

SYRIAN CHRISTIANS CREATE SPACE FOR HOPE

Posted on August 24, 2016 by [Phil Tanis](#)

In war-torn Syria, hope is fading for many. After five years of civil war, there are few who have not lost family members or close friends, but life needs to go on for those who are alive, for those who have stayed. They struggle to continue with their lives every day, to study and work, although jobs have become scarce, and to maintain as much normalcy as possible amidst the war and the ever-present threat of attacks, while dreaming about a better future and peace.

However, as Najla Kassab, WCRC Executive Committee member and director of the Christian Education Department of the [National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon](#) (NESSL), points out: “In the Middle East, war always influences how we see each other; it clouds our view of the beauty of the other’s religion.”

So what comes after the war, how will the Syrian people, mostly Muslim but with a significant Christian minority, be able to relate to each other and reconcile as neighbours when the conflict has caused so much mistrust? How can interfaith relationships be restored, when, after five years, there is now a new generation growing up that has never experienced life before the war?

A group of young people, members of a NESSL congregation in Homs, Syria, have started a project to achieve just that. “Space for Hope” came to life in the fall of 2014. It is a space for children and youths, girls and boys, between the ages of 9 and 17 from the different religions and sects of Syria to come together in team-building activities.

There have been four events so far, and in the last one, that took place in September of last year, the team was able to successfully involve 180 people from the different neighbourhoods of Homs City in the yard of the Evangelical School, a place that was almost destroyed in the war, but has been rebuilt.

Twenty-one volunteers were involved in the events, all young Presbyterians from different walks of life—students, doctors, teachers, lawyers, secretaries. The reason why these young people were so enthusiastic about their project is simple: love for their neighbours, no matter their background. “We are a part of the team because we want to show the children how to smile and tell the whole world that there is a space for hope in Syria. We hope to light a peace candle around the children of Syria and hope for our project to arrive to the whole world,” they say.

“The most recent event was carried out over five weeks, two days a week for two hours each,” tells Mofid Samir Karajili, pastor of the Presbyterian congregation in Homs and co-founder of the project. “Every day consists of two sessions: the games session where we use team games to build or make up relations, and the teaching session that includes time to reflect about what we have learned from these games.

“We have learned that it is very possible, even lovely, to be with the others that are males or females, Christians, Muslims or Alawites, in the same team to face the same challenge, to work hard to get the same target on the very same ground. This was the target of the event, to put in the minds and the memories of these youths that they can live together, regardless

of their religious background and conflicts. We are also committed to make the parents of the youths feel comfortable and safe.”

“It isn’t common in Syria for children or people in general to interact much with their neighbours from other religions. Here, they forget the differences, because they want to be happy,” adds Loujain Saad, one of the young people who initiated the programme. “This project is so important because in Homs during the five years of war, kids have never seen any kind of happiness, only war, murder, weapons. This project makes the kids love each other and work with each other. It is also important for our community because we need this peace, we need to love all people in our country and say to them ‘Don’t be afraid, “Space for Hope” is here for your children.’”

Pastor Mofid Karajili is pleased with what has been achieved so far: “I think we got our targets. We know that we can’t change the world, but we can make at least one right step towards a better life. And we did that. The most important thing is that ‘Space for Hope’ became a team. We created a team that has a vision to make different events under this title, in different places that need the light of hope in these very dark days.”

A new “Space for Hope” cycle will start in September. Some new activities will be included, such as painting, sculpture making, piano and dancing. The team is currently looking for instructors in some of these fields, because, as they say: “We wish this event to be the first step of a very long episode.”

INTERNSHIPS

The World Communion of Reformed Churches is pleased to announce that it has an internship opportunity for a highly qualified young person who is interested in gaining valuable experience working with an international ecumenical organization. The internship will be for 12 months in the WCRC offices in Hannover, Germany, beginning in January 2017, as well as in Leipzig, Germany, for the [2017 General Council](#).

This opportunity is open to English-speaking individuals of WCRC member churches who are aged 30 or younger, including ministers, seminarians in their senior years or Christian professionals with an interest in working for their churches or the ecumenical movement at any level.

The intern will be given a variety of experiences within the WCRC, including working in these areas:

- Communications
- Communion
- Ecumenical Engagement
- General Council
- Justice
- Mission
- Theology

The WCRC internship programme is sponsored by the [Evangelisches Missionswerk \(EMW\)](#) and covers almost all costs (including travel, housing, medical insurance and a small

stipend). However, it is asked that the intern (or sponsoring church) will share in some costs (based on ability).

Deadline for applying is 1 November 2016—and all applications must be endorsed by a WCRC member church.

- **Download an application** (which contains additional information): [PDF](#), [Word Doc](#)

For more information contact: werc@werc.eu

Indigenous spirituality to enrich and transform the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace

15 August 2016

At a time when Indigenous communities worldwide struggle for recognition, survival and the right to exist as distinct and self-determined peoples, the World Council of Churches (WCC) convenes a consultation on Indigenous Spirituality and Theology, in Darwin, Australia (NT).

The consultation, which takes place on 27-31 August, is on the theme of “*Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace: Shaping Landscapes of Hope Together*”. Dr Katalina Tahaafe-Williams, WCC programme executive for Mission and Evangelism, explains, “As the fellowship of churches journeys on a Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace, it is key that we reflect together and articulate Indigenous spiritual and theological understandings of this pilgrimage that can inform, resource, and enrich how churches and faith communities together seek to achieve justice and peace for all peoples.”

