

No.	Item	Speaker	Language	Script	Prerecorded	Time	Remarks
0	Technical Introduction	Nathan	English	no	no	5	
1	Opening Prayer	Pat & Beth & Peggy	English	Powerpoint		5	
2	Greeting and Welcome	Lungile				5	
3	Women Sharing Circle: Questions of Gender at the Intersection of Race, Class, and Indigeneity in the Midst of COVID-19						
3.1	Introduction	Najla Kassab	English		Prerecording	5	
3.3	Presentations						
3.3(a)	Presentation 1	Jacobed Solano	Spanish		Prerecording	5	
3.3(b)	Presentation 2	Paulette Brown	English			5	
3.3(c)	Women and COVID19: Southern Africa	Christina Landman	English	Text		5	
3.4	Breakout Groups 1						
3.4(a)	Discernment questions 1. What has not been mentioned? 2. What can we add?					25	
3.5	Prayer	Peggy				5	
	Time: Opening & Women Sharing Circle						65
4.	ACRC Sharing Circle: COVID-19 IN AFRICA: PERSPECTIVES OF ECONOMIC JUSTICE AND GENDER JUSTICE						
4.1	Introducing the Africa Session	ACRC President – Rev Dr Uma Onwunta	English			5	
4.2	Presentations						
4.2(a)	Refugees, internally displaced people, and stateless people	Rev Isaac Kalonji	French	Text		5	
4.2(b)	Issues of justice regarding women and girls	Chief Magistrate – Mrs E Uma Onwunta	English		Prerecorded	5	
4.2(c)	Racism, inequalities, and trans-national issues: Migration and Xenophobia	Rev Dr Buhle Mpofu	English	Powerpoint		5	
4.3	Breakout Groups 2						
4.3(a)	Discernment questions 1. How can churches promote the dignity of internally displaced people, stateless persons and refugees?					25	

- 2. How can churches held governments accountable to provide essential services to all people?
- 3. How can churches provide a space where those who are without voice can make themselves heard?

4.4	<i>Vote of thanks</i>	<i>ACRC President – Rev Dr Uma Onwunta</i>	<i>English</i>	5
5.	<i>Closing Prayer</i>	<i>ACRC President – Rev Dr Uma Onwunta</i>	<i>English</i>	5
	Time: ACRC Sharing Circle			55
	Total Time			120

