

A VOICE CRIES OUT

Advent Reflections 2020



CWM offers these reflections for Advent at the close of a turbulent year. Advent is itself a time of turmoil and hope. We use it to prepare for the coming of the Christ-child into our realities and to attend to the prophetic voices indicating where this child will be born, for whom and what new worlds he will institute. The theme also connects us to CWM's new mission theology which underlines the urgency of a *confessing witness*. A witness which speaks up and out for Jesus present in the injustices of our generation bringing forth change long prepared in the heart of God.

This is to read our world in the prophetic way of Isaiah who so often accompanies us in Advent. These reflections come modelled on and mindful of these words:

A voice cries out:

"In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord,
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.

5 Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,
and all people shall see it together,
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

6 A voice says, "Cry out!" And I said, "What shall I cry?"

Isaiah 40: 4-6 RSV

The voices who cry out here name how and where Christ is coming to work again for the transformation of a world of mountainous inequalities, grounded in the upheavals of violence and repression. Voices from India, Taiwan, the Philippines, Europe and indeed the earth and the body are joining with Zechariah and if their voices are heeded: 'By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace(Luke 1: 78-79)'

So, we sit with these speakers who respond to Isaiah's question: *What shall I cry?* and are challenged to raise our own voices in the same way for the kind of peace which makes angels sing.

Rev Dr Peter Cruchley, Advent 2020.

WHAT SHALL I CRY?

“I can’t breathe...”

“Please, I can’t breathe”: do you remember George Floyd’s desperate cries for help as he gasped for breath and clung to life due to the senseless brutality of the policing machinery? Those few minutes both capture and sum up 400 years of white terror on and over black bodies. The ongoing legacies are still with us, within and across nations in multiple manifestations. Racism continues to dominate as seen in personal and institutional racism that continue to harm human lives, communities, nations and economies.

what shall I cry? rooting out sin

Issues that continue to suffocate are many and they intersect. Here I name one – racism. The reach of racism, of racist frameworks – ideas of exceptionalism, supremacy, whiteness – is a long, embedded, and subliminal one. Allow 400 years of asphyxiation and death to sink in. There is an idol, heavy on black bodies, against which cries rise like incense. It is the idol of whiteness. This idol governs cultural, economic, and political norms and it devours black bodies through physical, psychological, and spiritual violence. It leaves a gaping hole in our collective consciousness. The worshippers and beneficiaries of this idol are not interested in uneven ground become level (equity). Will Black Lives ever matter? Consider this slant





diversion: what do you think good-hearted White Americans are asking about their current President's refusal to concede? Is it, what kind of system produces a man like this? No. Their mantra is: 'we must defend the system from this man'.

advent call

Where is the system's boot on the neck, throat, and heartbeat of sisters and brother and where is protest and movement to dare to ask the critical, collective, and systemic questions? Where and how must our life together reflect change so that a fresh and new conspiring (breathing together) may be birthed? What should be toppled and thrown out? What new alliances are needed? How will church space and church community create empowering 'breathing spaces', redressing deficits, inequities, and foster life-flourishing spaces? If you are looking for an advent message to soothe hearts, tickle ears and pat backs, and get nostalgic over advent candle flames, Isaiah is not the prophet to turn to. Obsession with a straight path may miss Isaiah's invitation to building a highway and the disruption this calls for.

Advent may be saying: wait not for the majority, it is always the minority that must disrupt the system. Like prophets they mirror (truth-tellers) the 'now' to move us toward a different future. For truth to set us free it must first 'piss us off', forcing us to see what we would rather not see, chosen to disregard, or pretend we are not. The BLM movement refer to the power the moment and that the struggle is not over until total transformation. Let's keep building the movement, making it stronger and bigger until we eradicate racism and white



supremacy. May the emancipatory yearnings in the wailings of the prophet propel us until the edifice of racism and whiteness tumble so that all can breathe again and together.

praying boldly

God-who-loves-just-ways and who understands our anger at blatant injustices: we groan and cry out for those who suffer from racism, hatred, and all related forms of discrimination and we chant out against the people and systems that perpetuate such violence. Give us confident hearts and strong voices to protest and become active advocates of your economy of full flourishing life for all so that we may break the enslaving spirals of evil, living-out more fully your way of goodness, justice and love.

Helpful links:

<https://blacklivesmatter.com/> [Black Lives Matter]

<https://www.bl.uk/windrush> [Windrush, UK]

<https://www.ninsee.nl/> [National Institute of Dutch Slavery History and Legacy]

<https://caricomreparations.org/the-global-reparations-movement/> [The Global Reparations Movement]

Rev Dr Michael Jagessar
Council for World Mission

WHAT SHALL I CRY?

