



PHP POST

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Longing for Light

An Advent Reflection: God Who Offers Light to Those on the Move

Amanda Craft, Manager of Advocacy for the Office of Immigration Issues, Office of the General Assembly

“When the magi had departed, an angel from the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, ‘Get up. Take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod will soon search for the child in order to kill him.’ Joseph got up and, during the night, took the child and his mother to Egypt” (Common English Bible, Matt. 2:13-15).

When this bible passage comes through the lectionary during Advent, it still startles me. How would I feel if I were told to leave in the night to escape impending danger – danger that could lead to my child’s death? What would I take with me? How would I prepare my family? And where would I go in the new land?

When I think about human history, humans have always moved. It is only a more recent concept to belong to a nation-state with exact borders and defined citizenship. People groups moved when there was a need. When a certain location could not sufficiently meet a group’s needs, they moved. Statehood makes that much more difficult, even though the reasons for moving have not changed.

So, why would someone need to pack in the middle of the night? Humans seek refuge for numerous reasons, but the most common are: to escape armed conflict, poverty, food insecurity, persecution, terrorism, or human rights violations and abuses. Others do so in response to the adverse effects of

climate change, natural disasters (some of which may be linked to climate change), or other environmental factors. Some seek better economic opportunities. In all cases, refugees are not able to find the protection, care and stability to live out their lives in their home countries. They often pack in the middle of the night and walk, hitchhike, climb upon trains, float on makeshift rafts, and bribe others to help them find safety. Many do not successfully make it to another location – some are returned home, some are imprisoned, some die.

We face the worst refugee crisis in human history due mostly to human-made causes. Currently there are 65 million displaced people in this world, of that number 22 million are refugees – those individuals housed in a secondary country seeking resettlement in yet a third country. They face insurmountable obstacles in the secondary country – many exacerbating the trauma that caused their flight. Most have little access to adequate housing, sanitation, medical care, education, or employment.

They are often housed in unsuitable lands making it impossible to grow food crops. As third placement countries struggle with accepting more refugees, like the United States lowering the admissions ceiling from 110,000 for 2017 set by the Obama administration to only 45,000 for 2018, we leave these individuals stranded in unending limbo.

When God sent the angel to warn Joseph to protect the Christ child, God did so out of mercy and love. And this story of Jesus’ parents as foreign travelers and of Jesus’ birth in an unknown place echoes God’s love for all who are on the move.

Refugees’ decisions to move are much like those of Joseph and Mary. When you cannot keep your children sufficiently fed, housed, clothed, or safe, you take the risk and migrate. Refugees are the most vulnerable communities in the world. They are the strangers, widows, and orphans.

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Longing for Light: Coordinator's Reflection

Rebecca Barnes, Coordinator for Presbyterian Hunger Program

While we prepare to enter Advent this year, I'm aware of my acute longing for the good news of God's redeeming love. Even more than other years, I long for the lights on each of those candles on the Advent wreath. I will watch each Sunday as we move closer to the birth of Christ, the good news that love and peace and hope and joy have arrived. I long so intensely right now, like so many around me, because our world is in so much pain. We feel devastated at every turn.

Disaster upon disaster. Longing for light takes on a new meaning as brothers and sisters in Puerto Rico suffer loss of electricity, damaged homes, and lack of food. This suffering came right on top of those so heavily hit in prior weeks in Texas, the Caribbean, Florida. Who brings light back to these communities?

Cherished values of caring for God's creation and of welcoming the stranger seem unwelcome and unheeded in public policy arenas these days, and faithful advocates feel tired. The values of caring for the world and all people are rooted in Scripture and affirmed by General Assembly policies--on earth care, supporting the Environmental Protection Agency, welcoming refugees and immigrants, protecting public health, and working to end hunger and homelessness. Yet, we feel daily the loss of protections for



Jessica Maudlin

Presbyterian Hunger Program Advisory Committee sharing hope, joy, and light at its fall meeting, September 2017, Louisville, KY.

our earth and people. Who will claim hope in these days?

As we declare Christ as the Light of the world, may we all act as little lights for God's redeeming love throughout all the world. We are not to hide our light under a bushel but to become God's light in and for the world.

What will we do to stand together, to offer hope, joy, peace, and love to the world in this desperate time? We can support a Joining Hands network or learn more about We Choose Welcome.

We can find inspiration from an Earth Care Congregation, a Hunger Action Congregation, or Congregation-Based Community Organizing. We can order Christmas greenery that supports healthy rainforests, or remember connections to sisters and brothers from trips we've taken and relationships we've formed. In these ways and many more, may your Advent be filled with good news of great light. As my pastor used to say as she passed out baptismal candles to children and their families: "you are the light of the world--burn brightly!"