WOMEN AND AFRICA COUNCIL OF REFORMED CHURCHES SHARING CIRCLE

Prayers



A poem by a 12 year old girl

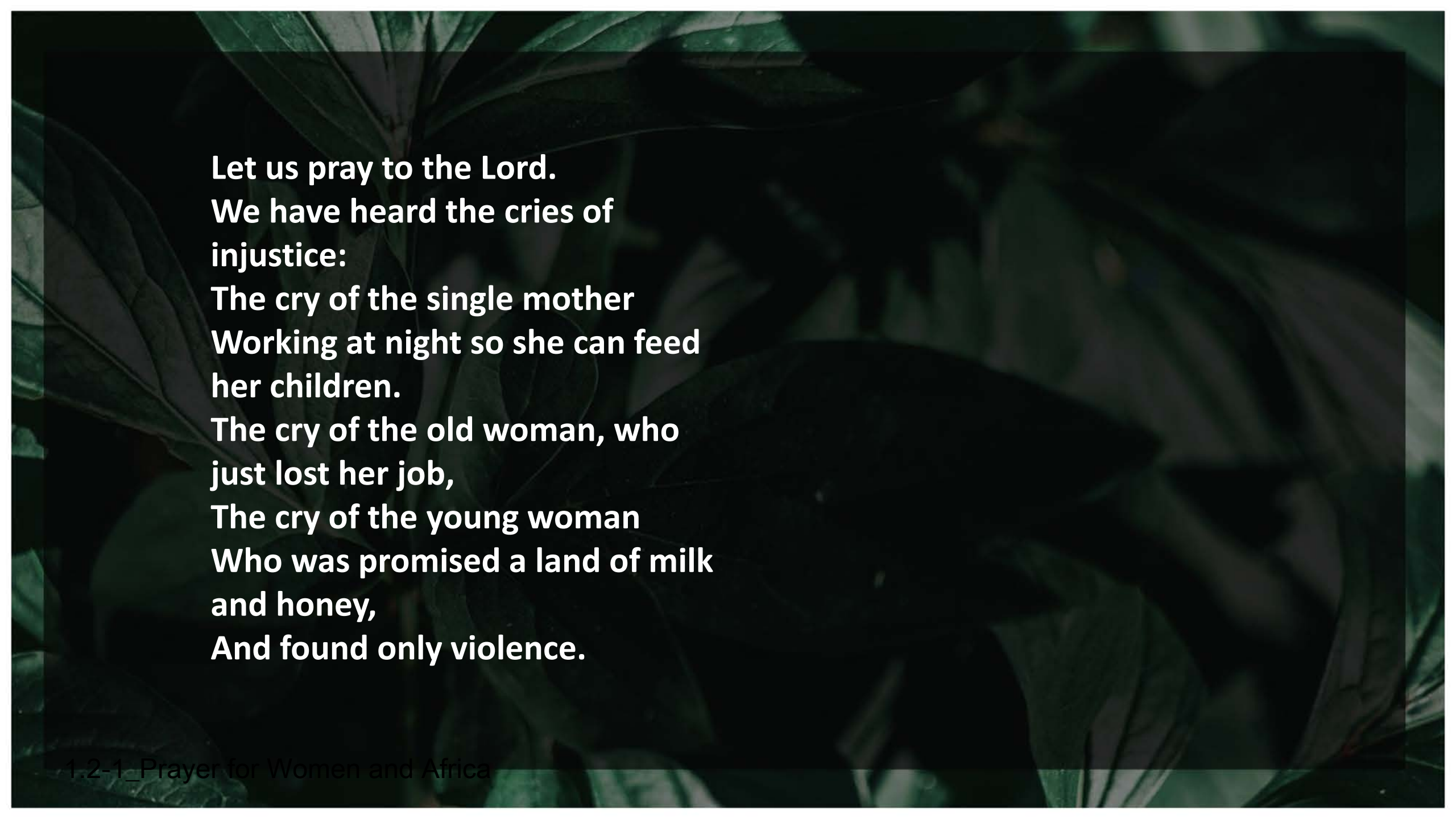
My mother's name is worry

My mother's name is worry

**In summer, my mother worries about water,
In winter, she worries about coal briquettes
And all the year long, she worries about rice.**

**In day time, my mother worries about living,
At night, she worries for children,
And all day long she worries and worries.**

**Then, my mother's name is worry,
My father's name is drunken frenzy
And mine is tear and sigh**



**Let us pray to the Lord.
We have heard the cries of
injustice:
The cry of the single mother
Working at night so she can feed
her children.
The cry of the old woman, who
just lost her job,
The cry of the young woman
Who was promised a land of milk
and honey,
And found only violence.**

**The cry of the Dalit woman being brutalized
Her day's wages being denied
Finding only sexual abuse...
Yet we have been led to believe that this is
normal
Not out of the ordinary
We have been taught to not get involved
And we have obeyed**

**Unquestioning, believing
Having faith,
Not in God, but in the lords of this earth
Help us to question Lord
To not follow blindly
But to ask the difficult question
To expose reality
To doubt and through doubt
To come to true faith in you. Amen**

We often hear it said that 'The Poor will always be with us.'

Give us the courage then to say 'Your Kingdom Come.'

We often hear it said that 'It's what they're used to... they're not like us.'

Give us the courage then to say 'Your Kingdom Come.'

We often hear it said that 'I don't want to think about it – it makes me depressed.'

Give us the courage then to say 'Your Kingdom Come.'

We often hear it said that ‘What did she expect – dressed like that.’

Give us the courage then to say ‘Your Kingdom Come.’

We often hear it said that ‘It’s the world – you can’t change it.’

Give us the courage then to say ‘Your Kingdom Come.’

Amen

Intermediate Prayer

May Your Light Shine!

By Diann L. Neu

Light a candle in your own good company, or light several as you gather with family and friends to pray this blessing.

**When you celebrate the season of light,
May your light shine.**

**When you share love,
May your light shine.**

**When you work for peace,
May your light shine.**

**When you teach a child about justice,
May your light shine.**

**When you comfort someone who is ill,
May your light shine.**

**When you grieve the loss of a loved one, May your
light shine.**

**When you are challenged to change,
May your light shine.**

**When you (add your own intention here),
May your light shine.**

Amen

WORLD COMMUNION OF REFORMED CHURCHES

Questions of Gender at the Intersection of Race, Class, and Indigeneity in the Midst of COVID-19

14th December 2020

Greetings, my name is Jocabed Solano, I am from the Gunadule people, one of the seven indigenous peoples that live in Panama and Colombia. You can hear the ancestral song of the elderly grandmother lying on the hammock in her gunadule home ... (she sings) *Sister, brother, listen to what the great mother tells us. Listen carefully. We sing so as not to die.*

The impact Covid19 has had on our gunadule territories is that of a health crisis, thought deeper than that, it is a profound spiritual crisis. When we recognize that the indigenous people in Abya Yala have suffered the invasion, which caused the greatest genocide in history; the epistemicide when they tried to kill our spirit by imposing eurocentric knowledge on our indigenous people, or when they have tried to create a memorycide deleting our ancestral memories in the Abya Yala territory. Currently we can recognize that Covid19 is not the only pandemic. So is extractivism. So is the death system - necropolitics-, the injustice that has tried to steal and exploit our land. Even when mother earth suffers violence and consequently. so do we. Due to all this, which has increased with Covid19, it is clear that the vulnerability that these death systems have created, have undermined our territory, our bodies. When we think of the reality of women in the Abya Yala, we see inequalities, and the lack of equal opportunities indigenous women must be able to relate to this system.