“If we do not rise”

If we do not rise..... the rallying cry, the commitment, the inspiration that resounded in almost every corner of this sprawling and big country. As Christian women we joined in a national campaign, with all women and concerned men reminding ourselves that **If we do not rise**... the oppression will only grow. This emanates from the power the present dispensation has taken on itself to trample on the secular fabric of the country; and on the right to dissent; impeding the independence of the judiciary and the protection of the rights of minority communities in a Hindutva dominated India. All this among other undemocratic actions makes us aware of our responsibility, our calling! The onslaught is on all of creation as environmental protection laws have been repealed and farming laws that favour big business have been introduced. And yes... **If we do not rise**...violence against women will not be controlled!





Demonstrators from All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA) hold placards and shout slogans during a protest against the recent killings of two teenage girls, in New Delhi May 31, 2014. Source: Reuters.

If we do not rise...... we are concerned that, particularly, the relentless atrocities on Dalit women and their right to a life of dignity and justice and safety at every stage of their lives will go on unchecked.

If we do not rise....... was the challenge we repeated to ourselves, on the 29 of October, a month after the gruesome gang rape and mutilation of the 19-year-old Dalit woman in Hathras in Uttar Pradesh, a state in North India. This Dalit woman from Hathras died in a hospital in Delhi. She was gang raped and brutally attacked by four upper caste men (Thakurs) – in the process they mutilated her body. She died on 29 September, in a hospital in Delhi. An even more outrageous act was to follow - the police did not hand over her body to the family of the girl for her last rites, but instead burnt her body in the middle of the night; thus, not only violating the rights of the family and the girl, but wilfully destroying all evidence. The Dalit feminist movement has reminded us that according to government statistics every single day 10 Dalit women are raped in some part of India.

If we do not rise...... we as concerned women and men all over India reminded ourselves...

A small group of women in Kerala (the southern-most state of India) posted their photographs and voices on their group's Facebook page - each briefly speaking of the culture of rape that is increasing in India. In Jalandhar in Punjab, in North India women took out small

marches (all with masks and keeping a safe distance between each other as required) as the Covid 19 pandemic rages across India. In West Bengal they showed their protest in the form of drama and powerful poems - some in the group wrote heartrending and poignant poems weeping over the loss of this women and other Dalit women. A national twitter storm on the campaign was trending for a few days....



But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you.

(Acts 26:16 ESV)

We are women and men who in our collective strength recognise that we have a calling to transform our feeling of helplessness against forces that seem too big for us to confront and like Saul to have a conversion experience. We have to, like the Apostle Paul, recognise that we have no choice but to “get up and stand on our feet” (NSRV) as we too have been appointed and ordained to serve in God’s purposes for the community around us – especially for those so much more vulnerable than u the Dalit women in our nation! This advent, in the midst of a deadly pandemic we await the promise of new life in the birth of the Christ Child. All around us we hear the litany of challenge and hope...If we do not Rise, If we do not Rise!

Aruna Gnanadason
Church of South India

WHAT SHALL I CRY?

"Global warming is scary. I want to die here!"



Pacific Island climate warriors take on fossil fuel industry. Source: www.greenleft.org.au

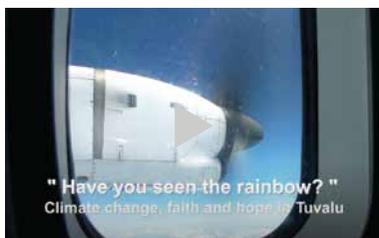
The Pacific islanders protest human greed and the profit motive that has polluted the earth and distorted weather patterns. Their protest interweaves fear, creativity, resilience, hope, prayer and daring.

Climate change as result of global warming threatens the very existence of island nations. Caused by unsustainable patterns of consumption and use of natural resources, the powerful and wealthy among humans tread the earth that God loves with arrogance and contempt as they utilise its resources greedily and unjustly. The earth itself, and those without power wealth and political clout are denied the flourishing God intends for all creation.

For the people of Tuvalu and other Pacific islands, a scary prospect of the sea engulfing their homes is ever present. Flooding, strong winds and distorted ecosystems threaten the livelihood, and desecrate graves, scattering cherished memories that hold the communities' histories and identities. There was a time when people predicted seasons, planned their lives around them and built robust defences – not any more.