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Home for Christmas: Organizing Hope, Power, and People

Trey Hammond, Pastor of Mesa Presbyterian Church, and Andrew Kang Bartlett, Associate for National Hunger Concerns and CBCO

“To the place where God was homeless and all people are at home.”

—from *The House of Christmas*,
G. K. Chesterton

We long to be home at Christmas, close to loved ones. Without a home, we can feel lost. In many parts of the country, owning a home can elude those of us with modest or low incomes. Many housing markets price people out of renting, much less buying a home. To counter those market forces, first we must envision a world where, as Chesterton says, “all people are at home.” The Washington Interfaith Network (WIN), a grantee partner of the Presbyterian Hunger Program, organizes to help ensure that more people can celebrate Christmas in their own homes.

WIN is a congregation-based community organization (CBCO) committed to helping create affordable housing in one such pricey housing market. Washington, D.C. WIN is comprised of 35 congregations that represent a diversity of Christian denominations, as well as Jewish and Muslim faith communities, along with a union and two non-profit groups.

From its formation in 1996, WIN has been working on affordable housing. They began by advocating for and organizing broad political support for the creation of D.C.’s Housing Production Trust Fund. Now at almost \$500 million, the trust fund subsidizes permanent, affordable housing. Housing trust funds have been created by

CBCOs in cities all across the country to capitalize affordable housing. For example, CLOUT, another CBCO supported through One Great Hour of Sharing, helped increase Louisville’s housing trust fund to \$10 million this year.

With the D.C. trust fund and other sources, WIN has helped reshape the housing landscape of the city. Just this past year they completed a project named North Capital Commons, which provides 172 homeless veterans with a place to live. Along the way, WIN created a non-profit housing development arm, named UrbanMatters, to carry out the housing mission. A recent effort is the Homestead Apartments, where the residents of an apartment building were able to purchase a building and preserve 55 units of affordable housing near a historic part of town. The building was facing gentrification and the eviction of original tenants. Those tenants can now stay in their homes for many Christmases to come.

Affordable housing wins require determination. UrbanMatters organized for seven years to get a formerly blighted and abandoned public housing site revitalized. Just last year they successfully completed the last of five homes in the 29-unit Nehemiah home ownership community. These three and four bedroom town homes are sold at affordable rates to first-time home buyers. With their start in Brooklyn in the 1980s, a number of Nehemiah housing developments have sprouted up across the country. The name refers to the 5th chapter of the Book of Nehemiah, where people organized to fight for justice against exploitive interests.



Washington Interfaith Network (WIN).

Community organizers celebrate the positive outcome of their affordable housing campaign.

Rev. Roger Gench of New York Avenue Presbyterian Church says, “WIN organizes directly with those most affected by changes in the city. We don’t do ‘for,’ we do ‘with.’ We organize by building relationships, identifying and training leaders, and creating space for ordinary people to speak for themselves. This is slow and patient—but incredibly effective—work, because in the process we don’t just change communities, we change lives.”

The Presbyterian Hunger Program oversees a small portion of One Great Hour of Sharing set aside for congregation-based community organizing. Dozens of community organizations around the country, like WIN, are working on public policy for building and preserving affordable housing. At Christmas, when Christ became homeless, it was so humanity could find a home. For these families, whose hope for a home was realized in one of these WIN campaigns, this Christmas will be a time where the intersection of hope, home, and God’s justice will be joyously celebrated.

To read how a Presbyterian eleven-year old tackles homelessness, and how 70+ congregations became “Hunger Action Congregations” this fall, go to pcusa.org/news/archives and look for stories from Oct 16 and Oct 27.

» LEARN MORE

Visit pcusa.org/cbco. For resources on homelessness visit pcusa.org/homeless.

