

# Globalization We Can Grasp: The Covenanting for Justice Online Curriculum

*Developed by the North American Working Group for Covenanting for Justice/Accra Confession*

Covenanting for Justice means working with communities as part of our Christian witness in solidarity with neighbors near and far to bring about a sustainable and just global community. We invite you to join in this transnational movement and to covenant for justice!

Below are five workshop modules that make real the challenges of globalization and the witness of the prophetic church. The modules in the curriculum contain video examples of social and environmental tragedy, and some triumphs of solidarity. You can use these as a five-week curriculum (or six weeks if you add an additional session to read and discuss the Accra Confession), or choose from the five modules according to the interests and time commitment of the group.

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## **The Five Modules**

### 1) Introduction to Globalization and the Churches' Response

*Globalization and the Churches' Response* provides background and theology about globalization. The relationship between globalization and empire is explored. Through the "Letter from Accra," video and worship, this module explores how we as Christians can respond to aspects of globalization that are unsustainable and unjust.

- **View the video "Coffee, Corn and the Cost of Globalization"**
- **Globalization Workshop Module** <- link to what follows

### 2) Global Climate Change: Renewing the Sacred Balance

*Global Climate Change* calls us to act for climate justice. We--individuals and communities, institutions and governments--must dramatically reduce our greenhouse gas emissions. Our faith teaches us to work for equitable, just and sustainable solutions. Changes in regulations and changes in lifestyle are essential to preserve Creation's balance. Here are practical ways we can create greener practices in church and society.

- **View the video "Greening Sacred Spaces"**  
<http://vidego.multicastmedia.com/player.php?v=z550m2iu>
- **Climate Change Workshop Module** <- link to what follows

### 3) Farmworkers, Low-Wage Jobs, and Living into a New Economy

*Farmworkers, Low-wage Jobs, and Living into a New Economy* reveals the working and living conditions endured by farmworkers in Canada and the United States. It tells the story of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, an organization of tomato pickers living in Immokalee, Florida, and the successes they and their allies have achieved in struggles with Taco Bell, McDonalds, and Burger King.

- **View the video “The Battle Fields” (28 minutes)**  
<http://vidego.multicastmedia.com/player.php?v=s6mf04f0>
- **Farmworkers Workshop Module** <- link to what follows

### 4) Environmental Justice and Human Rights

*Environmental Justice and Human Rights* are both at grave risk in the Peruvian lead mining town of La Oroya. A privately held U.S. firm continues to profit from operations that have contaminated people and the land. This tragedy demonstrates how the pursuit of profit can lead to ecological degradation/damage. We see how people and organizations can join forces through coalitions to support the struggles of local communities. See the prophetic force in Jesus’ parable of the talents when illuminated by this ray of darkness (not sure what you mean by “ray of darkness” – best to stay away from light and dark imagery that associates light with good and dark with bad.

- **View the video “La Oroya: Hot Metal Air”**  
<http://vidego.multicastmedia.com/player.php?v=q6pm6fol>
- **Environmental Justice Workshop Module** <- link to what follows

### 5) Faithful Purchasing and the Global Sweatshop Economy

*Faithful Purchasing and the Global Sweatshop Economy* exposes the harsh reality of the global production line. While workers in many countries around the world, including the United States and Canada, work under brutal conditions, consumers and people of faith have joined their struggle to end sweatshops.

- **View the video “Sweatfree Communities: Make Your Community Sweatfree” (9:45 minutes)** <http://vidego.multicastmedia.com/player.php?v=u0wm9w50>
- **Sweatshop Workshop Module** <- link to sweatshop module

## FACILITATOR’S GUIDE

### *What is the Covenanting for Justice (CFJ) movement?*

The CFJ movement is a worldwide movement of churches actively working against global economic and ecological injustice and for communities that sustain fullness of life for all. Initiated in the mid-1990s by member churches of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), the CFJ movement is importantly guided by the *Accra Confession*. The *Accra Confession* is a statement of faith adopted by WARC’s 24<sup>th</sup> General Council in Accra, Ghana, in 2004 that calls churches and society to work for transformative change in the current global

economy based on their faith in Jesus Christ. [For more about WARC and North American churches represented see “The Accra Confession Study Guide” link below.]

### ***What is the Covenanting for Justice Online Curriculum?***

The CFJ Web Curriculum offers learning tools for North American churches to bring the *Accra Confession* to life. Through film, case stories, Bible studies, and prayer, the workshops help congregations engage a variety of issues related to global economic injustice and ecological degradation. The workshops are designed primarily for use in an adult education class or series of classes, though they also could be used with a youth group and/or over the course of a day- or weekend-long retreat.

### ***What are the parts of the CFJ Web Curriculum?***

Four modules, each of which has the same components:

- ***Reading the Signs of the Times***, (include a short description/definition of what is reading the signs of the times – a lay leader may not know about this practice or what is meant by it, what is it’s purpose) which includes a suggested video clip, reviews a particular justice concern, and provides facts, statistics, and background information. The video gives additional information and shares personal stories.
- ***Confessing our Faith***, which provides a relevant Bible passage, a reflection on the passage (“Bible Study”), and discussion questions that can lead to deeper reflection on the connection between our faith and the justice issue.
- ***Covenanting for Justice***, which gives examples of ways to get involved to end the injustice that is the focus of the module and includes links to key groups working on the issue and resources.
- ***The Closing Litany***, which provides excerpts from the very powerful Accra Confession as well as a Closing Prayer. The full text of the Accra Confession is available online:  
English: [http://warc.jalb.de/warcajsp/side.jsp?news\\_id=1154&navi=45](http://warc.jalb.de/warcajsp/side.jsp?news_id=1154&navi=45)  
Spanish: [http://warc.jalb.de/warcajsp/side.jsp?news\\_id=1195&navi=24](http://warc.jalb.de/warcajsp/side.jsp?news_id=1195&navi=24)  
French: [http://warc.jalb.de/warcajsp/side.jsp?news\\_id=1188&navi=47](http://warc.jalb.de/warcajsp/side.jsp?news_id=1188&navi=47)  
German: [http://warc.jalb.de/warcajsp/news\\_file/doc-183-1.pdf](http://warc.jalb.de/warcajsp/news_file/doc-183-1.pdf)

***Additional Resources***, which provides many other web- and print-based resources on the issue. Participants may want to add others that they use.

## PRESENTING A WORKSHOP

### *Step 1: Planning the workshop*

- Select a module or modules that fits the interests of your group.
- Prepare to lead the workshop by reading through the entire module and viewing the video.
- In multiple places discussion questions are provided. Consider whether there are additional questions that you want to pose that have special relevance for your group. In the *Covenanting for Justice* section, look over the action ideas to determine whether additions are needed to address particular concerns of your church and community. Check your denomination's national website to see if actions on similar issues have been taken.
- You may want to choose a hymn or song to close the session following the litany.
- Consider how the written material will be presented. For example, the section entitled "Reading the Signs of the Times" can be read by participants in advance, be read silently at the beginning of the session, or read aloud during the session. Select the method that works best for your group. Reading aloud the Reflection on the Scripture may facilitate the conversation around the discussion questions.
- Be aware of your time constraints. Mentally assign time allotments to each section of the workshop knowing that you may also allow some flexibility. Be aware that if one section goes longer than planned, another must be shortened.
- Consider whether to provide copies of the full text of the module to all participants. The environmental concerns must be weighed against its value as an ongoing resource for participants. If you don't copy the entire module, you may want to distribute the *Covenanting for Justice* and *Additional Resources* sections for use as resources in the future.
- Consider whether you will need more than one session to complete the module. You may want to do the study (*Reading the Signs of the Times*), reflection (*Confessing our Faith*), and part or all of the *Closing Litany* in one session, then address what to do (*Covenanting for Justice* and *Additional Resources*) in a second session, even bringing in local people who face this issue in their daily lives.

### *Step 2: Leading the workshop*

After Introductions and an Opening Prayer (or your usual form of workshop opening), briefly inform the group about the *Covenanting for Justice* modules (see above: *What is the Covenanting for Justice (CFJ) movement?* and *What is the Covenanting for Justice Online Workshop?*). Then introduce the module you have selected (you could use the brief overview provided on pages 1 and 2 of this curriculum).

#### *Reading the Signs of the Times*

Take the group through the Reading the Signs of the Times section. Be prepared to allow time for discussion of this material. People may want to share their experience with the issue. However, if time is short, you may want to hold all discussion until the time for discussion questions.

The workshop leader or someone s/he selects should read aloud the section that introduces the video. Show the video. After the viewing, lead the group through the discussion questions in the printed materials and those you have developed, if any.

### ***Confessing Our Faith***

Read aloud the Bible passage and Reflection. Then discuss the Bible study questions. This can be a very powerful section of the workshop as people explore the connection between their faith and the injustice they are learning about.

### ***Covenanting for Justice***

Read silently or aloud the suggestions for taking action. Discuss how individuals, families, the congregation, and the community may want to become engaged around this issue. *What is God calling the church and its members to do?* It may be helpful to revisit this section after participants have time for more reflection. Invite individuals to suggest actions that they are willing to take. Explore whether the group wants to take a particular action together or invite their congregation/broader community to do so.

### ***Closing Litany***

Read aloud, together or responsively, the excerpt from the Accra Confession. If there is time, discuss how the passages speak to the issue you have been addressing. Do we truly believe the words we are saying in the Confession? Conclude by reading aloud the closing prayer.

# **Covenanting for Justice:**

## **An Introduction to Globalization and the Churches' Response**

### **Reading the signs of the times**

The term *globalization* refers to the increasing integration of peoples, cultures, and economies in the world. While migration, trade, and cultural exchange have long been a part of human history, technological advances have increased many people's access to information, travel, communication, and goods. The shape globalization is taking in our world emanates from our institutions, systems and societies. Increasingly people around the world are recognizing as morally untenable forms and systems of globalization that contribute to the exploitation of people and degrade the planet. This study piece introduces the work of the Covenanting for Justice movement supported by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC). The letter that follows was written at the conclusion of the 2004 WARC General Council meeting in Accra, Ghana as a way to communicate with people of faith around the world who are part of the Reformed tradition. It encouraged prayerful consideration of our own role, responsibility and accountability in the midst of a world full of inequality, oppression and environmental crises.