“The ongoing realities of injustice against Indigenous peoples worldwide, through political oppression, economic exploitation, and violence, call for renewed political and humanitarian effort and commitment”, Tahaafe-Williams says.

The August consultation in Darwin is hosted by the Nungalinga Ecumenical Theological College, and is the first in a series bringing together Indigenous theologians from around the world to provide space to plan strategically and proactively about how Indigenous spirituality and theology can impact and help shape the ecumenical movement. The series also aims to inspire and strengthen the building of ecumenical networks among Indigenous peoples, regionally as well as globally.

“This consultation could not have come at a better time and place”, Tahaafe-Williams adds.

“Injustices against indigenous peoples are unacceptable in all contexts. Yet they surface time and again across the world, not least here in Australia where we have recently seen a very public exposure of violence against young indigenous people in detention.”

“It is our hope that through the work of the WCC and all our partners, we can embark on pilgrimages of justice and peace that transform the landscapes on which we journey and ourselves as pilgrims on the way into peoples and places where God truly reigns,” Tahaafe-Williams concludes.

More information about the WCC Indigenous Spirituality and Theology Consultation, 27-31 August

WCC Solidarity with Indigenous Peoples

WCC Mission from the margins

WCC Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace

PRAY FOR KOREAN PEACE AND REUNIFICATION

Posted on August 5, 2016 by [Anna Krueger](#)

“The distance between the North and South has become unfathomable, but we believe that the day will come when we will need each other.”

We join the WCC with the peoples and churches of Korea and of the world in prayer for the peaceful reunification of the Korean peninsula.

This 15 August will mark the 71st anniversary of the liberation of the Korean peninsula from Japanese colonial rule, but at the same time of the division of the peninsula into two countries. It is celebrated as the National Liberation Day of Korea in both North and South Korea.

Every year, a joint prayer is prepared by the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCCCK) and the Korean Christian Federation (KCF) to be used on the “Sunday of Prayer for the Peaceful Reunification of the Korean Peninsula”. This year, the date, which is traditionally the Sunday before the anniversary, falls on 14 August.

We call upon our members to join in prayer:

God, ruler of history!

Thank you for letting the churches of the South and the North share the joys of independence with the same longings again this year. The Lord’s grace that led us to share this common prayer filled with yearnings from past promises for a peaceful unification is indeed great and amazing. Please accept our earnest desires for you Lord.

Seventy one years ago, our country again found its once lost country and welcomed the joys of independence. Having patiently waited with righteous efforts, we trusted God, the ruler of history, and hoped that the day would one day come. With shouts of victory resonating over the whole of Korea, how can we ever forget that overwhelming day when the triumphs of independence surged up in thirty million souls?

Gracious God!

Such a short-lasting joy, our people came to a dead end of a harsh road filled with division, separation, war and armistice. Through meetings and talks, paths to reconciliation were created and through economic cooperation, dreams of common prosperity were once built. But now, the walls in our hearts have become higher than ever. There is no knowing of the depths of the rivers of mistrust and the valleys of anger that we would have to cross. Lord, take pity on this misfortunate country.

Though the Lord has given the church a responsibility to take care of peace, the people did not serve such command fully. Christians were called to be apostles of peace but instead they have created conflict. As they do not even acknowledge each other as their own people, they do not bother to bear hearts to love. Lord, we confess our wrongs and sins, please forgive us.

God of love and peace!

The distance between the North and South has become unfathomable, but we believe that the day will come when we will need each other. Though our hearts have been ripped to pieces, we realize that it is not far to where we would heal each other’s pains and

encourage one another. Amongst the tension of the great powers, we are certain that the day will come when we sing songs of self-existence and independence.

Lord, make one this separated country and gather all those families who have been scattered everywhere. Let the children of North and South eat from one bowl, and youths to sing songs for a hopeful humanity from one desk. Let the footsteps of the people's coexistence lead from Hallah to Baek-du and the waves of peaceful co-prosperity surge from Dokdo to the West Sea.

Thus let the people in this safe and peaceful peninsula nourish the happiness that should be granted to all the seventy million people. And from that oneness, let the people serve all over the world with greater vigor and spirit. We pray in Jesus' name.

August 15, 2016

National Council of Churches in Korea and Korean Christian Federation

New guide on climate justice and water released

01 September 2016

“Water, food and climate justice are key to a sustainable future.” This was one of the key messages from the World Council of Churches (WCC) Ecumenical Water Network at the recent general assembly of the Council of Presbyterian and Reformed Churches of Latin America (AIPRAL), in Sao Paolo, Brazil, in mid-August. As part of its work on climate change and access to safe drinking water, AIPRAL released a new pedagogical tool at the assembly: the book “We are on Time”.

The book sets out to inspire reflections on how God's creation is affected by human practices, and by consumerism, greed and lack of responsibility, and how this relates to communities sharing God's gift of a common home.

From the perspective of Christian faith, “We are on Time” addresses topics such as water, climate change, nature as God's creation, environmental health, food security, biodiversity, eco-theology, new paradigms, and more, highlighting the compromises that our faith may force us to make in moments of crisis.

The new publication is the result of numerous discussions and encounters in Latin America over the past few years, among them the consultation “Climate Justice and Water”, at which Veronica Flachier, co-chair of WCC's Ecumenical Water Network, played an active role.

“For us, as Reformed churches, it is essential to work for climate justice. We cannot deny that this issue is a priority and a responsibility as Christians. We hope the new guide can be of help to respond to this issue as communities of faith,” said Gabriela Mulder, who chaired the meetings at the AIPRAL assembly.

[More information about the AIPRAL General Assembly](#)