CLIMATE & DISASTERS

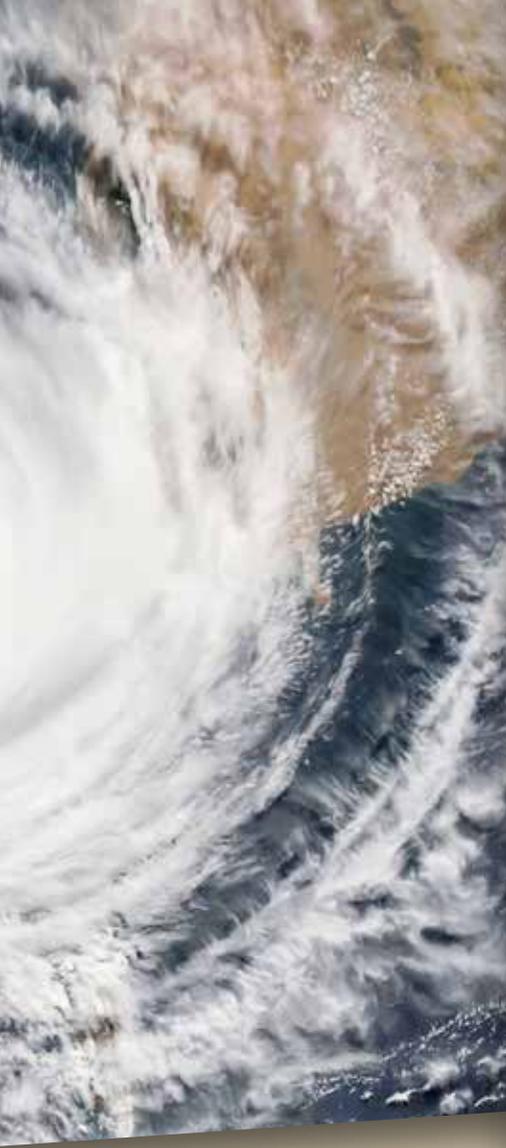


Climate change intensifies floods, droughts, hurricanes and fires.

These disproportionately affect populations already made vulnerable by poverty and hunger. When we learn about and then work to address climate change and disasters, we stand with those who are poor and hungry.

DID YOU KNOW?

- A warming world means that more precipitation falls as rain, snow melts earlier, and evaporation and transpiration increase; this causes both hydrologic and agricultural **drought**.
- Hurricane Harvey dumped a year's worth of rain on Texas and Louisiana in a few days, breaking all U.S. rain records. This summer in South Asia, 1,300 people died and more than 45 million people were affected by storms and **flooding**. Both are serious threats to food security.
- Since the 1970's, the number of category 4 and 5 **hurricanes** has doubled.
- As **sea levels rise** with increasing temperatures, the risks of storm-surge flooding from hurricanes increases. Warmer sea water leads to more rapid water evaporation which leads to more intense hurricanes.
- **Forest fires** have doubled in the western U.S. over the last 35 years due to the 2.5°F increase in temperature caused by climate change.
- Warmer winters lead to more pests that attack and kill trees, and dead trees are the perfect tinder for **wildfires**.



WHAT CAN WE DO?

- Commit yourself to personal climate justice actions-- eating organic and local food, reducing energy use, investing in renewables, or getting an energy audit.
- Examine environmental justice in your area at scorecard.goodguide.com.
- Learn about grassroots Presbyterian Fossil Free PC(USA) , corporate engagement efforts with the elected MRTI committee, and environmental investment options with Presbyterian Foundation.
- Encourage your church to become an Earth Care Congregation or to go carbon neutral at pcusa.org/climate.
- Support Joining Hands partners in global work at pcusa.org/joininghands.
- Pray every week for people in areas of the world affected by climate change.
- Contribute to Presbyterian Disaster Assistance for immediate relief and Presbyterian Hunger Program for long-term, root cause work for sustainability and resiliency.

WHAT DOES THE PC(USA) SAY?

“Earth-keeping today means insisting on sustainability—the ongoing capacity of natural and social systems to thrive together—which requires human beings to practice wise, humble, responsible stewardship, after the model of servanthood that we have in Jesus.” (1990 policy “Restoring Creation for Ecology and Justice)

Reflecting on Abundance in Advent

Jessica Maudlin, Associate for Sustainable Living and Earth Care Concerns

What would it mean to live more simply? Who is impacted when we don't live with care? What can we do about that? The Presbyterian Hunger Program invites Presbyterians to ask themselves tough questions about their daily purchasing choices and people impacted in supply chains.

Everyday life—with its food, clothes, cell phones, cars, and beauty products—is sustained by materials from the earth. There is only so much to go around. The average American consumes 120 pounds of these materials each day. This per person American-style consumption could support the equivalent of 2 Japanese, 11 Indian or an astonishing 18 Haitian persons.¹

During the holiday season it's particularly easy for the important questions to be drowned out by the loud voices of advertisements that feed our consumerism. Hopefully though, in this time of eager waiting for the coming of the ultimate gift in the form of the Christ child, we can reflect on Luke 12:34 which reminds us that *"...life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."*

For many people reflecting on where this "treasure" is, they find within themselves a desire for a simpler life. A life of Christian simplicity, even during the holiday season, doesn't mean giving up everything good. It does mean cutting back, reducing harm, choosing our purchases wisely, caring for creation, and acting out gospel values whenever purchasing or disposing of anything. These considerations are acts of intentionality and can be considered a spiritual practice.

1. Lent 4.5 Christian Simplicity

Activity

One act of intentionality you might try is to replace wish lists with lists of your current wants versus needs, and then reflect on them.