Still, even now, the people of Kiribati harvest dead corals to defend their homes from the sea waves. They fiercely defend their homes creatively, powerlessly and with resilience. Elsewhere, Pacific Islanders plant mangrove trees - those 'walking' trees blockade the land from the sea. They harvest from nature and the remnants of pollution to make ravaged islands habitable.

The threat Pacific islanders face is compounded by the prospect of being uprooted and resettled in other lands, away from the cherish home and way of life. The threat of collectively losing home, language, identity and sovereignty. The land and sea that has been home and sanctuary for centuries, and is imbued with collective memories and lore that make a people, is threatened with extinction. 'Global warming is scary, but I want to die here', a voice cries out.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UXxX6FeBh2c>



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TZoj6kr4ZJo>

'I am The Lord, and there is no other.
I form the light and create darkness...
It is I who made the earth and created (hu)mankind upon it.
My own hands stretched out the heavens,
I marshalled their starry hosts...
For this is what the Lord says –
(God) who created the heavens ... is God;
(God) who fashioned and made the earth, (God) founded it;
(God) did not create it to be empty, but formed it to be inhabited.'
(Isaiah 45:6-8, 12, 18)

Prayer

God, who walks on the water of our fears,
stretching out a hand to hold us firm,
telling us not to be afraid,
we come to worship you in faith.
God, who speaks to us in story and word,
in each other,
and in life itself,
we come to worship you in faith,
for you are our God and we are your people.
Creation cries out to us,
creation shouts out to us,
creation groans, and to our human eyes it has gone mad.
It rains in the desert,
forest fires destroy life.
And we dare to ask, 'Why, Lord?' for we ourselves have been the ones
responsible for polluting what is good,
beautiful and healthy for our human life.
We still hope for prophetic voices to be raised by men,
women,
young people,
boys and girls,
whose damaged bodies condemn human evil.
But we still have hope that the words of the prophet Isaiah will
become true in this century: 'Behold, I will create new heavens and a
new earth, and the former things will not be remembered.'
May it be so.
Amen.

(Pilgrim Prayer -
The Ecumenical Prayer Cycle, WCC Publications, 2020, pp.193,196)

Rev Dr Kuzipa Nalwamba
World Council of Churches/United Church of Zambia

WHAT SHALL I CRY?

“Chhut Thou ThiN!”

Thus, says the Lord, the God of Israel: Let my people go so that they may celebrate a festival to me in the wilderness

Exodus 5:1



George Floyd’s agonising “I can’t breathe” has become a solidarity call to the churches and to all people of conscience to hear and heed the cry of the oppressed and the voiceless. The amazing chorus of international response has made it a sign of hope for those in despair. It has become a prophetic call and a source of comfort just as Isaiah did in his time.

Since World War II the Taiwanese have been crying out in their struggle for human dignity and national identity. No sooner had they celebrated the end of Japanese colonialism than Generalissimo Chiang Kai-Shek’s troops invaded Taiwan and turned it into a military fortress in their ongoing civil war with Mao’s Communist Party. Following the cruel February 28 Massacre of Taiwan’s elite in 1947, Chiang Kai-Shek imposed martial law that lasted until 1987. The Formosans Christians for Self-Determination established in 1975 cry out: “Chhut Thou ThiN!”

Taiwan began to experience the hegemonic rise of China as a great power. China employs diplomatic, military, economic, cultural and religious means to stifle Taiwan's place internationally and intimidate all potential supporters of Taiwan. Only 15 countries recognise the Taiwan government. It is not allowed to join international organisations such as the United Nations, the World Health Organisation, and the World Trade Organisation. Where Taiwan is permitted by China to participate such as the Olympic Games, it is not allowed to use the name, "Taiwan", and must identify itself as "Chinese Taipei." The Taiwanese are denied the right to self-determination. Indeed, every Taiwanese feels China's suffocation and cries out, "I can't breathe!"

Like the characters in Jean-Paul Sartre's drama, "No Exit" the 23-million Taiwanese are locked in a box in a perpetual detention. They await liberation, healing and restoration described in Mathew 25 vision: "when I was in prison, you visited me, and when I was a stranger, you welcomed me." The church and the Christians of Taiwan believe that God has given them dignity, talents and a homeland, so that they may share in God's creation, and enjoy the responsibility of participating in taking care of the world. They believe that the fellowship of God's people is called to proclaim the salvation of Jesus Christ while rooted in Taiwan and must identify with all its inhabitants through love and suffering, thus becoming the sign of hope for Taiwan. Archbishop William Temple of the Anglican Communion once said, "Our dignity is that we are children of God, capable of communion with God. In gratitude to the incarnation, our lives should be ordered and conducted with this dignity in view....so that we can glorify God forever."

