

**LWF Pre-Assembly Youth Conference (PAYC)
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**HEALING IN SOCIETY AND OF CREATION
By Krystal Greene**

When I first agreed to speak to you on a theme that focused on healing, admittedly, I was a little stomped. I thought to myself, where does one begin on such a broad topic? How can you make something like healing, not only in society but all of creation. How do you make it meaningful and specific for those listening. As I studied healing in the Christian context, I realized that although “Healing in Society and of Creation” is very broad it is also very specific because as one man said, any great journey starts with the first step. The journey begins with each and every one of us taking that first step toward meaningful and consistent change. Just as John the Baptist summoned two disciples to ask of Jesus, “Are you the one who is to come or are we to wait for another?” From an introspective standpoint, all of us have to ask ourselves, what is our service to society. Are we to serve or do we pass that responsibility on to someone else. As God says in Romans, “All creation anticipates the day when it will join God’s children from death and decay. For we know that all creation has been groaning up to the present time. And even we Christians, although we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, also groan to be released from pain and suffering.” How can we be instruments for healing, for justice and reconciliation in the midst of such brokenness and society? The journey begins within.

What does healing mean? One of the definitions healing is to cure; to restore to health or soundness, to set right, to restore to spiritual wholeness. We are a society of open wounds, discontent and even fear of one another as it relates to race and our empathy for other people and other countries. Many times we feel like we feel like our voices and concerns are not being heard and taken seriously. Our open wounds affect even the smallest of our communities. Even our children, the next generation, suffer from hopelessness, a lack of belief in themselves and in the power of their dreams. However, before we can heal the wound; to truly begin the deep, powerful healing that transforms lives, communities and our society, we have to examine, the source of the wound and for those of us who feel cut by the calamity that society often presents, we have admit that we are bleeding.

We have to look within ourselves to embrace our fellow brothers and sisters with love and not try to cure, but try to understand. We cannot try to put a band aid on it but to hear, feel and see what our wounds are and become one in the struggle of mankind. One of the goals of the Pre-Assembly youth conference is to also look at these global issues of concern; Human rights, the access to health and quality healthcare and increase capacity to address social and political issues that promote a just and peaceful society for the sake of creation. Whether we have experienced these issues first hand or not, the healing of our wounds is a joint endeavor where all of our liberation is at stake. We cannot begin the process of healing from a distance.

Some may say, our worship is about expressing our personal relationship with God, giving thanks for the blessings that we have received. So, we are not responsible for healing creation, we are responsible for getting into heaven. Why should we be worried about the earth? The story of creation takes us back to Genesis at the beginning of the creation of “heaven and earth”. In Genesis 2: 4-10, we read that “Out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. A river flows out of Eden to water the garden and from there it divides and becomes four branches. The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to till it and keep it.” This shows us that there is a very strong connection between humans and creation. If God has planted us here to till the earth, how should we treat it? When man was placed in the Garden of Eden to tend and care for it, he was responsible for protecting and nurturing God’s garden. The first humans were to “till and keep” the earth by serving and protecting it. Our families, our communities, our children and our churches are in need of service and protection. As committed individuals, our duty today is the same as in the beginning, to serve and protect by tilling and keeping creation. For we participate with God in helping to heal creation.

When we understand that, as a society, we continue to suffer from wounds that have not been addressed, as Christians, we are obligated to take an active role in understanding those wounds. The wounds of poverty continue to plague our society. Whether we realize it or not, all of the countries all of us here are affected by the fact that, according to statistics, every 1.2 seconds a child is born in poverty. According to the UN Development Index, of the 4.6 billion people in developing countries, more than 850 million are illiterate, nearly a billion lack access to improved water sources and 2.4 billion lack access to basic sanitation. Around the world, nearly 3 billion people live on less than 2 dollars a day. Thousands are homeless in Post-war Iraq. The lack of consistent access to

nutritious foods, clean water and a healthy sustainable environment lends itself to a lack of measures to prevent ill healthcare. An estimated 4 million babies die annually in their first week of birth. These deaths are often the result of limited pre-natal health care. Inadequate healthcare, poor education for our children around the world who don't often see or believe in a better world beyond their circumstances, are all the results of the open wounds of poverty. The idea that so many are suffering from poverty is overwhelming. The results of these open wounds keep our families and communities fragmented, our children unable to reach their full potential and a world apathetic to their struggles because its not happening in their backyard.