For this reason, we believe it is crucial that we re-think ourselves as church, as communities of christian faith; how do we participating in the death that is being created by that pandemic and by Covid19?

A Gunadule people, as indigenous people, we recognize we have a “Cosmo-experience”, a “Cosmo-existence” which involves a deep relationship with Mother Earth, whom we call ‘nabwagana’ because we emerge from her, we are fed by her, and when we die, we are cultivated by her. This means that, for example, an indigenous women are one, we are the ones that nurtures the identity, the language, and from us emerges the wisdom so that new generations can preserve the identity of the people.

Covid19 has attacked the body of our elders, who are the living memory that is transmitted from generation to generation. Such wisdom has died prematurely, and so the living memory of our communities has died. When a gunadule sister or brother dies, the ancestral wisdom dies. When the indigenous people die, something dies in God. Why? Because God has breathed God’s spirit into the indigenous people.

When we reflect on these situations, we can ask ourselves, how will the indigenous people face this? The Gunadule people hold a celebration we call Waar Ued, the pipe of peace. This ceremony shows us the importance of life in harmony when the house is in

danger, it invites the whole community, together with the cosmic community – that means all other living creatures, to recognize the importance of living in harmony, in silence and lament. And it is through lament that we can resist. A song that is prayed to God so that we do not die. A song raised to Nana and Baba, that is the Grand Mother and the Grand Father.

What do the indigenous people learn in times like this? The recognition of life in fullness, where we are all affected. The inter-connectivity by which we recognize that when one part suffers, we all suffer; but it also teaches us to recognize the importance of resistance through a collective lament. When a gunadule person dies, when one of the elders die, we hold a ceremony called Masar Igar, where sisters and brothers travel through the sacred rivers before reaching the home of the parents. There the people lament, in a public act where one will sing the life of the dead person for three days. This spiritual celebration is an act of remembrance that tells us we are all part of everything. In this sense lament is also a form of hope. There are tears, but we also remember the good things that person shared with the community, and even if it seems that lament is caused by pain, which it is, that lament leads us to recognize the hope we have in a deeper spirituality, which affirms that life does not end on this earth, we are also travellers going through the sacred rivers.

Finally, we extend an invitation to all, that we may embrace justice so that those death systems - which attack the indigenous territories, can also be denounced due to their injustice, and that the Christian faith communities can struggle together with the indigenous communities, to resist, to learn from their spiritualities; and also to walk with them and commit so that these things never again happen, to work together with indigenous communities and recognize the importance of their spiritualities, the importance of our connection with earth, the importance of not remaining silent and the need to recognize that we all depend on all. That during this time of pain for so many, we can lament together, but that in that lament we may also find hope.

Paulette Brown

Greetings, I speak on behalf my location in the CANAAC region in Toronto, Canada. I serve the Presbyterian Church in Canada as a minister at Saint Andrew Presbyterian Church Humber Heights. I must admit that I cannot claim to speak from the broader perspective of community within the CANAAC Region without erasing the reality of other people. So best effort is to hope that whatever I have to say that I would be some kind of resemblances, a commonality experiences within this region. My reflection is basically based on two statements from the concept paper, and one is that “salvation cannot be found in the center of power but rather in the margins” and the second one is that we need to retelling the Accra Confession for it to be able to help us to face the issues that are on our plate as such a time like this. For me to say that 2020 has been such a defining moment to life of the church is quite an understanding. The reckless way in which Covid 19 inflicted holocaust among the older people in the retirement homes sent a shock waves across the province. And what we meant to pay attention to is that many of these homes were owned by the wealthy business people who invested in health care for profit. The massacre of health care workers as Covid 19 marched to the health care facilities created a thick environment of fear and pain within the community. And then the public murder of Gorge Floyd. The spontaneous of rage, and this spontaneous call across the globe for change, it galvanizes attention in Canada, to a long resisted truth was always resisted in the Canadian context, that police brutality on black bodies was real. So the question that I bring to this table, what does salvation look like in the context, for example; we imagined object of police brutality is the black male bodies completely erasing police brutality on the bodies of black female and girls, women and girls. What does salvation look like within the context of healing and reconciliation project, the mission project that our churches or region here were so involved in? when the ongoing settle colonization continuous to recurved on the life of our indigenous siblings resulting a neglect and horrific abuses consider that missing and murder indigenous women and children almost becoming a way of life in our country? And what does salvation mean when we look at the multiplicity of violence against differently sexed people of the LGBTQ+ community, against communities of people with different disabilities and abilities? And as these people hammer their ways through seeking liberation, what does salvation look like? For me, if salvation is about changes, living in the abundance grace and love of God, if it’s about sharing, participating in with equity in the resources that God has given us then there can be no more salvation, whether you think about it in the places of power or in the margins, there can be no more salvation unless we begin to pay attention to the status of women and to the intersectionality of the distinct oppression that are they have to bear in their bodies. Having said that I want to go back to 2020, a moment for the church. Police officer kneeling on the neck of George Floyd, and George Floyd crying out for Mama. His Mama was death and this is my take, what if George Floyd was not crying out for his death mother instead crying out for God, Mama God? The trinity allows us to imagine, the Trinity provides space for us to rethink ways of talking about God that don’t really have to mess around with the patriarchal road block and limitations but over us access to God in our moment if crisis. The idea of Accra confession needs to brought back to the table is great. 15 years ago women gathered in Jamaica to hammer the implication of the Accra confession in its fresh forms for women,