The "Chhut Thou ThiN!" aspiration of Taiwan is poignantly represented in a sad song, Wu Yia Hue (Rainy Night Flower), from Taiwan:



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TkswjfFfmzo>

*The flower is dying on the ground,
Who will come and look after me?
The ruthless wind and rain ruin my future.
What else can I do when the flower is dying on the ground?
The rain is ruthless.
It doesn't think about my future.
And it doesn't look after my soft heart.
It takes away the brightness of my future.
The rain is dropping.
It makes me suffer and down through an endless drop.
It tears me apart like the flowers remove from
the leaves and branches,
No one is ever gonna see me.
The flower is dying on the ground,
Who will come and look after me?
The ruthless wind and rain ruin my future.
What else can I do when the flower is dying on the ground?*

Prayer

Oh God, we believe in your mighty works to part the Red Sea again to free the people of Taiwan to determine their own future and to enjoy the full dignity that is your will for all your children. The Taiwanese cry is your Advent invitation to the church universal to be a sign of hope for the people of Taiwan.

AMEN

Prof Victor Hsu
Presbyterian Church of Taiwan

WHAT SHALL I CRY?

“Stop the attacks!”

This call is part of National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP) and its partners' national and international campaign on human rights and is based on the “Unity Statement for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights in the Philippines, Keep Watch and Bear Witness with the Filipino People” which was released on September 17, 2020 for the International Ecumenical Convocation on the Defense of Human Rights in Philippines.¹

This collective cry from the ecumenical movement in the Philippines is addressed to the government of President Rodrigo R. Duterte to stop the killings, unlawful arrests and detention, rampant vilification and red tagging and other forms of human rights violations. Our cries also summon the international community for solidarity and accompaniment - to keep watch and bear witness.

Since President Duterte came into power in 2016, the human rights situation in the Philippines has gone from bad to worse. Violations happen in a climate of impunity and practically no one has been held accountable.



Catholic nuns hold placards as they protest against drug-related extrajudicial killings, on International Human Rights Day in Manila, Philippines.
Source: Ezra Acayan/Reuters

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the human rights crisis. With deepening economic misery in the country, the government has simultaneously used the pandemic to further constrict our already shrinking civic space. On July 3, 2020 President Rodrigo Duterte

signed the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020 into law which legitimises unlawful arrests and detention, undermines the due process of law, and runs contrary to the Philippine Constitution. With the new Act in place, human rights violations have continued at an unabated rate and churches and church people have not been spared. At the time this was being written, there were already 37 petitions against the Anti-Terrorism Act filed before the Supreme Court.²

The crisis is getting worse.



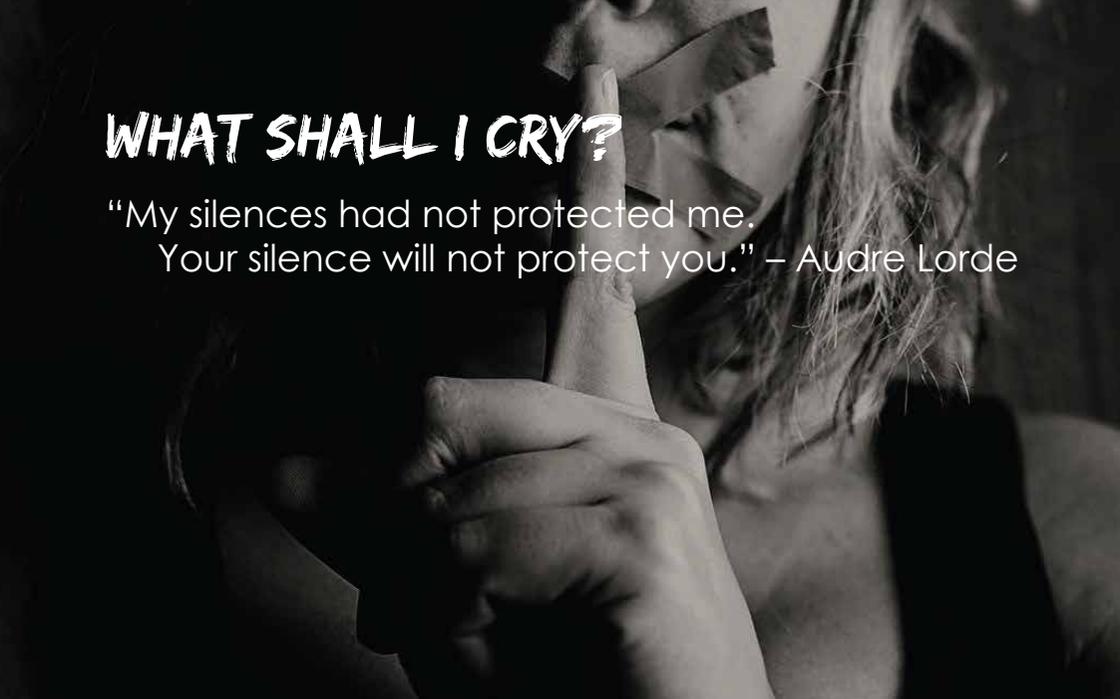
God, we affirm that each of us is your child and a bearer of your image. The dignity that you have bestowed on your people is disregarded by our very own government. We cry out to you and to our siblings around the world: be with us, accompany us, and embolden us for collective action, to stop the attacks on the rights of the people.