As we look at the open wounds of injustice, we see our brothers and sisters around the world struggling for human dignity, to be equal parties in a landscape that still discriminates based on color and class. Take for example Aboriginal Communities throughout the country. Throughout the world, Aboriginal Community's development has been below that of many developing nations. Aboriginal People face a life expectancy six years shorter that the Canadian average. Suicide rates for Aboriginal Youth are 5 to 8 times greater than the national average. The aboriginal infant mortality rate is almost double the Canadian average and 40% of Aboriginal people live at or below the poverty line.

The injustice of Child Labour robs our youth of their innocence. The International Labour organization or ILO estimates that 1.2 million children are living away from their homes and families with people who force them to work for long hours in harsh conditions. Many receive no money and are denied their rights to food and rest. Altogether, the ILO estimates that 8.4 million are in slavery, trafficking, debt bondage and other forms of forced labor, forced recruitment for armed conflict, prostitution and other illicit activities. Injustice denies dignity to all. At the heart of us tilling and keeping the earth is the fight for social justice. We cannot be afraid to take a stand and fight for one another. For every one who is suffering from these open wounds in our society, we must multiply that, for every single person in society is suffering as well. Poverty, inadequate health care, the dynamics of prejudice are all injustices that our church communities see every day. We read in Micah that he has told us "what is good and what does the Lord require of you bit to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God." Advocacy is a ministry. Those who advocate on behalf of the poor, bridge the needs of those struggling for human dignity to those who have the desire and commitment to save lives, and the healing process of injustice truly begins. Martin Luther King once said, that "I can not be what I ought to

be until you are what you ought to be and you can not be what you should be until I am all that I can be” In this healing process of creation, everyone has a responsibility to give and be the best of who they are. Our destinies are intertwined. I can not grow in my faith and in my discipleship, if I can not reach out and help someone else get to the place of belief, love and hope in what creation holds. What happens to one, happens to all. The aborigines are examples of how the cycle of trying to heal from a distance and not be one in the struggle of our brothers and sisters keeps us from looking at their pain as our pain and creating a circle of love and commitment that includes all of God’s children. The child that commits suicide is one less child that can help til’ the earth. The child who is a victim of mortality is one less child who could possibly help those who have lost their way find their voices. We can’t afford to lose anyone in this effort to protect and to serve. We all need each other. We must reach out up close and personal. Taking the experiences and life situations of others transforms us because we are looking beyond ourselves and toward the greater good and understanding of humanity. Solidarity implies accountability for one another. We stand together in our protest for change. We mobilize for effective community outreach. We get involved with the world around us and make them hear our voices. When we are accountable for the rise and fall of our neighbors, we are changed.

In the study book for LWF’s Tenth Assembly, one quote in particular caught my attention. It was the idea that the world’s problems, divisions and tensions have deeply affected what it means for the church to gather in assembly at a given time and place. Although the church’s agenda must never be reduced to the world’s agenda, it cannot ignore the challenge to faith and discipleship emerging from the world. The faith we confess is more than private, it has public implications for the sake of the world.” Our faith in something bigger than ourselves can serve as a light for those who have lost their way. As they look for faith and turn to the church for answers, when they see you, in your walk, in your spirit, in your belief that the process of healing can be a reality and your commitment to make it possible. Most importantly, they too can see hope for a better world. They can join hands through and with the church to take their newfound light into the world and be another hand in the process of healing our open wounds.