WANTS

NEEDS

Discussion

- 1) Was it easier to think of your "wants" or your "needs"? Why do you think that might be?
- 2) What influenced your choices about what went on each side?
- 3) Does your list look like your child's or grandparent's list? Why do you think that might be?
- 4) How might your list look if you were born in another country or time period?

For Further Reflection

- The Story of Stuff by Annie Leonard at thestoryofstuff.com
- Information on responsible purchasing at responsiblepurchasing.org
- Ideas for Reclaiming Advent and Christmas pcusa.org/justliving

An Advent Reflection, continued from page 1

"Get up. Take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt." This is a story that 65 million people can relate to in our world today. So many tears are shed and God weeps with them.

Yet, refugees are some of the most resilient people in the world. Many refugee families have managed to become independent in their new countries, and the resettlement program in the United States has been extremely successful.

We have the opportunity to stand beside them and help create another narrative with hopeful endings. Presbyterians do this every day by supporting refugee resettlement programs and following the teachings of John Calvin. Let us continue to do more.

To learn more about how you can be a part of "We Choose Welcome" campaign go to www.presbyterianmission.org/we-choose-welcome

We Do Not Lose Heart

Reflection on "Together As One" Joining Hands Networks Consultation

Doris Evangelista, Coordinator of Joining Hands El Salvador

In my mind, Peru is Machu Picchu, the Amazon, alpacas, pisco, and its famous culinary arts. As my trip was for work, I knew I would probably not see what a tourist usually sees. We gathered as Joining Hands network leaders from Cameroon, Sri Lanka, Haiti, Bolivia, Peru, and El Salvador, even as we remembered our colleagues from India and Congo who could not attend our "Together as One" consultation this August.

What a blessing to join together four continents which included many different countries and different languages for this event. Learning of the experiences of other networks, their struggles, their dreams, their work, and their challenges enabled me to see that many of their realities and injustices are the same as those in my country, El Salvador.

Seeing the environmental and health damages in La Oroya, Peru, caused by the mining industry was without precedent for me; my heart and my life were touched, and it made me more conscious of how human hands can bring so much destruction and tragedy. Peru, El Salvador, and the ravaged, threatened and contaminated earth itself cry out against this negligence and the destruction made worse by climate change.

In El Salvador, where political will does not exist to pass a law to prohibit the use of pesticides in agriculture, 99 percent of the

Through our struggle, together as one, we can make changes and continue being the voice of those who are not heard

water is contaminated. Economic profits carry more weight than the food security and sovereignty needed to provide adequate and healthy nutrition for all. Our reality does not differ much from other realities in the world. We need Joining Hands to keep knocking on doors and doing the advocacy work that we are called to, as climate change does not respect borders and in its wake leaves destruction.

Hearing the testimonies of the brave women of Filomena Tomaira Pacsi gave me strength to not lose heart in our common ministry. Through our struggle, together as one we can make changes and continue being the voice of those who are not heard, the voice of those who lack protection, the orphans, the widows, the most vulnerable.

God of the journey,
We remember that Mary and Joseph
Had to flee to Egypt,
Taking Jesus to safety,
Leaving home behind.
Remembering,
We pray for sisters and brothers
Around your world

Who are forced to leave their homes. . .
Inspire us to engage in efforts to create a world
In which all have a safe place to call home.
We pray in the name of the refugee Jesus, **Amen.**

Excerpt from prayer written by Rev. Mark Koenig, former Director of Presbyterian Ministry at the United Nations



Valery Nodem
Doris Evangelista from El Salvador shares her story with Joining Hands colleagues in August 2017.

It pains me to see so much abuse of human life and nature and it makes me feel powerless. The problem is so big and finding a solution seems so difficult. But as Joining Hands we move forward together trusting, like the people of Israel in the desert, in this journey to the land flowing with milk and honey. We see with eyes of faith the cloud that gives us shade in the day and the pillar of fire that gives us light at night. This Bible story encourages us because we believe that we are not wandering lost on this road of injustices, where there are moments of loneliness and where we find many rocks and thorns along the way that do not let us progress as we would like. It is often hard to find the change we want to see, but in these challenging moments, we find the balm that allows us to breathe again without difficulty. We believe that although the road is hard, we must continue moving forward, and that at some point we are going to see the changes we are seeking that will tell us our efforts have not been in vain.



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Sustainably-Sourced Greenery

Each year Presbyterian congregations have the opportunity to order sustainably-sourced palms for their Palm Sunday celebrations. Orders for 2018 will be open in early January, so make plans today to order yours by visiting www.pcusa.org/ecopalms.

For the first time in 2017, Presbyterians are offered a new opportunity to use sustainably-sourced greenery for Advent and Christmas. Learn more by visiting www.rainforesttorainforest.com.

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