Amen.

Mervin Toquero
National Council of Churches
Philippines

¹<http://nccphilippines.org/2020/10/02/keep-watch-and-bear-witness-with-the-filipino-people-defend-civil-liberties-stop-the-killings/>.

²Even before the passage of the Anti-Terrorism Act, there were numerous violations against church people which was reported by the NCCP to the UN OHRCHR. For a copy of the NCCP report to the UN OHRCHR (A/HRC/44/NGO/116) please visit <https://daccess-ods.un.org/TMP/2837062.77608871.html> or https://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?m=86



WHAT SHALL I CRY?

“My silences had not protected me.
Your silence will not protect you.” – Audre Lorde

Silence is a tool of oppression

Voices from the margins are historically and categorically disenfranchised repeatedly and systematically silenced. These are voices of the social rejects, outcasts, misfits, misunderstood, marginalised and disenfranchised. These are voices who remind us that **all** have intrinsic worth and value. Silencing voices is a tool of oppression. It invalidates the experiences of those in the margins. It trivialises their subjugation and exploitation. It casts those at the margins as noisy trouble makers, rebel rousers, social disruptors and agitators. It creates a system of fear and intimidation for those who dare contest the powerful in speaking out. This is what silencing does.

On the contrary, voices from the margins give agency to disrupt and dismantle dehumanising oppressive systems. Hearing voices from the margins is participating in something powerful. It is a defiant act of humanising those whose backs are pushed against the wall. There is truth in their stories that powerful elites are determined to hide. Those who are cast aside, cast away, and treated as disposable, they matter. Their humanity is intrinsically intertwined with ours. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. reminds us of how *“injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly”*¹. And for this we cry out against systems that silence.

Silence is violence

While those who are in the margins are historically and systemically silenced, those who benefit from various intersections of social privileges such as the privilege of being white or proximity to it, cis-gender male, heterosexual, able-bodied, educated, part of the dominant socio-cultural group and etc., - choose silence when their privilege is made visible. This silence happens when someone makes a racist, xenophobic, homophobic, or ableist remark and they say nothing. This silence happens when the dominant group leaves the emotional or self-reflective work to the minoritised group (Thompson, 2004) . This silence not a neutral position. Rather, this silence is violence. The unwillingness and passiveness in staying silent only adds to the oppression as it reinforces a culture that seeks to silence those already oppressed and marginalised. Silence is complicity and submission to subjugating systems and reinforces privileges we benefit from. This silence is problematic. And for this we cry out against the uncomfortable silence.



Four Korean comfort women after they were liberated by US-China Allied Forces outside Songshan, Yunnan Province, China on September 7, 1944. Source: The Hankyoreh website at <https://tinyurl.com/y4dddjxn>. Photo by Charles H. Hatfield, US 164th Signal Photo Company. Note: The original photo is available in the National Archives Catalog at <https://tinyurl.com/yymu88z>.

Silence shattered - change initiated

After decades being silent, it was only in the early 1990s when Korean Comfort women started to speak about the sexual assault they experienced during the second world war. Poverty cast them as unworthy characters. Patriarchy cast them as unchaste, and undignified women. The intersectionality of their gender, socio-economics, sexuality and social standing initially silenced them, and amplified the oppressive dynamics of a shame and culture that prevented them speaking out. It puts the blame and weight of their sexual abuses on them, instead of the perpetrators and the system that supports them. Once they broke the silence a movement grew demanding for justice, an apology and reparations began. And for this we cry out against systems that silence because then change can come, change that has been long prepared.