### **Letter from Accra: message of the 2004 WARC General Council**

From the delegates gathered from throughout the world in Accra, Ghana, at the 24th General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches to the congregations of all those churches belonging to this fellowship, greetings. We have met as 400 delegates in this Council from July 30 to August 12, 2004, worshipping, studying the Bible, deliberating on urgent issues facing God's world, and participating in the rich life of local churches in Ghana. We write to share with you what, on your behalf, we have discerned and experienced. Grace and peace to you from our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Our most moving and memorable moments came from our visit to Elmina and Cape Coast, two "castles" on the Coast of Ghana that held those who had been captured into slavery, as they suffered in dungeons waiting for slave ships that would take them to unknown lands and destinies. Over brutal centuries 15 million African slaves were transported to the Americas, and millions more were captured and died. On this trade in humans as commodities, wealth in Europe was built. Through their labour, sweat, suffering, intelligence and creativity the wealth of the Americas was developed.

At the Elmina Castle the Dutch merchants, soldiers, and Governor lived on the upper level, while the slaves were held in captivity one level below. We entered a room used as a church, with words from Psalm 132 on a sign still hanging above the door ("For the Lord has chosen Zion..."). And we imagined Reformed Christians worshipping their God while directly below them, right under their feet, those being sold into slavery languished in the chains and horror of those dungeons. For more than two centuries in that place this went on.

In angry bewilderment we thought, “How could their faith be so divided from life? How could they separate their spiritual experience from the torturous physical suffering directly beneath their feet? How could their faith be so blind?”

Some of us are descended from those slave traders and slave owners, and others of us are descendants of those who were enslaved. We shared responses of tears, silence, anger, and lamentation. Those who are Reformed Christians have always declared God’s sovereignty over all life and all the earth. So how could these forbears of Reformed faith deny so blatantly what they believed so clearly?

Yet, as we listened to the voices today from our global fellowship, we discovered the mortal danger of repeating the same sin of those whose blindness we decried. For today’s world is divided between those who worship in comfortable contentment and those enslaved by the world’s economic injustice and ecological destruction who still suffer and die.

We perceive that the world today lives under the shadow of an oppressive empire. By this we mean the gathered power of pervasive economic and political forces throughout the globe that reinforce the division between the rich and the poor. Millions of those in our congregations live daily in the midst of these realities. The economies of many of our countries are trapped in international debt and imposed financial demands that worsen the lives of the poorest. So many suffer! Each day 24,000 people die because of hunger and malnutrition, and global trends show that wealth grows for the few while poverty increases for the many. Meanwhile, millions of others in our congregations live lives as inattentive to this suffering as those who worshipped God on the floor above slave dungeons.

In our discussions in Accra—indeed in the past seven years of reflection since we last met in General Council at Debrecen, Hungary—we have come to realize that this is not just another “issue” to be “addressed.” Rather, it goes to the heart of our confession of faith. How can we say that we believe that Jesus Christ is the Lord over all life and not stand against all that denies the promise of fullness of life to the world?

If Jesus Christ is not Lord over all, he is not Lord at all. That is why we find in the Bible a constant criticism of idolatry, emphasized in our Reformed tradition. To declare faith in the one true God is to reject divided loyalties between God and mammon, dethrone the false gods of wealth and power, and turn from false promises to the true God of life.

We know that this does not come easily for any of us. Yet our hope lies in confessing that the power of the resurrected Christ can overturn the idols and the modern gods that hold the world captive to injustice and ecological destruction.

Therefore we invite you, in Reformed churches throughout the world, to take this stance of faith, standing against all that denies life and hope for millions, as a concrete expression of our allegiance to Jesus Christ.

## **What is the Accra Confession?**

The Accra Confession was adopted by the delegates of the World Alliance of Reformed

Churches (WARC) 24th General Council in Accra, Ghana (2004) based on the theological conviction that the economic and environmental injustices of today's global economy require the Reformed family of churches to respond as a matter of faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Accra Confession calls upon Reformed Christians around the world to address injustices in the world as an integral part of their churches' witness and mission. (include web address for Accra Confession)

### **Why does the church need the Accra Confession?**

1. Justice is a matter of faith. The Accra Confession states that matters of economic and environmental justice are not only social, political, and moral issues: they are integral to faith in Jesus Christ and affect the integrity of the church. Being faithful to God's covenant requires that individual Christians and the churches take a stand against current economic and environmental injustices.
2. The unity of the church is critical. Unity is concerned with togetherness, however divisive the issues confronting the confessing body may be. While the complex realities of globalization have not led to a full consensus, the global Reformed family addresses the problematic nature of today's global economy in the Accra Confession.
3. The church stands in solidarity with persons who are suffering and struggling. Following the justice traditions of the biblical prophets and of Jesus in the Gospel narratives, the Accra Confession views the current world (dis)order by "looking through the eyes of powerless and suffering people." It calls the churches and society to hear the cries of the people who suffer and the woundedness of Creation itself, over-consumed and undervalued by the current global economy.

Include suggested discussion questions for the above "reading the signs of the times" section. This is a lot of material to cover just by reading aloud or silently.

### **Show the video "*Coffee, Corn and the Cost of Globalization*"**

People in North America can eat tropical fruit in winter and buy clothing made in Asia. Around the world, people exchange goods, information and technology at a faster rate than ever before. But not everyone benefits from having the world within reach. This video raises some questions about economic globalization through the stories of two communities in Mexico. In Tilapia, families who depend on income from coffee now face a devastating drop in world coffee prices. In Zaongo, changes to age-old corn farming practices and less expensive imported corn have cut deeply into people's ability to support themselves. Explore how we as Christians have a responsibility to our global neighbors whose lives have been profoundly affected by this race to accumulate wealth.

#### **Questions for discussion:**

1. What are the positive aspects of globalization? What are the costs of globalization?
2. What biblical basis can we find for a just global economy? How did Jesus respond to the economic inequalities he saw in the first century?

3. Why have coffee prices plummeted around the globe? How could the coffee producers in Tilapia make a living selling coffee? How can North American Christians act in solidarity with the coffee producers in Tilapia?
4. Why is Mexico importing corn from the United States? Why are Mexicans buying it? How do subsidized agricultural crops affect farmers both in the United States and in other countries?
5. What values are needed to have a more just economy? How can we develop these values in ourselves and encourage these values in our institutions, government, and representatives?

*Adapted from the Study Guide for Coffee, Corn and the Cost of Globalization produced by the Mennonite Central Committee*

## **Confessing Our Faith**

*Exodus 32:1–6 (NRSV)*

*When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered around Aaron, and said to him, “Come, make gods for us, who shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.” Aaron said to them, “Take off the gold rings that are on the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.” So all the people took off the gold rings from their ears, and brought them to Aaron. He took the gold from them, formed it in a mould, and cast an image of a calf; and they said, “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!” When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation and said, “Tomorrow shall be a festival to the Lord.” They rose early the next day, and offered burnt offerings and brought sacrifices of well-being; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to revel.*

*Revelation 18:10–13 (NRSV)*

*They will stand far off, in fear of her torment, and say, “Alas, alas, the great city, Babylon the mighty city! For in one hour your judgment has come.” And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn for her, since no one buys their cargo anymore, cargo of gold, silver, jewels and pearls, fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet, all kinds of scented wood, all articles of ivory, all articles of costly wood, bronze, iron, and marble, cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, frankincense, wine, olive oil, choice flour and wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, slaves—and human lives.*

## **Reflection**

In biblical times the people of God turned away from God and made gods for themselves by taking gold rings from people, pouring the gold into a mould, casting an image of a golden calf and worshipping it in place of God, their liberator. In the biblical time, the merchants of the earth greedily bought and traded cargoes of gold, silver, jewels and pearls, fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet, all kinds of scented wood, all articles of ivory, all articles of costly wood, bronze, iron,

and marble, cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, frankincense, wine, olive oil, choice flour and wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, slaves—and human souls.

Five hundred years ago people of God turned away from God, took lands not their own, stole resources, and traded not only resources but human beings created in God's image in order to dominate and to benefit from them. Lamentably, our Reformed ancestors were involved in this slave trade. Today, in the name of capitalism, people have erected a bull in front of banks, stock markets and economic centers, and worship mammon in place of the God of life. They globalize markets and commodify nearly everything God has granted freely. We pursue an economy of empire in which the economic and political power of the few leave the majority of the world's people in poverty. Do we realize that when we benefit from a corrupt system we too are complicit? Do we too worship mammon instead of God? Can Christians and churches compromised by the comforts and benefits of economic globalization chart a different course? The Accra Confession and the Covenanting for Justice movement are invitations to participate in finding a more faithful path.

1. What would you identify as the idols in your life that prevent you from truly being in relationship with God?
2. What does it mean to pursue an economy of empire? How are North Americans and North American churches complicit in empire building that exploits the Global South?
3. What can we resist the empire of which we are a part?

*Adapted from the WARC Worship Book for the 24<sup>th</sup> General Council*

## **Covenanting for Justice**

Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth is working to build a movement of churches, communities and individuals who offer a beacon of hope for life in fullness for all. We invite you and your faith community to become active in the struggle for justice and peace and to consider ways you might engage and covenant for justice at local, regional, national, and international levels.

### ***Locally***

- lead (or participate in) a study of the issues of globalization and justice using this curriculum or the materials suggested at the end of this study guide
- get involved with community-based groups in your area working to promote affordable housing, immigrant and refugee rights, anti-poverty initiatives, living wages, and so forth
- recruit other members of your faith community to join you and others in this work
- begin to develop a partnership with a church in another country or on the other side of town to develop a long-term relationship with a Christian community that may experience the global economy very differently from you and your church members.

Check with your denomination to find out which global partnerships it is involved in and what programs it may have that facilitate your involvement

### *Regionally*

- find the councils of churches in your area and see how you can get involved in helping to address issues of economic injustice in your locality and region
- organize an ecumenical or interfaith study and work project with other communities of faith in your area, talk about the issues together and develop a project in which you can work together to strengthen your local community

### *Nationally*

- educate yourself about issues of economic and environmental justice and question political candidates about their plans to address these issues
- lobby your national political leaders to address injustices

### *Internationally*

- learn from individuals and partner organizations overseas, especially in developing countries, about their challenges and ask whether practices and policies in North America are contributing to these. Check your denomination's website for more information.
- identify, support and/or work with groups within and outside your denomination that have a track record of effective advocacy work with North American governments, corporations and multilateral institutions, such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and United Nations agencies

## **Closing Litany**

### **a) Call to worship**

The Lord says, This is the fast I choose;

This is what is acceptable to me:

**To loose the bonds of injustice,  
to undo the yoke of oppression  
and let the prisoners go free;  
to share our bread with the hungry  
and bring the homeless poor into our house.**

Give dignity to those who have nothing  
and do not turn from your own families.  
Then your light shall break forth like the dawn  
and your healing shall well up like a spring.

