brings us to the third and final consideration:

3. We are called as disciples to belong together in just and inclusive communities. This emphasis on belonging is perhaps the most important aspect of the seventh Arusha call.

For belonging is the primary, fundamental piece. As many recent Christian commentators have pointed out, the sequence of Church priorities has appropriately shifted (back) to belonging-believing-behaving. It all starts, and should start, with belonging.

Moreover, as Billy Swan tells us: "To be human is to belong, for it ties together both our existence (to be) and our longing (to long for God, to

### Arusha Call # 7:

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CAROLYN V ON UNSPLASH

### 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.*

long for home). This is why the 'be-long' is so important."

And what is the source of this belonging? The astonishing, mysterious gift of grace that is somehow ours through baptism — our reception into the household of God in the name of the Trinity, that primordial, dynamic, model community of Love.

It is the act and fact of our being marked "as Christ's own forever" that means we belong.

We belong to God, and inescapably then — through the Great Commandment of love — we also belong to one another. To our neighbours. Such is our membership in the faithful company of all believers, the Body of Christ, the Church.

And as we all know, membership has its privileges — as well as its responsibilities. Living out our belonging — within and among inclusive, just communities — comprises the

lifelong work of our discipleship, as described so insightfully and comprehensively in The Arusha Call.

So let us proceed — let us undertake our vocation(s) as disciples — wholeheartedly, together, in safety, freedom, and joy!

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