Prayer

Comfort, O comfort your people Compassionate One! How long do we wail? How much louder must our crises rise up? How else do we lament in the midst of a culture of silence and its violence? May we commit to be like the daughters of *Zelophehad*, the persistent woman of Luke 18 and the Korean Comfort Women refusing to be quiet and raising their voices to break the culture of silence. May we be like *Rizpah* emboldened to confront uncomfortable realities of inequity and oppression. May we hear each voice as holy, beloved and worthy.

Helpful links

Korean Comfort Women

<https://thediplomat.com/2020/01/before-metoo-there-were-the-comfort-women/#:~:text=The%20comfort%20women%20movement%20was,the%20Japanese%20government%20in%201991.>

Intersectionality

<https://time.com/5560575/intersectionality-theory/>

White Privilege and Male Privilege (Peggy McIntosh)

<https://www.collegeart.org/pdf/diversity/white-privilege-and-male-privilege.pdf>

Lynnette Li

Council for World Mission/ Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

WHAT SHALL I CRY?

“Let hope be the antidote to fear...”

This year has been traumatic at all levels of our life, personal, national and international. Covid-19 has struck at the heart of our economic, social, political and religious plans and certainties. The Covid-19 Pandemic exposes our interconnected economic and ecological crises and unmasks the systemic inequalities which reign in our world.

This is the critique the ecumenical community brought to Covid-19 in the first wave of its impact:

The crises of the Covid-19 pandemic are rooted in human and systemic sickness. They stem from oppressive and exploitative economic systems that are based on the logic of profit-making, socio-economic inequalities, ecological indifference, political self-interest, and colonial legacies. ...The Covid-19 pandemic is both the product of and the spur to the current economic catastrophe. The public health emergency is symptomatic of a deeper economic crisis that undergirds it. Decades of austerity – in the global South, as part of harsh debt conditionalities, and in the global North, as a consequence of the 2008 global financial crash – have rendered many countries utterly defenceless in the face of this threat. Moreover, ineffective and corrupt governance at national levels has exacerbated the inability of governments to support those who are most vulnerable to the pandemic.

Calling for an Economy of Life in a Time of Pandemic: A Joint Message from the WCC, WCRC, LWF, and CWM
<https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/calling-for-an-economy-of-life-in-a-time-of-pandemic-a-joint-message-from-the-wcc-wcrc-lwf-and-cwm>



Advent breaks over a world in which at least 53 million people have contracted the virus and over 1.2million people have died.¹ Unlike previous pandemics Covid-19 seems to have convulsed the world and led some to make changes in work, health care and economic life that hitherto were told to be impossible. News grows of vaccines and treatments and claims are made that we will grow back better. But, even so, the impact continues to hurt most the most vulnerable, and especially those society has least valued or noticed.

In the midst of many voices these words of Tedros Ghebreyesus stand out, especially for religious communities called to be people of light in the times of darkness:

Let hope be the antidote to fear. Let solidarity be the antidote to blame. Let our shared humanity be the antidote to our shared threat. [Tedros Ghebreyesus Governor General World Health Organisation]

Advent leads Christians to the God who became human, who shared our life, our viruses, our vulnerabilities. Born not in a palace but in a stable, who had to become a refugee in the face of political turmoil, persecution and state violence. We find him in our bodies and find ourselves in his body. This baby cries out for a new humanity and a new world to be born. Attending to this voice can bring down old worlds and raise up new ones which shelters the vulnerable, houses them in dignity, respects the bodies, identities and rights of its people, deals tenderly with the hurting, affirms diverse human community, taxes those most able to contribute, resets the world's axes away from the centre to the margins where peace can flourish anew.

Let us pray in this way

Come anew holy child: That hope be the antidote to fear. That solidarity be the antidote to blame. That our shared humanity be the antidote to our shared threat.

Rev Dr Peter Cruchley
Council for World Mission

¹<https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/geographical-distribution-2019-ncov-cases>



Council for World Mission Ltd
114 Lavender Street, #12-01,
CT Hub 2, Singapore 338729
T (65) 6887 3400 F (65) 6235 7760
(E) council@cwmission.org
(W) www.cwmission.org

Company Limited by Guarantee.
Registered in Singapore.
Unique Entity Number 201206146Z

Copyright © 2020 Council for World Mission. All Rights Reserved. Content may not be reproduced, downloaded, disseminated, published or transferred in any form or by any means, except with the prior written permission of Council for World Mission Ltd.