**Your justice and your glory will surround us,**

**You will answer when we cry for help;  
You will say, O Lord, "Here I am!"** (*Isaiah 58:6–9a*)

Let us worship God.

**b) Prayer  
The Lord's Prayer**

**Our Father who art in heaven,**  
Beloved God, Creator of heaven and earth,  
and of all the peoples of the earth,  
bring peace and righteousness to all the peoples.  
In your grace, may equity grow.  
Turn our hearts to you in healing and transformation.

**hallowed be thy name.**  
Be present to all peoples,  
that we may open our eyes and recognize you  
in our history, in our cultures, in our struggles.  
Deliver us from enchantment by the false gods of money, markets  
and status.  
Help us to praise you in our faith and actions,  
that, seeing our loving service in your name,  
others, too, may bless that name.

**Thy kingdom come;**  
Where people resist injustice,  
live in solidarity,  
and seek a more human social order,  
help us to recognize the ferment of your kingdom already at work.  
Bless those who are poor, those who suffer for the sake of justice,  
those who promote and defend human rights.  
Bless the children of our countries,  
and protect them from terror and oppression.

**Thy will be done,**  
Yes! That your wisdom would be our wisdom!  
Deliver us from adjusting to unjust systems,  
Move our hearts, and the hearts of women and men everywhere  
to act in love,  
that we may resist the seductions of power and greed  
and may live in right relationships with all.

**on earth as it is in heaven.**  
God, present in every movement of creation,  
let us be responsible stewards of your garden of life,

striving for sustainability.  
And as the firmament in all its mystery and glory  
displays your cosmic will,  
so may our lives display the mystery and glory of love,  
your will for life on earth.

**Give us this day our daily bread,**

That no one may be threatened by hunger, malnutrition, scarcity,  
give bread to those who have none,  
and hunger for justice to those who have bread.  
Teach us what is enough for today,  
and to share with those who have less than enough,  
for in this, it is Jesus whom we serve.

**and forgive us our debts**

Don't let us lose our lives,  
as persons and as peoples,  
because of our debts.  
Let not the poorest pay for the benefit of the richest,  
in unfair demands, punitive interest rates and excessive charges.  
But forgive us, and let justice prevail.

**as we forgive our debtors.**

As we live by your grace and sharing of your very self,  
deliver us from systems of aggressive and divisive individualism.  
Break our chains of selfishness,  
open our hearts to those who need our solidarity,  
and deliver us from illusion,  
that we might practice what we preach.

**And lead us not into temptation,**

Deliver us from being bewitched by power,  
and keep us faithful to you;  
for you are our help, where else can we appeal?  
Money will not save us, nor the market, nor our powerful friends.  
Strengthen us to resist the false attraction of easy answers,  
magic fixes,  
abuses of power,  
and the delusion that there is any way apart from justice  
in which God's justice can be done.

**but deliver us from evil.**

From every evil that objectifies the earth,  
all living beings, and our neighbours;  
from every evil that degrades creation  
and destroys societies;

from every evil that encourages us to think  
that we are God.

So may we learn from you to refrain from judgment,  
to accord respect to all God's creation,  
and so be privileged to hear the witness  
of those the world treats with indignity.

**Because yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory,  
Forever and ever. Amen.**

*Adapted from the WARC Worship Book for the 24<sup>th</sup> General Council*

## **Additional Resources**

### ***Books:***

Brubaker, Pamela K., *Globalization at What Price? Economic Change and Daily Life*. Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2001.

Brubaker, Pamela K., Rebecca Todd Peters, and Laura A. Stivers, eds., *Justice in a Global Economy: Strategies for Home, Community, and World*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2006.

Peters, Rebecca Todd and Elizabeth Hinson-Hasty, *To Do Justice: A Guide for Progressive Christians*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2008.

### ***Denominational resources:***

Christian Reformed Church in North America—*Shalom Seekers: Living the Call to Do Justice*. [www.crcjustice.org](http://www.crcjustice.org).

Presbyterian Church in Canada—*God is Our Refuge: Security in an Insecure World, Part 1*. <http://www.presbyterian.ca/assembly/2003/reports/internationalaffairs.pdf>

Report of the International Affairs Committee to the 129th General Assembly, 2003. Acts and Proceedings, pp. 297–309. *God is Our Refuge: Security in an Insecure World, Part 2*. Report of the International Affairs Committee to the 130th General Assembly, 2004. Acts and Proceedings, pp. 310–324.

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)—*Just Globalization: Justice, Ownership, and Accountability*. General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) PDS#OGA-06-090, 2006. [www.pcusa.org/acswp](http://www.pcusa.org/acswp) or [www.pcusa.org/oga](http://www.pcusa.org/oga), and the Just Trade website [www.pcusa.org/trade](http://www.pcusa.org/trade).

Reformed Church in America—*Globalization, Ethics, and the Earth*. Minutes of the General Synod/June 2005, pp. 344-364.

United Church of Christ—*A Faithful Response: Calling for a More Just, Humane Direction for*

*Economic Globalization*. A Pronouncement by the General Synod XXIV, 2003.  
[www.ucc.org/justice/issues/pdfs/A-Faithful-Response-Callingfor-a-More-Just-Humane-Direction-for-Economic-Globalization.pdf](http://www.ucc.org/justice/issues/pdfs/A-Faithful-Response-Callingfor-a-More-Just-Humane-Direction-for-Economic-Globalization.pdf)

United Church of Canada—*Living Faithfully in the Midst of Empire*. A Preliminary Report to the 39th General Council of the United Church of Canada, August 2006.

**Websites:**

- Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance: [www.e-alliance.ch](http://www.e-alliance.ch)
- Global issues website: [www.globalissues.org](http://www.globalissues.org)
- Oikotree: [www.oikotree.org](http://www.oikotree.org)
- WARC Covenanting for Justice website:  
[warc.jalb.de/warcajsp/side.jsp?news\\_id=796&part\\_id=28&navi=24](http://warc.jalb.de/warcajsp/side.jsp?news_id=796&part_id=28&navi=24)
- World Council of Churches—Poverty, Wealth, and Ecology program:  
[www.oikoumene.org/en/programmes/public-witness-addressing-power-affirming-peace/poverty-wealth-and-ecology.html](http://www.oikoumene.org/en/programmes/public-witness-addressing-power-affirming-peace/poverty-wealth-and-ecology.html)

# Global Climate Change

## Reading the Signs of the Times

As planet Earth heats up due to the increase of greenhouse gases (GHGs) in the atmosphere and as the resulting impacts of climate change are already adversely affecting ecosystems and millions of people around the world, we must face the human connection and our collective responsibility for this crisis of global warming. Climate change is above all a moral, ethical and spiritual issue about our relationship with God's whole wondrous creation.

Global climate change is fundamentally altering God's creation. Bird and fish migration patterns are changing, permafrost is melting, freshwater sources and coastal wetlands are disappearing as a result of sea level rise. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) estimates that 20–30 percent of plant and animal species are at risk for extinction and that acidification of the oceans will fundamentally change marine life. Overall, global climate change is predicted to bring increases in flooding, severe storm events, and drought. And the expected toll on human society is staggering. The additional number of people affected by malnutrition could rise to 600 million by 2080.

An additional 1.8 billion people could be living in a water-scarce environment by 2080. An additional 220-400 million people could be exposed to malaria.<sup>1</sup> Although global climate change affects all human populations around the globe, it hits those living in poverty the hardest because they depend on the surrounding physical environment to supply their needs and they have limited ability to cope with climate variability and extremes.

The worst climate effects are currently borne and will be borne in the future, by those most vulnerable—the poor and marginalized, those living in low-lying island states and coastal areas, melting glacial regions, and spreading deserts. Those least able to adapt are least resilient to catastrophic changes—and climate justice demands that those most able and most historically responsible take immediate action to drastically lower their GHG emissions to stabilize the climate. Global climate change reduces access to drinking water, limits access to food, and negatively impacts human health particularly in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. According to the Fourth Assessment Report of the IPCC, developing countries are expected to suffer the most from the negative impacts of climate change.

For instance, Lake Chad, a water source for five countries and 20 million people in Africa, is drying up because of droughts. In 1960 Lake Chad covered more than 26,000 km<sup>2</sup>. By 2000 it was down to 1,500 km<sup>2</sup>. When weather patterns change in Africa, crops fail and people go hungry. The challenges of global climate change will not be in just developing countries. In the United States, for example, the town of Shismaref, Alaska, with a per capita income around \$10,500, will need to be relocated because of shoreline erosion caused by the melting of protective sea ice.<sup>3</sup>

The infestation of the mountain pine beetle, predicted to destroy 80 percent of the Canadian pine forest in British Columbia by 2013, is a direct result of its larvae surviving the warmer winters, and the entire Northern boreal forest is also under threat.<sup>4</sup> The devastation of habitats for wildlife

and livelihoods for human communities is one of the most immediately felt impacts of climate change.

Our call as people of faith—to protect the vulnerable and to be stewards of God’s Earth—means we must act to stop global climate change. Because the effects of global climate change are already impacting those who can least afford to deal with it, addressing global climate change is also a justice issue.

*Portions excerpted from “The Poverty of Global Climate Change” published by the National Council of Churches Eco-Justice Program*

<sup>1</sup> Watkins, Kevin. *Human Development Report 2007/2008. Fighting Climate Change: Human Solidarity in a Divided World*. United Nations Development Program. December 2007.

<sup>2</sup> *Lake Chad* [www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org) Dec. 20, 2007

<sup>3</sup> *Photo Essay: Sea Change* [www.motherjones.org](http://www.motherjones.org) Dec. 20, 2007

<sup>4</sup> *The beetle and the damage done*. Paul Jay. CBC News. April 23, 2008

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/science/beetle.html>

#### *Film*

*Renewing the Sacred Balance—Greening Sacred Spaces* examines the impact of our human footprint on the Earth, calls for climate justice, energy consciousness and greenhouse gas emissions reductions through lifestyle changes in churches, homes and communities. It highlights the actions of some faith leaders—in their teaching, preaching, and in greening their buildings—and encourages viewers to respect Creation and address the serious issue of climate change.