those notes and those paper works were with work I think in the WCRC. What would I say, La Luta Continua! Be safe, be courageous and God bless.

Chief Magistrate – Mrs E Uma Onwunta - Issues of Justice Regarding Women and Girls

Issues of gender and economic justice affecting women and girls is well known fact but in the wake of Covid 19 Pandemic, several causalities were recorded in different part of the globe. This is not only in term of the people that actually died as the results of the pandemic. No, but also causalities of the order adverse consequences. And among the worse causalities in Africa and in Nigeria to be particular, were women and girls. I supposed I share this topic under the fueling free headings namely domestic violence, rape and sexual assault and then economic exploitation. First, domestic violence. When the lockdown was enforced, and people were forced to stay at home, many men got themselves busy by butchering their wives. Hence, there were increase in domestic violence. Some of the men who were already used to such a habit, couple with stresses that constricted by the pandemic of course, had now a full of opportunity to vent their frustration to the female folks. Then rape and sexual assault. There's also been an increase in rape cases that actually got to a level a disgust as some men descended to the point of indecently assaulting girls under ten years of age. As a judge in the magistrate court in my country, handling both juvenile and general criminal cases I can share with authority that reported cases of rape, (not all cases are reported) and all the session we face have escalate well above 200 % since the pandemic. This is real. We come down to economic exploitation. Many unemployed women and those the whose business were caught sort by the pandemic had to resort to prostitution as an act of survival from lack of order verbal means of livelihood. Economic exploitation of women and girls is high within this period. For instance, women and young girls are paid very minimally for jobs like carrying of blocks and stones at building sites. It is no longer new many undergraduate students returned to campuses after the lockdown with unplanned unwanted pregnancies. This of course not includes those girls who had delivered their own babies during the lockdown. And of course many abortions by the girls who did not have the courage to keep the pregnancies. So the question become, in the midst of all this, where's the church coming? In the heat of the pandemic, churches did set up a food bank for giving to members and even nonmembers, this too is a temporary measure. The question goes on, what is the way forward, what is the church can do better? Can the churches implement some feminist and lasting measure by empowering people for small scale, are micro economic business for their sustainability? Again, can the WCRC assist in this direction? Secondly, there is this issues of advocacy. Structurally, the law and the justice delivery system in Nigeria, in Africa and in other part of the world are in place to reduce some of the criminals in nature, however people rarely use them for fear of publicity and stigmatization. More often than now, for victim of under age and the parents of underage victims of sexual offenses, prefer to shoot themselves and their personalities so far in silence instead of the shame and the stigmatization that such disclosure perhaps in the courts of law may bring. First, can the churches use their structure to advocate the voices of the victims can be heard louder and clearer? Secondly, can the churches create a safe space to for rebooting of this victim emotionally, physically and otherwise? Thirdly, can the church increase advocacy, there's need to louder volume of advocacy against future occurrence of this ills. Why is this necessary? It is so because both of the victims and the

perpetrator of these crime all exist within the society of which also a part of. I think these are some of the few things that Lord require of us, in time like this. In time like this, the church can be an anchor.

Women and COVID19: Southern Africa

Christina Landman

Dear Colleagues in the ACRC and WCRC

The Christian women of Southern Africa wish to invite the WCRC community to engage with them on the following three points.

The first is to join the women in taking stock of churches' commitment to gender equity by asking the churches in Southern Africa the following three questions:

- (1) Were they able to establish a multi-dimensional contra-culture in your church, that is, a culture contra to patriarchy and gender-bias, both in your theology and practice?
- (2) Have you assisted men and women to explore the dialogical spaces between the gendered binaries of male and female?
- (3) Have you effected healing in a gendered society and were they able to establish partnership between genders?
- (4) Have you created space to listen to the stories of women who are suffering because of your lack of commitment to their embodied sufferings?