Romans 8:19-25, reads “For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God, for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now and not only the

creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.” The language indicates that not only humanity but the whole creation waits for its redemption, a future that has been inaugurated by Christ. Being that the whole creation waits for its redemption, in order for us to preach justice to the world, we must practice peace and fairness with one another to allow that redemption to take place. Healing our divisions means getting to the root of our fear of one another. There are so many walls that separate us from one another; the walls of materialism, consumerism, prejudice, class, race, miscommunication and misunderstanding of who and what we are, as Christians, as members of different cultures and citizens of different countries. Too often we create exclusive communities. Anyone who is not like us or from something similar to our experiences doesn’t get a pass, isolating our brothers and sisters who should be taking our journey with us. Ephesians tells us that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens but you are citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.” At Pentecost, members of the early church were able to understand each other in unexpected ways. We may not be able to understand one another’s language or culture, but together we can acquire a new comprehension of what it means to be a communion of the world. The spirit imparts a sense of connection and familiarity. People with different gifts and abilities can attest to the reality of a relational God who creates, delivers and gives life to the whole world. It is through the power of the spirit that we are able to communicate across our many differences to deliberate what is at stake in light of scripture and to discern what communion will do. The Spirit restores solidarity and the ability to act, to resist in the face of despair.” Too often we become captive to the protection of our individual economic and political agenda agendas. Through the power of the church, we are able to open our eyes to all of the painful realities around us that have been previously overlooked. Our ears begin to hear cries rising from the suffering earth, our hearts can then be moved to act compassionately with others. According to St. Paul, there is not a lot of distinction between those who are good and those who are evil, all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, our imperfections make us strong because it increases our understanding of our fellow man and allows us not to assist mankind from a measured distance but from compassion and love.

The affirmation of human dignity is the primary reason why a church must not tolerate injustices such as poverty, violations against human rights, exclusion of our fellow brothers and sisters because of physical appearance of what that means barriers that arise in our churches based on ethnicity, gender or class keep us from dialoging with one another.

Without the dialogue, healing can't begin. As Ephesians reads, "For Christ himself has made peace between us Jews and you Gentiles by making us all one people. He has broken down the wall of hostility that used to separate us...Now all of us, both Jews and Gentiles, may come to the father through the same Holy Spirit because of what Christ has done for us...So now you Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God's holy people. You are members of God's family."

As members of God's family, we have to be willing to act and understand our calling to mend, heal and transform. The journey toward healing our society and creation has already begun. If you don't know where to start because the problems of our society are so massive, start today. Start with that first step. Look within. Ask yourself, just as when John summoned the disciples to have them ask Jesus if he was the one to serve or were they to wait for another? Are you going to serve or are you going to wait for someone else to do it. What can I do? After the introspection, begin the journey. Healing can only take place one person, one day at a time. Healing is not merely about finding one fix all for all society's ills, it is an example of God's grace and love. It is the restoration to live faithfully. The commitment to believe in your power to make a difference as someone put her to keep and till the earth and making the responsibility a reality. I know sometimes you may feel like you are traveling down the journey alone or that you are trying to make change and no one will listen. Stay the course. Our liberation depends on it. I ask you to ask yourselves, what are your biggest hopes for the healing of society. How do you see yourself being a part of healing those injustices, divisions and misunderstandings? In an age of overwhelming poverty, HIV/ AIDS claiming 40 million lives every year, the fight for human rights and the work to mend the divisions in our churches and communities, our work is clear. And our success will depend upon our commitment to leave the world better than when we found it. We are here to keep and till creation. As we move forward in a world that is in such dire need of healing, we must remember that just as we work with the spirit in healing our personal lives, we have to walk with the spirit in healing the earth. Our communities depend on it. Our future depends on it and our own personal healing depends on it. We are all on the same battlefield moving toward a better world. Healing, the process of resolving

and meeting issues head on that plague society with love and understanding will undoubtedly leave an indelible mark on all those who are touched by our forgiveness, our strength to stand up and be counted and our ability to look at our fellow man as our brothers and sisters and see their pain and struggles as our own.

Healing in society and of creation is not an easy task but just as I said in the beginning, every journey begins with the first step. God Bless the steps you take toward tilling and keeping the earth.

As you continue or begin your process of healing, I leave you with The Prayer of St. Francis.

Lord, Make me and instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred. Let me show love.

Where there is division, unity;

Where there is error, truth;

Where there is injury, pardon;

Where there is doubt, faith;

Where there is despair, hope;

Where there is darkness, light;

Where there is sadness, joy

O divine master, let me not seek so much to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as love for it is giving that we receive; in pardoning that we are pardoned; in dying that we are born to eternal life. AMEN