#### **View the video “Greening Sacred Spaces”**

<http://vidego.multicastmedia.com/player.php?v=z550m2iu>

#### **Study questions:**

1. As we examine the impact of our ecological footprint—both individually and collectively—on the Earth, the home that we all share, we can see that all too often human power has been used to “dominate” it and abuse its life-giving resources. To restore a more just and sustainable Earth Community we must regain a sense of our being a part of Creation and seek ways to re-invigorate our participation in God’s covenant with all living things. At the same time we must take seriously the “polluter pay” principle and our responsibility to pay for past and current excesses and to share the wealth that has been created, often at the expense of the environment, with those least able to pay. What can you and your faith community do to renew the Sacred Balance?
2. Because the increased concentration of greenhouse gases (GHGs) in the atmosphere is a direct result of human activity, particularly our North American overconsumption of fossil fuels, we must seek ways and means of lowering our emissions and becoming more energy-conscious and energy-efficient. What can you and your faith community contribute toward greening our sacred spaces and modeling the change we seek?
3. While the shift to renewable energy sources and better use of finite resources must become a priority for us all, at the same time enormous public subsidies are being paid to

the fossil fuel industry as it invests in exploration and extraction around the world, often contributing to conflict and human rights abuses. How can you and your faith community learn about the global links to local energy use? And how can you contribute to the eradication of fossil fuel based conflict and human rights abuses?

## Confessing our Faith

*Genesis 1:23-31 (NRSV)*

*And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day. And God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind.” And it was so. God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good.*

*Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.” So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”*

*God said, “See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so.*

*God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.*

1. Read Genesis 1:23–31 out loud as a group or alternately by different people.
2. Ask the following questions for discussion:
  - If we recognized everything as a creation of God, and a creation that God said was good, how would this change how we interact with it?
  - What does it mean to be “made in God’s own image?” How does this change how we interact with all of creation?
  - If everyone recognizes every other human being as created in the image of God, how shall we act justly to share the burden of the disproportionate impacts of climate change suffered by the most vulnerable?
3. Word study: *creation*
4. Open with the following observation: Often—too often—we talk of this as an environmental movement, or an ecological movement. When we do, we miss what makes this a matter of faith. This environment is the creation of God, and the word *creation* appears 55 times in Scripture. The Green Bible says there are over 1,000 references to Earth, compared to 490 to heaven and 530 to love.

5. Have participants locate at least one reference to creation in the Bible and have a few participants share their Bible passage. Afterwards have people write or draw an example of what creation means to them.
6. With the group, discuss current attitudes towards creation and global climate change. Discuss God's view of creation.

## **Covenanting for Justice**

The challenge of global climate change is enormous and can seem overwhelming—but there is much that faith communities can do to make a difference. They can advocate for policy changes and changes in government directions, contribute to necessary adaptation programs with partners experiencing difficulties, especially in developing countries, and they can demonstrate leadership in making lifestyle changes in their churches, their homes and their communities. You too can join the movement of greening sacred spaces and working for climate justice. Here are some ideas:

- Support legislation fighting climate change that includes assistance to those most adversely affected
- Plan a worship service around climate change.
- Create a “Green Team” in your faith community.
- Make your home, church, and/or community buildings more energy-efficient. For ideas, visit [www.faith-commongood.net](http://www.faith-commongood.net) or [www.nccecojustice.org/climate.html](http://www.nccecojustice.org/climate.html).

Here are some examples:

In March 2006 the Sisters of St. Dominic of Caldwell turned on 648 solar panels that now power 8 percent of the campus, making it the largest solar power program in New Jersey.

The Hebron Baptist Church in Dacula, Georgia, installed nearly 1,000 energy-efficiency lights, saving \$1,400 per month after loan payments. The church is saving \$32,000 each year and has reduced its carbon emissions by 1 million pounds.

Bethesda Lutheran Church in Ames, Iowa, replaced incandescent lighting with compact fluorescent lighting, installed computer controls to heat and cool occupied rooms, purchased new energy-efficient freezers, and installed new storm windows over the stained glass windows. They are saving \$5,000 each year and have reduced their carbon emissions by 100,286 pounds.

Solana Beach Presbyterian Church in Solana Beach, California, upgraded its incandescent lamps with fluorescent lighting, added occupancy sensors, installed LED exit signs, and new air conditioning and heating systems. They are saving \$6,620 each year and have reduced their carbon emissions by 120,000 pounds.

Greening Sacred Spaces, a project of Faith and the Common Good in Canada, has partnered with provincial and municipal governments to conduct hundreds of energy audits leading to retrofits. They are motivating people to change by building partnerships with organizations doing

community-based social marketing to design and evaluate programs that foster sustainable behaviour. Working ecumenically and in an interfaith context they have helped many faith communities begin to develop their own green teams and have produced a downloadable guide and resources.

## **Closing Litany**

### ***Excerpted from the Accra Confession: Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth***

We believe in God, Creator and Sustainer of all life, who calls us as partners in the creation and redemption of the world. We live under the promise that Jesus Christ came so that all might have life in fullness (John 10:10). Guided and upheld by the Holy Spirit, we open ourselves to the reality of our world.

We believe that God is sovereign over all creation. “The Earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof” (Psalm 24:1).

Therefore, we reject the current world economic order imposed by global neoliberal capitalism and any other economic system, including absolute planned economies, that defy God’s covenant by excluding the poor, the vulnerable and the whole of creation from the fullness of life. We reject any claim of economic, political, and military empire that subverts God’s sovereignty over life and acts contrary to God’s just rule.

We believe that God has made a covenant with all of creation (Genesis 9:8–12). God has brought into being an Earth community based on the vision of justice and peace. The covenant is a gift of grace that is not for sale in the marketplace (Isaiah 55:1). It is an economy of grace for the household of all of creation. Jesus shows that this is an inclusive covenant in which the poor and marginalized are preferential partners and calls us to put justice for the “least of these” (Matthew 25:40) at the centre of the community of life. All creation is blessed and included in this covenant (Hosea 2:18ff).

### ***Prayer***

#### ***For the Beauty of Creation***

Almighty and everlasting God, you created the world as a bountiful garden, bringing life to every creature that moves and breathes. We thank you for the vitality, beauty and fruit of your creation. We pray that our roots would grow deep in the rich soil of your Word. Water us daily with the subterranean river of life. From seed to sapling, may we grow to be sturdy oaks of righteousness, radiating light in dark places. With time may the girth of our trunks be hearty and sap-thick in protection against those who destroy. May our branches reach out to the high heavens and our falling leaves drift to lands far and wide for the healing of the nations. Rejoice, O ye Earth, rejoice! We wait and watch with the eyes of ravens and the patience of ancient trees for that day when the trump shall sound and the trees of the fields shall clap their hands. Let thy Spirit go forth quickly, that it may renew the face of the Earth. Friends on Earth and friends above, let’s burst forth God’s peace and love; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

Peter Goodwin Heltzel, New York Theological Seminary

In *Prayers for the New Social Awakening*, Elizabeth Hinson-Hasty and Christian Iosso, eds. (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press), 2008.

*For Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation:*

Sisters and brothers, God has formed us from the dust of the Earth and has breathed into us the spirit of life. This spirit calls us to join in the holy act of creation and preservation of all that God has made. This gracious invitation confronts us with choices. We have set before us this day choices of life and death. When we pray, “Giver of life, sustain your creation,” we commit ourselves to choosing life, for the healing of the nations and for the care and redemption of all that God has made.

Let us join together to affirm our choice for life, and our commitment to cherish God’s world and to work to sustain all of creation.

Eternal God, our beginning and our end,

be our starting point and our heaven

and accompany us on this day’s journey.

Use our hands to do the work of your creation

and use our lives to bring others to the new life you give this world

in Jesus Christ, Redeemer of all.

**Amen.**

In *Worshipping Ecumenically, Orders of Service from Global Meetings with Suggestions for Global Use*, Per Harling, ed. Geneva, Switzerland: WCC Publications, World Council of Churches, pp. 122–123. 1995.

*Benediction*

(Julian of Norwich, 14<sup>th</sup>-century Benedictine sister)

Be a gardener for Creation.

dig, toil and sweat, and turn the Earth upside down,

seek the deepness,

and water the plants in time.

Continue this labour, and make sweet floods to run,

and noble abundant fruits to spring.

Then take this food, drink, and beauty,

and carry it to God as your true worship.

**Thanks be to God!**

## **Additional Resources**

**For scientific information, visit:**

1. The National Academy of Sciences: [www4.nationalacademies.org/nas/nashome.nsf](http://www4.nationalacademies.org/nas/nashome.nsf)

2. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change: [www.ipcc.ch](http://www.ipcc.ch)
3. Union of Concerned Scientists: [www.ucsusa.org](http://www.ucsusa.org)
4. Climate Solutions: [www.climatesolutions.org](http://www.climatesolutions.org)
5. Science for Peace: [scienceforpeace.sa.utoronto.ca](http://scienceforpeace.sa.utoronto.ca)

**For information on connecting faith and care for Earth, check out the following organizations:**

**(United States)**

1. The Interfaith Climate and Energy Campaign (a joint project of the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life and the National Council of Churches of Christ):  
[www.protectingcreation.org](http://www.protectingcreation.org)
2. The National Religious Partnership for the Environment: [www.nrpe.org](http://www.nrpe.org)
3. Earth Ministry: [www.Earthministry.org](http://www.Earthministry.org)
4. Web of Creation: [www.webofcreation.org](http://www.webofcreation.org)
5. The Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life: [www.coejl.org](http://www.coejl.org)
6. The National Council of Churches of Christ: [www.webofcreation.org/ncc](http://www.webofcreation.org/ncc)
7. The Evangelical Environmental Network: [www.creationcare.org](http://www.creationcare.org)
8. United States Catholic Conference: [www.nccbuscc.org/sdwp/ejp](http://www.nccbuscc.org/sdwp/ejp)
9. Partners for Environmental Quality: [www.peqnj.org](http://www.peqnj.org)
10. Eco-Justice Ministries: [www.eco-justice.org](http://www.eco-justice.org)
11. The National Council of Churches Eco-Justice Program: [www.nccecojustice.org](http://www.nccecojustice.org)
12. The Forum on Religion and Ecology: [fore.research.yale.edu](http://fore.research.yale.edu)
13. EcoEquity: [www.eco-equity.org](http://www.eco-equity.org)
14. Interfaith Power and Light: [www.theregenerationproject.org](http://www.theregenerationproject.org)