Secondly – since the answer to the above questions is “no” - the Christian women of Southern Africa would like to bring the livid experiences of women under the attention of the WCRC community, experiences that became worse because of the COVID-19 pandemic:

- (1) Apart from women who lost their jobs during the COVID-19 lockdown, women report how they are exploited by companies who remained open

during lockdown, became rich because of the essential services they rendered, but forced their workers to work double shifts for half their salaries – or go. Here is one such story. Sheila is a single parent, or rather a double parent, being both a mother and a father to a teenage son and a daughter in her early twenties with a baby. Sheila has a job, but for the last year she has received only half her salary. Two-thirds of the personell have been retrenched, and to keep her job, she has to work for half her salary – or go. The boss says that if they want to keep the business, they all have to make sacrifices. Sheila had to walk through bushes and the CBD of the city to get to work, leaving her home at 03:30 in the morning. At a specific place on the footpath through the bushes where she has to pass if not to take a detour that will take her another hour, men wait for her and she has to give them sex before they let her pass. She then bought herself a small car, but with the small salary the down payment has become very difficult. Also, she took out a loan for her daughter’s studies, but the daughter did not finish when she became pregnant. Yet, the bank of course still deduces the loan payment. “That is why,” Sheila says, “it is the first of the month and there is already no food in the house. My son beats me when he is hungry. And I have nobody to talk to, because I was always a respectable member of this community, but now I have to beg for food.”

- (2) Because of COVID-19, women became very vulnerable vis-à-vis their sexual health. A surge in pregnancies amongst women who are not in stable relationships have been detected. Talking to some of them, they indicated that the way in which COVID-19 stole their dignity from them in closing down jobs and closing down the future, made them fell pregnant to feel less worthless. When you are pregnant you are somebody.

Women also testify to the fact that their sexual health in general has remained unattended to by hospitals and clinics because of the emphasis on COVID-19 patients. Pregnant women are sitting in long lines to give birth at the hospital, and for many there is no chair to sit on while waiting, and no bed during and after giving birth.

- (3) To be noted also is the isolation suffered by women during lockdown. When losing a partner through a COVID-19 death, no pastoral care can be given, which of course goes for men and women. A woman's situation becomes more isolated when (a) she lives in a culture where widows have no rights and lose their property to the man's family and (b) she lives with domestic violence, face to face with her abuser without escape.
- (4) A survey was done recently on how women of faith express themselves on the use of vaccines. It became clear that they are caught between their common-sense caring abilities for family and community, societal/patriarchal discourses on the dangers of vaccines, and their deep and pietistic belief in the blood of Christ that will protect them. While a majority of the women indicated that they have no problem with vaccination as this is part of how they protect their children against illnesses, many reported that their husbands prohibit them from using a COVID-19 vaccine because it is believed that the vaccines are made of things coming from women, like fetuses. "Don't give this to me and the boys; its made of women stuff". Remarks from the women on the church's role in all of this, are "My church might not be for this vaccine, but the past year my church could not do much to keep bread on the table either." "Where does all this satanic stuff come from? How can a vaccine be satanic? My church is silent on this, not that I can even go there or to the

pastor.” “I wait to go to church to the pastor to hear where our church is on this. There is too much panic and confusion.”

Thirdly, - since they lack an appropriate theology in these times - the Christian women of Southern Africa would like to invite the WCRC community to join them in formulating an African women’s theology to assist them during the COVID-19 pandemic. We want to share with you at least three points on which such a theology should be based:

- (1) Acknowledge women’s leadership in dealing with the pandemic in the dialogical spaces between science, religious belief and cultural taboos.
- (2) Acknowledging women’s indigenous knowledge and preferred ways of expressing their belief as basis for a wise and life-giving theology.
- (3) Acknowledging the needs of women as they have expressed them in their stories of loneliness, hunger and sexual vulnerability, as the basis for an ecclesiastical practice ministering to women in a time of COVID-19.

3.4.a Discernment questions

1. What has not been mentioned?
2. What can we add?

Women Sharing Circle

3.4(b) Discernment Report

Question 1: What has not been mentioned?

Discernment Group 1:

Discernment Group 2:

The fear that exists among indigenous communities over health care and the racism connected to it. Indigenous people, particularly women are not being afforded the care they should have.

In Trinidad, the Venezuelan refugees are being denied access to health care during COVID. Women are particularly vulnerable in this. The lack of tourism is also closing economic opportunities.

Mental health issues in terms of being in a state of lockdown. Particularly those who are elderly and alone. As churches moved to online platforms there was a lack of support.

There is a greater amount of GBV during this time.

The lives of many people were affected, there has been a loss of employment. Families were impoverished. The breakdown of the family also led to the breakdown of family life.

At the same time corruption also abounds and this means a lack of services for people, this is particularly true for Eastern Africa.

COVID has brought the rich and the poor together, in the sense that earlier the rich would leave the country to access medical health care, the lockdown has prevented this.