**(Canada)**

1. Faith and the Common Good—Greening Sacred Spaces: [www.faith-commongood.net](http://www.faith-commongood.net)
2. KAIROS—Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives: [www.kairoscanada.org](http://www.kairoscanada.org)
3. Re-Energize—Time for a Carbon Sabbath: [www.re-energize.org](http://www.re-energize.org)
4. Climate Action Network-Réseau action climat—Canada: [www.climateactionnetwork.ca](http://www.climateactionnetwork.ca)
5. Canadian Youth Climate Coalition (CYCC): [www.ourclimate.ca](http://www.ourclimate.ca)
6. TakingITGlobal (see Youth Guide to Action): [www.takingitglobal.org](http://www.takingitglobal.org)
7. David Suzuki Foundation: [www.davidsuzuki.org](http://www.davidsuzuki.org)
8. Community-based Social Marketing: [www.cbsm.com](http://www.cbsm.com)
9. [www.goforgreen.ca/gardening/pdf/cbsm.pdf](http://www.goforgreen.ca/gardening/pdf/cbsm.pdf)
10. Zero Footprint: [zerofootprint.net](http://zerofootprint.net) and [www.toronto.zerofootprint.net](http://www.toronto.zerofootprint.net)
11. Tools of Change: [www.toolsofchange.com](http://www.toolsofchange.com)
12. The Art of Advocacy—a short guide to influencing government policy-making:  
[www.ccednet-rcdec.ca/en/docs/pubs/AdvocacyHandbook-FIN2.pdf](http://www.ccednet-rcdec.ca/en/docs/pubs/AdvocacyHandbook-FIN2.pdf)

# Farmworkers, Low-Wage Jobs, and Living into a New Economy

## Reading the Signs of the Times

Tomato pickers toil long days for 45 cents per 32-pound bucket of tomatoes, earning an average of \$10,000 a year according to the U.S. Department of Labor. Migrant workers face very similar conditions in Canada. Over half of farmworkers live in poverty. In the United States, they have no right to overtime pay, no health insurance, no sick leave, no paid vacation, and no right to organize a union to improve these conditions. In the most extreme cases, workers are held against their will and forced to work as modern-day slaves.

Faced with exploitative wages and very harsh working conditions, members of this predominantly immigrant workforce based in Immokalee, Florida, have organized themselves into an organization called the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW). The CIW forged alliances with religious, student, and human rights communities who represent millions of consumers across the country. This coalition, the Campaign for Fair Food, has won agreements between the CIW and the three largest fast-food corporations in the world: Yum! Brands (Taco Bell, Pizza Hut, KFC and others), McDonald, and Burger King. The results have been higher pay and improved conditions for the farmworkers harvesting the tomatoes that will eventually be sold to huge corporate firms. They are pressuring these large corporations to enact industry-wide, socially responsible purchasing practices to uphold human rights for farmworkers. In addition, the CIW has worked with the U.S. Department of Justice and the FBI to investigate and successfully prosecute six cases of slavery in recent years, freeing more than 1,000 people. The question is not “if” they will succeed, it is only a matter of “when.”

In June 2003 Lucas Benitez, co-founder of the CIW, testified before the U.S. Congress:

*My name is Lucas Benitez. I left Mexico at 17, driven by the poverty that faces thousands of Mexicans. Although we work hard, work in our own fields no longer provides enough for food or clothing. My father is a peasant who always worked the land, growing corn (maize). But he had to stop because it is a crop that is no longer profitable and it was impossible to support a family on its harvest....Thousands of us who find ourselves in Florida have been obligated to leave our countries because of the consequences of the free trade agreements that have flooded our countries' markets with cheap agricultural products from the United States and Canada, making it impossible for us to sell the crops that we have grown for generations.... We who once grew our own food are now simply peons working for the huge multinational agribusinesses that are taking over and monopolizing the international agricultural market.*

Many farmworkers in the United States and Canada face abusive conditions in the farms and fields. But for many this current reality was not the beginning of their difficulties. As Benitez describes, many farmworkers were forced to leave their homeland in Latin America due to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between Mexico, Canada, and the United States. In addition to working long hours at hard labor, farmworkers have organized

peaceful, mass protests to express their opposition to NAFTA and the international trade agreements which devastated their families and livelihoods and, in many cases, forced them to come to Canada and the U.S. looking for work.

## **View the Video “The Battle Fields” (28 minutes)**

<http://vidego.multicastmedia.com/player.php?v=s6mf04f0>

### **Discussion questions:**

1. Are there rights that every worker should have? What are they?
2. What should determine a worker’s pay and benefits?
3. What responsibilities do large companies have regarding their suppliers? What oversight should these firms provide for the workers employed by their suppliers?
4. Should workers who lack authorization to work in the U.S. or Canada receive the same pay, benefits, and working conditions as authorized workers?
5. Should poor workers in the United States and Canada be appreciative of any job they can get? Or should these workers have a right to a decent wage, benefits, and fair treatment?
6. What responsibility or obligation does a consumer have for the conditions in which a product is produced?

## **Confessing Our Faith**

*Isaiah 65:17–23 (NRSV)*

*For I am about to create new heavens and a new Earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating; for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight; I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and delight in my people; no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress. No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days, or an old person who does not live out a lifetime; for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth, and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed. They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.*

### **Reflection**

Isaiah envisioned an alternative to the destructive warfare and violent empire of his day. But his vision also speaks to us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Isaiah’s vivid description of God’s reign of righteousness provides a powerful contrast to the economic violence and destruction that exists in our world.

Farmworkers—those who plant—often don’t eat. They can’t afford sufficient food. And those who build don’t always inhabit. Immigrant construction workers are sometimes paid so little that they cannot afford decent housing. And many workers of all types suffer untold indignities and abuses in their workplaces.

All workers are children of God, made in the image of God. All workers have dignity and value. All work that makes a contribution to the community has dignity and is not degrading. But many *jobs* are degraded.

A degraded job is one that pays too little or is potentially unsafe. It is a job in which the worker is treated unfairly or illegally, or in which the employer discriminates in hiring or promotions. A degraded job is one in which a worker has too little autonomy or control over her work, resulting in high levels of stress and even physical illness.

Most countries, even the poorest, have labor protections that, on paper, are quite good. However, too often they are not enforced.

But workers need jobs, even bad jobs if that is all they can get. But these degraded jobs must be improved. People of faith must stand with workers seeking dignity and fair treatment. God's reign does not stop at the door to the workplace.

People of faith accompany their sisters and brothers through the valleys of life, wherever these lie. We support the Florida farmworkers as they join together in the Coalition of Immokalee Workers to address their workplace injustices. This is an important way that workers who plant may also afford to eat, and workers who build may also afford decent housing.

***Bible study questions:***

1. Describe Isaiah's vision of the "new Earth." In what ways does it differ from life today?
2. Can you think of situations today in the United States, Canada, or around the world where someone builds a house and someone else, unjustly, inhabits it? Where someone plants a vineyard and someone else, unjustly, eats its fruit? In what ways do people today *not* enjoy the work of their hands?
3. Thinking of Isaiah's day (sometime before 520 B.C.E., shortly after Israelites returned after the Babylonian exile), what would have been reasons for an infant to live just a few days or for adults to die prematurely? Why does this happen today—in Canada, the United States, the larger world?

## **Covenanting for Justice**

There are many ways that people of faith can support the struggles of workers for greater dignity, higher pay and benefits, and better working conditions. The website of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (<http://www.ciw-online.org>) provides updates on ways to support the Campaign for Fair Food and their efforts in the fast-food industry.

In the U.S., the National Farmworker Ministry (<http://www.nfwm.org/>) is an ecumenical organization active in the faith community to support farmworker organizing and improve the lives of these workers. Workers in other industries are also seeking to improve their work lives. There are two major national networks of labor-religious coalitions: Interfaith Worker Justice (<http://www.iwj.org/>) and Jobs with Justice (<http://www.jwj.org/>). Both of these organizations support a network of local coalitions involving people of faith and labor organizations that educate, organize and mobilize the religious community on issues and campaigns that will improve wages, benefits and conditions for workers, especially low-wage workers. Go to <http://www.iwj.org/outreach/lg.html> (for IWJ) and to <http://www.iwj.org/outreach/lg.html> (for JwJ) to see the over 50 cities and localities with a religious-labor coalition.

In Canada, Kairos: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives is the primary organization through which churches in Canada work ecumenically on these issues. The web site has good information and resources. <http://www.kairoscanada.org/e/refugees/migrants/index.asp>

## **Closing Litany**

### ***Excerpted from the Accra Confession: Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth***

We believe that any economy of the household of life, given to us by God's covenant to sustain life, is accountable to God. We believe the economy exists to serve the dignity and well-being of people in community, within the bounds of the sustainability of creation. We believe that human beings are called to choose God over Mammon and that confessing our faith is an act of obedience.

Therefore we reject the unregulated accumulation of wealth and limitless growth that has already cost the lives of millions and destroyed much of God's creation.

We believe that God is a God of justice. In a world of corruption, exploitation, and greed, God is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor, the exploited, the wronged, and the abused (Psalm 146:7-9). God calls for just relationships with all creation.

Therefore we reject any ideology or economic regime that puts profits before people, does not care for all creation, and privatizes those gifts of God meant for all. We reject any teaching that justifies those who support, or fail to resist, such an ideology in the name of the gospel.

By confessing our faith together, we covenant in obedience to God's will as an act of faithfulness in mutual solidarity and in accountable relationships. This binds us together to work for justice in

the economy and the Earth both in our common global context as well as our various regional and local settings.

### ***Prayer***

Abba, Father, I thank you for the many blessings you have bestowed upon me. Father, you see all that is happening in this world. You see the injustice that we, the field workers, go through when people are being penalized for not producing at a certain rate per hour, even when we are working as hard as we can.

Your Word, O God, tells me you hear our cries. God, help us to reflect on our lives, that we would not become like the people who cheat us of our pay. Breathe into our hearts a love and passion for you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in the name of Jesus. Amen.

*—A prayer written by a farmworker, preserved in the National Farmworker Ministry’s “Harvest of Justice” brochure, 2007*

### **Additional Resources**

- Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) is a community-based worker organization composed of Latinos, Haitians, and Mayan Indian immigrants working in low-wage jobs throughout the state of Florida. [www.ciw-online.org](http://www.ciw-online.org)
- More information from Public Broadcasting Corporation’s NOW program on farmworkers and the CIW. [www.pbs.org/now/society/ciw.html](http://www.pbs.org/now/society/ciw.html)

#### **In Canada:**

- Justicia for Migrant Workers (includes links to other organizations including faith based) [www.justicia4migrantworkers.org](http://www.justicia4migrantworkers.org)
- Agriculture Workers Alliance [awa-ata.ca/en](http://awa-ata.ca/en) is affiliated with the United Food and Commercial Workers (Canada). The website has links to excellent resources and organizations including films about farmworkers in Canada. [awa-ata.ca/en/resources-for-agriculture-workers-and-others/movies-about-farm-workers-in-canada](http://awa-ata.ca/en/resources-for-agriculture-workers-and-others/movies-about-farm-workers-in-canada)
- Enlace, based in Ontario, works with migrant workers and newly arrived immigrants. (Spanish only). [enlace.ca](http://enlace.ca)
- In June 2008 the CBC covered the news of the first collective agreement signed with migrant workers in Canada, in Portage la Prairie, Manitoba. [www.cbc.ca/canada/manitoba/story/2008/06/25/farm-union.html](http://www.cbc.ca/canada/manitoba/story/2008/06/25/farm-union.html)

#### **In the United States:**

- National Farmworker Ministry is an interfaith organization supporting farmworkers as they organize for justice; its member organizations include nearly 40 national, state and local religious bodies. [www.nfwm.org](http://www.nfwm.org)
- Student Action with Farmworkers brings students and farmworkers together to learn about each other’s lives, share resources and skills, improve conditions for farmworkers, and build

diverse coalitions working for social change. SAF works with farmworkers to address their concerns through documentation of human rights violations, grassroots education and mobilization, leadership development of young people, policy advocacy, and support of labor organizing. [saf-unite.org](http://saf-unite.org)

- Student Farmworker Alliance is a national network of students and youth organizing with farmworkers to eliminate sweatshop conditions and modern-day slavery in the fields. [www.sfalliance.org](http://www.sfalliance.org)
- Farmworker Justice seeks to empower farmworkers to improve their living and working conditions, immigration status, health, occupational safety, and access to justice by engaging in litigation, administrative and legislative advocacy, training and technical assistance, coalition-building, public education, and support for union organizing. [www.fwjjustice.org](http://www.fwjjustice.org)

# Environmental Justice and Human Rights

## Reading the Signs of the Times

La Oroya, Peru

Nestled between barren, moonscape-like peaks of the Andes Mountains in Peru and spanning the Mantaro River, which supplies water to the Mantaro River Valley, the breadbasket of Peru, is the community of La Oroya. This mountainous town of 35,000 is enshrouded by clouds of contamination and particulate matter caused by the U.S.-owned Doe Run metallurgical complex, the main employer in town, which daily spews tons of lead and other heavy metal into the community, poisoning land, air, water, animals, vegetation, and humans. Particularly vulnerable are the elderly, pregnant women and thousands of children. An independent health study done by St. Louis University indicated that 97 percent of the children have blood lead levels dangerously higher than World Health Organization alert levels of 10 micrograms per deciliter, and many should be immediately hospitalized. Lead, arsenic, sulfur dioxide, cadmium and other contaminants cause decreased mental capacity; cancer; stomach, urinary, bladder, dental, and other problems; skin rashes; fatigue; miscarriages; and other health issues. No one escapes the effects of this chronic contamination, which coats roofs, streets, and fields and insidiously permeates houses, businesses, schools, churches, and other facilities. For the last two years Blacksmith Institute has listed La Oroya as one of the 10 most polluted places on Earth, the most polluted in the western hemisphere.

The contamination affects not only the immediate health and well-being of the community but also its ability to be self-sustaining as its capacity to grow food and raise livestock is greatly diminished. Communities downwind and downstream from La Oroya are also negatively affected.

For the last decade many groups have been working together as a coalition to address the problem of contamination and hold Doe Run Peru and its owner The Renco Group, Inc. (a privately held, non-publicly traded corporation based in New York City) accountable to its environmental agreement (PAMA) with the Peruvian government. The agreement has been renegotiated several times but Doe Run is still not compliant. The coalition's work also reveals that globalization and free trade agreements have that given corporations undue power over local communities and national governments. Education both locally and globally has brought world attention to the problem of contamination in La Oroya. A sense of solidarity and accompaniment by the global community has given people the courage to speak out despite threats from Doe Run. In April 2008 CNN reported on the situation in La Oroya as part of the "Planet in Peril" series. They asked, "Should families have to choose between health and a stable job?"

In this U.N. Decade of the Child and growing concern for health and wholeness of the Earth community, La Oroya is a symbol of the type of destruction that cannot be allowed to continue. It also provides an example of human solidarity and well-being that is possible when available technology is used in a way that will enhance and not harm Earth's processes and its residents.

**View the video “La Oroya: Hot Metal and Air, Breathing Pollution and Promises”** <http://vidego.multicastmedia.com/player.php?v=q6pm6fol>

“La Oroya: Hot Metal and Air, Breathing Pollution and Promises” tells the story of the people of La Oroya and their struggle with the contamination caused by the Doe Run metallurgical complex. It introduces us to the children of La Oroya and discusses the various approaches of the community, the Peruvian Government, and Doe Run, “Hot Metal and Air” touches on the complexities of Environmental Justice and its direct connection to Human Rights.

### ***Discussion questions:***

1. In “La Oroya: Hot Metal and Air, Breathing Pollution and Promises” the children of La Oroya experience debilitating symptoms of lead poisoning. What other issues raised in the video might be understood as “symptoms”? What might be understood as “diseases”?
2. What options do the people running Doe Run Peru have? What decisions are they making? How do you think Doe Run makes decisions and what might be their motivations?
3. Peru is a small country over 2,500 miles from the United States and Canada. Though geographically distant, in what ways might we be seen as connected to the people of La Oroya?

### **Confessing Our Faith**

*Matthew 25:14-31 (NRSV)*

*‘For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money.*

*After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, “Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.” His master said to him, “Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.” And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, “Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.” His master said to him, “Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.”*

*Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, “Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is*

*yours.” But his master replied, “You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”*

### ***Bible Study Questions:***

1. What words are used to describe each of the slaves? How does the master describe them, and how do they describe themselves?
2. What does this passage say about the kind of master God is?
3. What does this passage say about what it means to be a servant of God? What are we to do with our given talents? What might prevent us from doing so?

### ***Reflection:***

Though the parable Jesus tells involves three individual slaves, it is interesting to think of those talents given not only to individuals, but also communities. Indeed, just as God covenanted with the entire community of Israel, so Jesus Christ calls us as the community of the church. As Paul points out in 1 Corinthians 12, we each have individual talents and gifts from God that we bring to the body of Christ. It might also be said that God has given us many talents as a community.

This image of investing our talent seems particularly appropriate when we think of our modern environment and the ways in which we not only bury but spend our resources. Looking at the images of the bleached La Oroya valley, one cannot but wonder what the master would say were the talent of that Peruvian land returned so bereft of life.

In Genesis 1, God says to humankind, “See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the Earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the Earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the Earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food” (Genesis 1:29–30, NRSV). In this passage the very Earth and all of the life it produces are as talents for us—belonging to God and to us to care for lovingly.

While our global community shares the talent of this Earth, it might also be said that our particular communities have been given particular talents by God. Indeed, though the talents mentioned by Jesus in this parable become a metaphor for any number of gifts from God, we know of other instances where Jesus speaks to very particular talents. Perhaps seen as a contrast to this parable, the tale of the rich young ruler tells of a time Jesus specifically told a man to give away his money. In this context the words in our parable like “banker” or “interest” seem anachronistic. For Jesus does not tell this man to spend wisely, to carefully place his literal talents so that they come back two fold. He tells the man, “Go, sell what you own, and give the

money to the poor” (Mark 10:21, NRSV). Here God’s servant is asked to give; here giving and investing become almost synonymous.

While it is easy to condemn the servant who does not invest his talent, we also know too well the motivations that led him to bury his talents in the ground. While we are quick to identify the mistake of the rich young man, we can probably also identify why “he was shocked and went away grieving” (Mark 10:22, NRSV). Here Jesus clearly calls us to move beyond theology, beyond patience, beyond simple instructions, beyond safety. In the parable of the talents Jesus calls us to a faith that is scary and unpredictable: one that takes responsibility, takes action, and takes risks.

When we learn about the people of La Oroya in light of this parable, we cannot then bury these images of children suffering and families having to choose between the health of their children and living the only place they can find work. Taking the measures necessary to turn back the effects of plants like the Doe Run metallurgical complex in La Oroya is costly, even risky. But there are times when Jesus clearly calls us to re-evaluate what we believe to be our talents, calls us to re-examine how we establish the worth of other human beings, and calls us to re-imagine what it means to invest what we’ve been given by God.

***Additional questions for reflection:***

1. How do you see La Oroya in this parable? How do you see your own community?
2. What are the talents in your community that might be buried or ill-used? Why?
3. What do you imagine an abundant return on “investment” to look like? For La Oroya? For your own community?

## **Covenanting for Justice**

How can we not act when giant corporations are poisoning people, especially knowing that we are using the products being produced? Yet stopping such practices happening around the world is a huge undertaking. For example, in the case of La Oroya, Doe Run is a private company, so shareholder activism is not an option unless you can apply pressure on the banks that lend them money. But many corporations are publicly traded and pressure can be applied through various types of advocacy. In all cases, governments can be pressured to enforce their environmental laws or create stronger laws. North American governments can be asked to regulate the overseas actions of corporations based in Canada or the United States.

Another way to affect widespread change is to gather information about the flow of money between corporations and host countries. Residents can then understand why concessions to companies are made and be able to make claim on funds that should benefit the country and populace, not disappear into private bank accounts. The anti-corruption work of Transparency International has helped in the drafting of two major international agreements that increase governments' ability to cooperate in reducing corruption across borders, and the United Nations and the World Bank highlight good governance and fighting corruption as key elements in reducing poverty.

Committed people around the globe are promoting an end to such corruption as well as transparency and accountability in the extractive industries. This movement has gained momentum over the past few years with an explosion in the number of civil society groups demanding company and government transparency in resource-rich developing countries.

We can add our individual and collective energies to this call for honest disclosure and justice by supporting the efforts of groups such as Transparency International and Publish What You Pay, which does effective work to reduce corruption. Consider joining Publish What You Pay and joining in global advocacy to demand accountability.