It is not possible to celebrate ceremonies and how they impact social identity and psychology. The work and valuation of traditional medicines with western medicine

Discernment Group 3:

1. Responsibility of the church in the Canadian context today
2. Indigenous knowledge is crucial to understanding context.
3. women and children were the most vulnerable and exposed to poverty.
4. The call to follow Covid 19 guidelines in the lockdown hit the poor
5. To communicate when wearing masks became a physical challenge for the hearing impaired.

1.2-3.4.b_Discernment Report

6. What does it mean to have our 'Daily Bread' in the context of the lockdown?
7. The context of abuse of children and sexual minorities during the Covid crisis may be further addressed

Discernment Group 4:

What has not been mentioned? Women's voices to challenge normative Western patriarchal theology. Also political systems built on power/loud voices/ arguing- where are our women in our leadership? In the world and in the church.

Concern across Africa- abuse of young girls. When schools re-opened so many were pregnant. Where is the justice for these girls? Not being sought by the church- who impregnated these girls and where will they find justice? Stigmatised in school. Gender-based violence has been talked about broadly but specifics of the issue need to be addressed.

Canada - healthcare workers who died- many undocumented. How to help with the immigration status of these women.

UK- creating safe spaces for women who are in danger. Issue of psychological violence/manipulation/ mental health.

Question 2: What can we add?

Discernment Group 1:

Discernment Group 2:

Discernment Group 3:

Discernment Group 4:

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Topic: The economic impact of covid-19 on refugees, internally displaced persons and stateless persons.

Presented by Reverend Isaac KALONJI at CAER

Sunday 02/07/2021. Zoom meeting.

Introduction

Ambassador MINATA SAMATE is right to say that "The Covid-19 pandemic is ruining the economy, putting pressure on health systems, but above all worsening the already gloomy humanitarian situation on the African continent"

Indeed, Central Africa was already suffering from a serious and even chronic economic anemia and the populations live in indescribable poverty as a result of mismanagement and endless conflicts. Covid-19 has improvised as a health war or a natural disaster, thus worsening the socio-economic situation and especially that of refugees, internally displaced persons as well as that of stateless persons.

A. Statistics:

According to the World Health Organization until yesterday Saturday 06/02/2021 the statistics update looks like this:

- 1) Cameroon 30,313 cases, 28,045 healings and 474 deaths.
- 2) Burundi 1,698 cases, 773 recoveries and 3 deaths.
- 3) DR Congo 22,322 cases, 14,997 healings and 665 deaths.
- 4) Republic of Congo 7,887 cases, 5,846 recoveries and 117 deaths.
- 5) Rwanda 16,186 cases, 11,617 healings and 213 deaths.

Given the fragility of the health system, the lack of equipment, the absence of a large number of qualified health workers and the very limited financial means, this situation is very alarming and deserves the sustained attention of all.

To prepare our presentation we contented ourselves with various United Nations reports as well as daily life.

B. In relation to refugees, internally displaced persons and stateless persons in Central Africa, UN News reveals that "West and Central Africa has one of the largest displaced populations in

~ 2 ~

Africa with some 5.6 million internally displaced persons, 1.3 million displaced persons, 1.4 million returnees and 1.6 million stateless persons.

(3)

These people have lost everything, their property, their land, their property and sometimes even their families and thus they have no social security. They depend on local and above all international protection and solidarity.

C. The restrictive measures taken by politico-administrative and health leaders to prevent the spread of the global covid-19 pandemic, including the closure of borders, the isolation of capitals and large cities, and confinement have had fatal consequences on the above-mentioned groups of people.

These people need to eat, drink clean water, sleep in humanly acceptable conditions, have access to basic primary health care, and get children to school. If life has become unbearable for those who live at home, imagine what the situation must be like for those who are forced to live outside their usual surroundings. They have become more vulnerable and more isolated than before.

D. Due to repeated cycles of conflicts, the DRC stands out in terms of the number of internally displaced persons and ranks first among African countries. The same goes for the refugees who come from Burundi, Rwanda and South Sudan. UNHCR spokesperson considers that the covid-19 pandemic and conflicts are intensifying in the Democratic Republic of Congo, internally displaced people face the deadly consequences of chronic underfunding, he also warns that challenges of Massive funding threatens hundreds of thousands of lives in the DRC where rising violence and covid-19 exacerbate the already dire conditions of millions of forcibly displaced people.

You understand that the economic impact of covid-19 on the current situation of refugees, internally displaced persons and stateless persons is enormous.

COVID-19 IN AFRICA: ISSUES OF GENDER AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE AFFECTING WOMEN AND GIRLS

It is a well-known fact that in the wake of COVID-19 Pandemic, several casualties were recorded in different parts of the globe. This is not only in terms of the people that died as a result of the pandemic but also casualties of other adverse consequences. Among the worst casualties in Africa, and Nigeria in particular were women and girls. I shall discuss this topic under the following three headings, namely, Domestic violence, Rape and sexual assault, and Economic exploitation.

1. **Domestic Violence:** When the lockdown was enforced and people were forced to stay at home, many men got themselves busy by battering their wives. Hence, there was increase of domestic violence. Some of the men who were already used to such habits coupled with the idleness orchestrated by the pandemic, had ample opportunity to vent their frustrations on the female folk.
2. **Rape and sexual assaults:** There has also been an increase in rape cases. It really got to a level of disgust as some men descended to the point of indecently assaulting girls under ten years of age. As a Judge in the Magistrate cadre handling both juvenile and general criminal cases, I can say with authority that reported cases of rape and other sexual offences have escalated well above 200% since the pandemic.
3. **Economic exploitation:** Many unemployed women and those whose businesses were cut short by the pandemic, had to resort to prostitution as a way of survival for lack of other viable means of livelihood.

Economic exploitation of women and girls have heightened within this period. Women and young girls are paid menially for jobs like carrying of blocks and stones at building sites. It is no longer news that many undergraduate students returned to campuses after the lockdown with unplanned and unwanted pregnancies. This of course does not include those girls who had delivered their babies during the lockdown and many abortions by the girls who did not have the courage to keep the pregnancies.

IN THE MIDST OF ALL THESE, WHERE DOES THE CHURCH COME IN?

In the heat of the pandemic, Churches set up food banks from where palliatives were given to members and non-members. This, though laudable, was a temporary measure.

QUESTIONS:

- Can the churches implement more permanent and lasting measures by empowering people for small scale or micro economic businesses for sustenance? Can the WCRC assist in this direction?
- Advocacy: Structurally, the law and justice delivery system are in place to redress some of these ills that are criminal in nature. However, people rarely use them for fear of publicity and stigmatization. More often than not, victims and/or parents of under age victims of sexual offences prefer to shield their personalities and suffer in silence instead of the shame and the stigmatization that such disclosures may bring.

Can the churches use their structures to: 1)Advocate that the voices of the victims be heard louder and clearer? 2) Create safe spaces for the rebuilding of the victims emotionally, physically and otherwise? and 3) Increase advocacy against future occurrences of these ills?

These are few of what the Lord requires of us in times like these!

FROM: CHIEF MAGISTRATE MRS ENYIDIYA UMA-ONWUNTA



ACRC WORKING GROUP

KEY FOCUS AREA: RACISM, INEQUALITIES, AND TRANS-NATIONALISM

AN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

BRIEF PRESENTATION BY DR. B MPOFU

COVID-19 CONTEXT AND IT'S IMPLICATIONS

Massive disruptions to the world order - African communities struggling to cope

- ❑ Shut down of non-essential global economic activities resulted in massive job losses and unemployment
- ❑ Increased poverty, crime, violence against women and children and marginalization of poor communities
- ❑ Extreme weather conditions due to climate change – floods driving some people out of their communities
- ❑ Closed borders – stranded as internally displaced/migrants/refugees or cross-border (incl. women & Children)
- ❑ Limited social support or access to services as result of COVID-19 lockdown restrictions
- ❑ Churches have struggled to respond with limited religious activities some even failing to take care of ministers

RACISM, INEQUALITIES AND TRANSNATIONALITY

Some implications of COVID-19 Lockdown:

- Social distancing measures meant that 'its okay to isolate' and that has reinforced marginalization of poor communities
- Closed borders provide rationale for draconian border management laws which emphasize national safety & security over the welfare & safety of the poor - often mobile & displaced (incl women & Chn)
- Increased poverty & unemployment has worsened hostility towards foreigners in host communities
- Religious communities struggle to function with limited resources and sometimes in-effective traditional structures that have not adapted to new challenges



CONCLUSION

“...THE JOY OF THE LORD IS [OUR] STRENGTH” (NEHEMIAH 8:10)

AS AFRICANS, WE ARE KNOWN FOR OUR RESILIENCE. SO YOU HEAR PEOPLE SAY... ‘THIS TOO SHALL PASS.....’

1. Governments should allocate more resources for social welfare and strengthen social security systems for poor communities to absorb shocks from disruptions caused by COVID-19
2. Churches should adapt to new ways of doing mission and move away from ‘traditional self-serving practices’ or structures that have been rendered ineffective by COVID-19



By disrupting traditional self-serving practices of the church, COVID-19 presents an opportunity for a paradigm shift for us to ‘go sharply into reverse ... [and] rehabilitate ourselves [and] restore our old natural selves’.

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4.3.a Discernment questions

- How can churches promote the dignity of internally displaced people, stateless persons and refugees?
- How can churches held governments accountable to provide essential services to all people?
- How can churches provide a space where those who are without voice can make themselves heard?

ACRC Sharing Circle

4.3(b) Discernment Report

Question 1: How can churches promote the dignity of internally displaced people, stateless persons and refugees?