**Transparency International—The coalition against corruption** [www.transparency.org](http://www.transparency.org)

**Publish What You Pay (PWYP)** is a global civil society coalition that helps citizens of resource-rich developing countries hold their governments accountable for the management of revenues from the oil, gas and mining industries.

**Publish What You Pay—International** [www.publishwhatyoupay.org](http://www.publishwhatyoupay.org)

**Publish What You Pay Canada** [www.pwyp.ca](http://www.pwyp.ca)

**Publish What You Pay—U.S.A.** [www.publishwhatyoupayusa.org](http://www.publishwhatyoupayusa.org)

**Join the PWYP coalition** if you are a civil society group or non-governmental organization [www.publishwhatyoupay.org/en/about/join-coalition](http://www.publishwhatyoupay.org/en/about/join-coalition)

**Open the Books** [action.openthebooks.org/t/2217/content.jsp?content\\_KEY=351](http://action.openthebooks.org/t/2217/content.jsp?content_KEY=351)

**Video: Open the Books on Corruption - Publish What You Pay**  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=3BsQRCAAdKBg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3BsQRCAAdKBg)

**Kairos: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives** does significant work on corporate responsibility and transparency especially with Canadian companies involved in resource extraction. <http://www.kairoscanada.org/en/ecojustice/csr/>

**The Halifax Initiative** is a Canadian coalition of development, environment, faith-based, human rights and labour groups that has done important work on monitoring Canadian corporations involved in resource extraction and Canadian government support that does not take into account environmental and human rights concerns. [www.halifaxinitiative.org/index.php/Issues\\_CNCA](http://www.halifaxinitiative.org/index.php/Issues_CNCA)

## **Closing Litany**

### *Excerpted from the Accra Confession: Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth*

We believe that God is a God of justice. In a world of corruption, exploitation and greed, God is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor, the exploited, the wronged and the abused (Psalms 146:7–9). God calls for just relationships with all creation.

Therefore we reject any ideology or economic regime that puts profits before people, does not care for all creation, and privatizes those gifts of God meant for all. We reject any teaching that justifies those who support, or fail to resist, such an ideology in the name of the gospel.

We believe that God calls us to hear the cries of the poor and the groaning of creation and to follow the public mission of Jesus Christ, who came so that all may have life and have it in fullness (John 10:10). Jesus brings justice to the oppressed and gives bread to the hungry; he frees the prisoner and restores sight to the blind (Luke 4:18); he supports and protects the downtrodden, the stranger, the orphans and the widows.

Therefore we reject any church practice or teaching that excludes the poor and care for creation in its mission; giving comfort to those who come to "steal, kill and destroy" (John 10:10) rather than following the "Good Shepherd" who has come for life for all (John 10:11).

By confessing our faith together, we covenant in obedience to God's will as an act of faithfulness in mutual solidarity and in accountable relationships. This binds us together to work for justice in the economy and the Earth both in our common global context as well as our various regional and local settings.

## **Additional Resources**

### Getting to Know the Situation

- Manos Peru website: [www.manosperu.org/index.php](http://www.manosperu.org/index.php)
- Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Involvement: [www.pcusa.org/joininghands/peru.htm](http://www.pcusa.org/joininghands/peru.htm)
- CNN video from "Planet in Peril"  
[www.cnn.com/video/#/video/health/2008/04/28/gupta.polluted.city.cnn?iref=videosearch](http://www.cnn.com/video/#/video/health/2008/04/28/gupta.polluted.city.cnn?iref=videosearch)
- CIA World Factbook on Peru: [www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/pe.html](http://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/pe.html)

For the La Oroya Campaign:

- Discussion Table: [www.todosobrelaoroya.org](http://www.todosobrelaoroya.org)
- Earthjustice-AINDA: [www.aida-americas.org](http://www.aida-americas.org)
- Oxfam America: [www.oxfamamerica.org](http://www.oxfamamerica.org)
- Muqui Network (“For responsible mining”): [www.muqui.org](http://www.muqui.org)
- The Canadian Network on Corporate Accountability (CNCA) – a coalition of organizations fighting for the regulation of Canadian corporations overseas  
[www.halifaxinitiative.org/index.php](http://www.halifaxinitiative.org/index.php)
- Mining Watch is a pan-Canadian initiative supported by environmental, social justice, Aboriginal and labour organisations from across the country. It addresses the urgent need for a co-ordinated public interest response to the threats to public health, water and air quality, fish and wildlife habitat and community interests posed by irresponsible mineral policies and practices in Canada and around the world. [www.miningwatch.ca/index.php](http://www.miningwatch.ca/index.php)

For Publish What You Pay—To bring transparency to extractive industries and help curb corruption:

- Open the Books on Corruption  
[action.openthebooks.org/t/2217/content.jsp?content\\_KEY=351](http://action.openthebooks.org/t/2217/content.jsp?content_KEY=351)
- Video for Open the Books on Corruption [www.youtube.com/watch?v=3BsQRCAAdKBg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3BsQRCAAdKBg)
- Publish What You Pay—U.S.A. [www.publishwhatyoupayusa.org](http://www.publishwhatyoupayusa.org)
- Publish What You Pay—International [www.publishwhatyoupay.org](http://www.publishwhatyoupay.org)

For fair trade and free trade:

- “TLC Así No” Movement: [www.gresp.org.pe](http://www.gresp.org.pe)
- PCUSA/PHP Joining Hands Program: [www.pcusa.org/hunger](http://www.pcusa.org/hunger)
- PC(USA)/PHP “Fair trade”: [www.pcusa.org/trade](http://www.pcusa.org/trade)
- PC(USA)/PHP “Environmental Justice”: [www.pcusa.org/environment](http://www.pcusa.org/environment)
- Washington Office on Latin America - Free Trade: [www.wola.org](http://www.wola.org)
- Oxfam—Free Trade: [www.oxfamamerica.org](http://www.oxfamamerica.org)
- International Fair Trade Association (IFAT): [www.ifat.org](http://www.ifat.org)

# Faithful Purchasing and the Global Sweatshop Economy

## Reading the Signs of the Times

Every time we purchase an item produced, assembled or laundered in a sweatshop, we become accomplices to the exploitation of employees working under oppressive conditions. Most of us do this daily, often without even knowing it!

In manufacturing plants around the world and in Canada and the United States, workers are employed in harsh, demeaning, and dangerous conditions: 16-hour days, slavery and bonded labor, sexual harassment and rape, dangerous equipment and toxic chemicals, child labor, poverty wages, violations of basic labor laws, threats to and even the murder of workers who seek to form a union, and all sorts of degrading and humiliating treatment.

In our globalized economy, the products we buy and their component parts originate from around the globe. Giant retail corporations search worldwide for manufacturing firms that will produce the products they desire at the lowest possible cost. Some have called this the “race to the bottom” as multinationals leap from one low-wage country to another, seeking the lowest cost producers. For many items such as food, clothes, footwear, and electronics, the “bottom” where it is produced most cheaply is a low-wage country such as China, Cambodia or Bangladesh. The factories producing these products that are usually destined to be sold in other countries like the United States and Canada are known as sweatshops due to their poor treatment of workers.

A sweatshop is a plant or facility with a very difficult or even dangerous working environment. Typically, workers have few rights or means by which they can address their situation. Sweatshop workers are often forced to work long hours for little or even no pay despite laws mandating overtime pay and a minimum wage. Children may be employed in violation of child labor laws. Workers may be exposed to harmful materials, hazardous situations, or extreme temperatures. They may suffer physical, emotional, or sexual abuse from employers. Though often associated with Third World countries in the global South, sweatshops can exist in any country and are also commonly found in the United States, Canada and other major industrialized countries. In fact, investigations by the U.S. Department of Labor have found that 100 percent of all poultry processing plants in the United States violate basic labor laws, as do 60 percent of nursing homes, and over 50 percent of Los Angeles, California, garment factories. These workplaces are sweatshops.

Fortunately, we can help change this reality.

This video introduces the State and Local Government Sweatfree Consortium ([www.sweatfree.org/sweatfreeconsortium](http://www.sweatfree.org/sweatfreeconsortium)), a bold initiative spearheaded by the U.S.-based SweatFree Communities ([www.sweatfree.org](http://www.sweatfree.org)). The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) recently endorsed the Sweatfree Consortium at their 2008 General Assembly and other denominations in the United States and Canada also work to end sweatshops. Many faith groups encourage

congregations and individuals to purchase non-sweatshop, green (ecologically-sound) products as much as possible. As you watch the video, think about how you and your faith community could get involved through changes in personal and institutional purchasing and support for the consortium or similar efforts.

## **View the video “Sweatfree Communities: Make Your Community Sweatfree”**

(9:45 minutes) <http://vidego.multicastmedia.com/player.php?v=u0wm9w50>

### **Discussion questions:**

1. Are there rights that every worker should have? What are they?
2. What responsibilities do large, multinational companies have regarding their suppliers? What oversight should multinational firms provide for the workers employed by their suppliers?
3. Should poor workers in poor countries be appreciative of any job they can get? Should these workers have a right to a decent wage, benefits, and fair treatment?
4. Should poor workers in the United States and Canada be appreciative of any job they can get? Should these workers have a right to a decent wage, benefits, and fair treatment?
5. What responsibility or obligation does a consumer have if the product she buys and uses is made under sweatshop conditions?

## **Confessing Our Faith**

*Matthew 22:15–22 (NRSV)*

*Then the Pharisees went and plotted to entrap him in what he said. So they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality. Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?" But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? Show me the coin used for the tax." And they brought him a denarius. Then he said to them, "Whose head is this, and whose title?" They answered, "The emperor's." Then he said to them, "Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's." When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away.*

### **Reflection**

The Jews of Jesus' day lived in the Roman Empire under the domination of the Roman military, Roman political system (rule by a small elite that evolved into a dictatorship), and Roman emperor (Caesar). The Roman elites used the Jews—and other conquered peoples—for their own purposes. They could (and did) command the Jews to pay money to them (taxes), give them portions of their agricultural products, or work for little or no pay in the service of the Empire's building projects. When the Jews resisted, they were crucified and left hanging in very visible locations as a vivid sign of the Empire's power. Jews in Israel would have been very familiar with these “signs” of the Roman Empire and its power over the Israelites.

One sign of the Empire was the centurions, the Roman soldiers who embodied its threatening, absolute power. Their presence as the occupying army in Israel made them a target for resentment and disdain. Their bright metal helmets and breastplates were a menacing reminder of Empire.

Another sign of the Empire was Jewish tax collectors. They were regarded as traitors to Israel because of their cooperation in collecting the very taxes that kept Israelites impoverished and in a servile position to the Roman Empire. They made their livings by extorting whatever extra money they were capable of getting.

Herodians—including their most recognized member, Herod the Great—were a group of Jews who collaborated in the domination of Israel by Rome. They served the Empire’s interests, not the interests of their own people, and Rome rewarded them for this. But many Jews regarded them as traitors. They recognized Jesus as someone who opposed the Roman Empire and so they tried to undermine him (also see Mark 3:6).

Roman coins, another sign of the Empire, featured the image of Caesar and proclaimed him a god. This was a double violation of the Ten Commandments: “You shall have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:3); “You shall not make for yourself an idol” (v. 4).

Colonized territories like Israel were used as a source of tax revenue, raw materials, and specialized goods to serve the Roman Empire. The Jews were forced to provide these things to the Romans, even when it meant they were left with inadequate resources for themselves. The dominated people could also be used as forced laborers to build the things the Empire wanted such as fortresses, new cities or ports.

In the Roman Empire coins were visible signs of Rome’s domination. Centurions, Herodians, and tax collectors all served the Empire including its need to keep subjugated people under control and provide money and goods to the Roman rulers.

Today we seldom use the term *empire*. However, in some countries small factions hold great power over other residents. In other cases nations dominate entire other nations. The reasons for the domination are similar to those in the days of the Roman Empire: the desire by the elites to extract wealth and goods from the dominated peoples. And just like in Jesus’ day, dominated people wonder how to resist. The signs of Empire are very apparent to oppressed people. They may not be so obvious to those who are not oppressed.

### ***Bible study questions***

1. Why do you think there was any question about the rightness of paying taxes
2. What would be the everyday reminders to Jesus’ people that they were living under the Roman Empire?
3. Can you imagine that Jesus’ words about the coin might have been said in a cleverly rebellious way?
4. Who would be the equivalent of the centurions in our world (within the United States, Canada or other countries)? What is the role of modern-day centurions?
5. Consider the Herodians of Jesus’ day. Can you think of examples of similar factions in today’s global politics?

6. There were many symbols of the Roman Empire (images, flags, pictures on coins, etc.). What are today's symbols of empire? (Hint: Think about military symbols, national flags, corporate logos, ubiquitous trademarks, advertising songs, and cultural images.)
7. Today how do some nations extract money, raw materials, or labor from other nations? (Hint: Think about resource extraction, cheap labor, and large-scale agriculture.) How does this happen within a country?
8. Look at the tag on one of the garments you are wearing. Where was it made? If Jesus held up currency during a rally in that country today, what kind of money would it be? What would Jesus say?

Adapted from Challenging Empire: A Call to Community, Mandate: The United Church of Canada's Mission Magazine, May 2007

## **Covenanting for Justice**

In the absence of a legal and/or regulatory framework to effectively eliminate abusive sweatshop conditions, consumers have turned to other means: buying sweat-free and fairly traded products.

***Avoid buying products made in sweatshops.*** Roughly 2 million apparel workers located in 150 nations make products for American and Canadian retailers. Some 80 percent of these are working in sweatshops under conditions that systematically violate international or local labor laws. Nearly all retail stores carry goods made in sweatshops. Most apparel is made in a sweatshop. Almost the only way to avoid purchasing sweatshop products is to purchase union-made clothes or buy through manufacturers certified to be sweat-free. Sweat Free Communities offers a sweat-free Shopping Guide ([www.sweatfree.org/shopping](http://www.sweatfree.org/shopping)). In the United States Coop America's National Green Pages (<http://www.coopamerica.org/pubs/greenpages/>) contain a huge listing of companies selling sweat-free, union-made, and environmentally-friendly items. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) sells sweat-free T-shirts ([www.pcusa.org/sweatfree](http://www.pcusa.org/sweatfree)) made by a women's sewing cooperative in Nicaragua. In Canada the Maquila Solidarity Network ([en.maquilasolidarity.org](http://en.maquilasolidarity.org)) documents sweatshop abuses and advocates for buying sweat-free products.

***Buy fairly traded goods.*** Fair trade is an equitable exchange between the people who make products and the people who buy them. It empowers low-income and marginalized farmers and artisans around the world. It eliminates many of the "middle men" and directly pays artisans, farmers, democratically run cooperatives, and other producers a living wage for their products, appropriate for their country and location. It encourages producers to engage in environmentally-sustainable practices, respects cultural identity, often provides much-needed credit, and promotes healthy, safe, and humane working conditions.

In the United States, the Interfaith Program ([www.equalexchange.com/interfaith-program](http://www.equalexchange.com/interfaith-program)) established by Equal Exchange ([www.equalexchange.com](http://www.equalexchange.com)) has "Coffee Projects" (partnerships between Equal Exchange and many denominations and faith bodies) that facilitate the use of fairly traded coffee, tea, chocolate, and other products by congregations and people of faith. There are many other companies selling fairly traded coffee also. In Canada and the United States, Transfair ([transfair.ca/en/node](http://transfair.ca/en/node) & [www.transfairusa.org](http://www.transfairusa.org)) is a certification and public

education organization promoting Fair Trade Certified products to improve the livelihood of developing world farmers and workers. Ten Thousand Villages ([www.tenthousandvillages.com](http://www.tenthousandvillages.com)), with roots in the Mennonite community, has outlets in Canada and the United States and sells a wide variety of fairly traded products. Global Exchange ([www.globalexchange.org](http://www.globalexchange.org)) is an advocacy and educational group that also sells fair trade goods.

## **Confessing Our Faith**

### *Excerpted from the Accra Confession: Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth*

We believe that God calls us to stand with those who are victims of injustice. We know what the Lord requires of us: to do justice, love kindness, and walk in God's way (Micah 6:8). We are called to stand against any form of injustice in the economy and the destruction of the environment, "so that justice may roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (Amos 5:24).

Therefore we reject any theology that claims that God is only with the rich and that poverty is the fault of the poor. We reject any form of injustice that destroys right relations—gender, race, class, disability, or caste. We reject any theology that affirms that human interests dominate nature.

We believe that God calls us to hear the cries of the poor and the groaning of creation and to follow the public mission of Jesus Christ, who came so that all may have life and have it in fullness (John 10:10). Jesus brings justice to the oppressed and gives bread to the hungry; he frees the prisoner and restores sight to the blind (Luke 4:18); he supports and protects the downtrodden, the stranger, the orphans and the widows.

Therefore we reject any church practice or teaching that excludes the poor and care for creation, in its mission; giving comfort to those who come to "steal, kill and destroy" (John 10:10) rather than following the "Good Shepherd" who has come for life for all (John 10:11).

By confessing our faith together we covenant in obedience to God's will as an act of faithfulness in mutual solidarity and in accountable relationships. This binds us together to work for justice in the economy and the Earth both in our common global context as well as our various regional and local settings.

## **Closing Litany**

Since our mothers and fathers cried out, since you heard their cries and noticed, since we left the brick production of Egypt, since you foiled the production schedules of Pharaoh,  
we have known your name,  
we have sensed your passion,  
we have treasured your vision of justice.

And now we turn to you again, you whose precious name we know.

We turn to you because there are  
still impossible production schedules,  
still exploitative systems,  
still cries of pain at injustice,  
still cheap labor that yields misery.

We turn to you in impatience and exasperation, wondering, "How long?"  
Before you answer our pleading question, hear our petition.

Since you are not a labor boss and do not set wages, we bid you: Stir up those who can change things:

do your stirring in the jaded halls of government;  
do your stirring in the cynical offices of the corporations;  
do your stirring amid the voting public too anxious to care;  
do your stirring in the church that thinks too much about purity and not enough about wages.

Move, as you moved in ancient Egyptian days; move the waters and the flocks and the herds toward new  
statutes and regulations, new equity and health care, new dignity that is not given on the cheap.

We have known now long since,  
that you reject cheap grace;  
We now know as well,  
that you reject cheap labor.

You God of justice and dignity and equity,...  
keep the promises you bodied in Jesus,  
that the poor may be first-class members of society;  
that the needy may have good care and respect;  
that the poor Earth may rejoice in well-being;  
that we may all come to Sabbath rest together,  
the owner and the worker,  
the leisure class and the labor class,  
all at rest in dignity and justice,  
not on the cheap, but  
in good measure,  
pressed down,  
running over . . . forgiven (Luke 6:37–38). Amen.

—by Walter Brueggemann, *Prayers for the New Social Awakening*

## **Additional Resources**

There are many sources for additional information on sweatshops in the United States, Canada and around the globe.

- The International Labor Rights Forum ([www.laborrights.org](http://www.laborrights.org)) filed a lawsuit on behalf of workers in China, Nicaragua, Swaziland, Indonesia, and Bangladesh against Wal-Mart. They charged the company with knowingly developing purchasing policies that the manufacturers they contract could not possibly meet while also following the Wal-Mart code of conduct.
- North American labor unions have helped support the anti-sweatshop movement out of concern both for the welfare of people in the developing world and for workers in the North who have lost or are at risk of losing jobs in the global race to the bottom.
- The National Labor Committee ([www.nlcnet.org/index.php](http://www.nlcnet.org/index.php)) is involved in many struggles around the world. NLC's video about sweatshops, "Hidden Face of Globalization," is excellent. (9:48 minutes) [www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Bhodyt4fmU&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Bhodyt4fmU&feature=related)

In Canada groups like the Maquila Solidarity Network ([en.maquilasolidarity.org](http://en.maquilasolidarity.org)) work in solidarity with women's and labor rights organizations in Mexico, Central America and Asia, promoting respect for workers' rights through corporate engagement, coalition building, and policy advocacy.

Groups active in the United States:

- **SweatFree Communities** ([www.sweatfree.org](http://www.sweatfree.org)) in the United States shares resources and information to assist campaigns to convince school districts, cities, states, and other institutional purchasers to adopt "sweatfree" purchasing policies and stop tax dollars from subsidizing sweatshops and abusive child labor. SFC is building a national sweatfree movement with the unity and political strength to generate significant market demand for products that are made in humane conditions by workers who earn living wages.
- **United Students Against Sweatshops** ([www.studentsagainstsweatshops.org](http://www.studentsagainstsweatshops.org)) is active on college campuses and established the **Worker Rights Consortium** ([www.workersrights.org](http://www.workersrights.org)) to conduct investigations of working conditions in factories around the globe.