Discernment Group 1:

Discernment Group 2:

In Trinidad, the church is offering material support. Particularly related to food supplies and is offering educational service especially teaching English and basic reading and writing. The church buildings are being offered as learning centres.

Building relationships at the community level and recognizing who is in the community, minorities in the community. This leads to the deeper question of who is our neighbour and related to the larger race question. We need a courageous conversation about this and also what does it mean to love our neighbours.

The government is not keeping its promises to indigenous people in Canada. The Government is not committing resources to indigenous people.

What is the source of the problem and what is the political solution here. Looking towards the UN and the AU to understand their approach to these issues, esp with refugees and stateless people. This is particularly a question in Africa.

It involves challenging the old boys network.

Relating this specifically to the Palestinian people

Discernment Group 3:

Cameron-The churches are engaged socially, economically and spiritually in the lives of the refugees who are generally shy initially.

-To try and bring the refugees in and integrate them amongst the women's groups who empower them through generating small capitals for them to lead financially independent lives.

-to help them come out of the trauma, encourage and empower them to feel at home.

Ghana-The social challenge of the refugees is addressed through vocational training and helping them start small businesses through generation of initial capital to become self-sufficient.

Canada- The closing of the borders translated to non-acceptance of the Other. The Pandemic has had an impact on the way in which people have generally been 'inward' looking and not necessarily concerned about the Other.

Discernment Group 4:

Canada- government stopped refugee programs. What needs to be done- churches need to find a way to lobby the government. Children stranded- forced to go to unsafe jobs- not recipients of government Covid-19 help. Need to understand these people cannot be returned to their homeland. No hearing- no help- no hope.

1.2-4.3.b_Discernment Report

India- never in history has so many people returned home from the cities. How can we give them dignity of life and skill orientated education? Means to earn? Need a long term strategy. Present concern so orientated in the short term context. Need to give equal importance to the rural context- cannot forget these people.

UK- government detention centers- blaming the most vulnerable/ powerless for Covid-19 spread when they have no decision making power. Church needs to speak out and be prophetic. Be against this white nationalist norm.

Question 4: How can churches hold governments accountable to provide essential services to all people?

Discernment Group 1:

Discernment Group 2:

UN processes.

This is very true for indigenous people and indigenous people in North America

Some indigenous communities have their own internal organizations. The church would help a lot if it supports public advocacy and initiatives and walks and unites with indigenous peoples. In addition the importance of knowing, learning how they work to organize and do. On the other hand, in a more global way, the recognition of the needs and the visibility of these realities with the governments.

Discernment Group 3:

-Governments were more concerned about themselves rather than addressing the services to be addressed

Germany-The governments were only concerned with closing the borders and a nationalistic discourse was dominant rather than providing services to the people.

-There was a move by the government to support the most needy through stimulus funds. This has been very slow and perhaps may have been redirected to other sectors (defence etc). The most vulnerable people are yet to receive these funds whereas big businesses were given support right from the beginning.

Ghana- Government initiated support through the provision of free water and the electricity bills were subsidised or were free. The COVID tests were also provided free of cost. The elderly were given food support. The Airfare was also subsidized for people from Ghana..

Canada- The government initiated a guaranteed income of \$500 per week as a model of governance. As regards the Vaccine, it is being first administered for the most vulnerable people as well as indigenous people (nearly 80% have been administered vaccines)

Discernment Group 4:

We can start by showing the way. We can be selfless as churches.

Africa- many in government are members of churches/Islamic groups. Church calls on these people to be Christ-like in their jobs. Not disciples to the government but disciples, firstly to Christ. The church should condemn them for keeping quiet. Young people demonstrated and broke into supply centers to spread it fairly- where was the church? Accountability.

1.2-4.3.b_Discernment Report

Problems from our structures? Local vs National tensions. Too worried that the church won't survive. Preoccupied with our buildings. How do we work through an issue through all our church structures? National church too busy trying to organise itself that it doesn't prioritize issues trickling down to the local- let alone grassroots.

Question 3: How can churches provide a space where those who are without a voice be heard?

Discernment Group 1:

Discernment Group 2:

The church should have a voice to be able to create a space.

We have frameworks for action, but these are not being used adequately. Specifically naming the Accra confession and the NIFEA documents.

Churches have programmes to be heard by governments. If churches are to provide spaces, the church should be heard by governments and they can highlight the voice of those who do not have voices and in this way help them.

Discernment Group 3:

Discernment Group 4:

Speaking is an inaccessible art. Church's responsibility to empower and teach voice and how to speak to power. Help people understand who they are and what that means.

Counter: How can the church move away from powerful voices and emphasise involvement in other ways- creative/ stories/ art. The importance of listening and holistic participation.

S. Africa- How can we teach that people have a voice even in isolation. Promote resources to help. Work alongside others.

Being a church is who we are- not who attends a building. We need to go beyond ourselves and others will support us. We, as church, need to take risks in faith and it will be reciprocated from the wider world.