

Shalom!

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Global Stories: Service, Peace, and Simplicity

WHEN THE TEN core values for the Brethren in Christ were identified, people from the church in Canada and the United States were involved. There were no representatives from the international Brethren in Christ Church at the Consultation on Core Values, held in 1999 at Roxbury Camp and attended by 55 people.

Nevertheless, in the years since, the core values have been embraced and adopted by our Brethren in Christ brothers and sisters around the world. When someone suggested “global stories” as a potential theme for *Shalom!*, with writers from the international church, I decided to focus on how the core values are being practiced in other settings. Given the particular emphasis of *Shalom!* on peace and justice issues, I asked writers to tell stories about how the three values of serving compassionately, pursuing peace, and living simply are being contextualized in very different circumstances than we experience here in North America.

This edition features articles from the Brethren in Christ in Venezuela, Spain, India, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Canada, and the US. As I prepared the articles for publication, I was struck not only by the intentional efforts around the world to promote and practice these three core values, but also by some common themes.

For example, I think it is fair to say that many North Americans have trouble with living simply, but how do you translate that value to contexts where living is already pretty simple due to economic circumstances? Writers from India and Zimbabwe

mention the negative impact of prosperity gospel teaching and how the living simply core value helps to counteract that.

Writers also described instances of serving compassionately that remind me of Paul’s praise of the Macedonians: “During a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity” (2 Cor. 8:2). The reality of their own lack of sufficient resources did not stop folks in India, Spain, Zimbabwe, and elsewhere from sharing what they had with others and serving them at their point of need.

What does pursuing peace mean for Zimbabwean people who don’t yet have closure for the atrocities that happened to them and their family members during the 1980s? What does it mean in Venezuela where there is “drug traffic involvement in high places, honest people deprived of freedom because of their political convictions, killings by gangsters”? What does it mean in Canada as more is uncovered about the mistreatment of Indigenous peoples? What does it mean in situations of domestic violence, in a prison setting, or interpersonal conflicts wherever they occur? Clearly, pursuing peace is needed everywhere!

As you read, I hope you will be inspired by these stories to redouble your own efforts to serve compassionately, pursue peace, and live simply wherever you happen to live and whatever your circumstances.

Harriet S. Bicksler, editor

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Brethren in Christ in Different Soil

By José Otamendi, Venezuela

NOT BEING BRETHERN in Christ originally, when I first connected with the Brethren in Christ in Venezuela, I had to reflect on the more specific values I now share. Two of those values were presented to me by the Brethren in Christ missionary in Venezuela, the planter of our first church, Gordon Gilmore. He said that the Brethren in Christ emphasized the study of Scripture as the guide for faith and life. The other value was pursuing peace.

The first one resonated clearly with one of my own Christian values: the Bible, its study, the deep understanding and interpretation of Jesus and the intimate disclosing of who the Father is, as stated in John 1:18: “No

one has ever seen God; the only-born God, the One being in the bosom of the Father—that One expounded Him” (Disciples’ Literal New Testament). The second was a surprising gift: a church that instituted peace as part of its own understanding of what it means to be Christian. Surprising because as history shows us, Christians not only have been involved in war, they have also persecuted and killed other Christians who they considered unorthodox.

There are two dimensions to this: the individual confirmation as a seeker of peace, and the collective, social understanding and practice of peace as a core value. Both aspects are difficult, and, depending on the case and context, one or the other could be a tougher challenge.

Some years ago, I had to deal emotionally and spiritually with a problem that, at the time, was a very rough one. A person from our church who had my confidence did something very wrong and destructive to somebody else in the church who was very close to me. The joy of worshipping and the necessary peace for preaching was greatly disturbed. I won’t give details, but I still had to serve that brother, accompany him in his times of mourning, advise him in periods of trouble, and pray for him in times of sorrow. I did not behave that way because I am a wonderful person or because I want to showcase myself as a wonderful Christian. What made me keep that relationship was the conviction that bringing out all the conflict would have offended more than solved the issue. It would hurt not just the person offended, but the offender as well, and also the church. Only the presence of Jesus, through his Holy Spirit, made me swallow hard and continue to minister—to serve the church and this brother. There are times when pursuing peace means lowering your arms and kneeling in prayer.

Will and spirituality have to work together. Continuing to serve, even when having been hurt, is not produced by some magical fixture. I had to make the decision to carry on my service as Jesus did in the face

of difficult, even hostile, situations. Then the Spirit of Christ led me through that rugged way, helping me to act in compassionate and responsible solidarity for peace, even when I had been wounded emotionally.

How about seeking peace in a hostile context? In troubled times, the prophet Habakkuk cried out to God:

How long, LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, “Violence!” but you do not save? Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrongdoing? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds. Therefore the law is paralyzed, and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted (Hab. 1:1-4).

That’s surprisingly similar to our context in Venezuela. Injustice, drug traffic involvement in high places, honest people deprived of freedom because of their political conviction, killings by gangsters and not gangsters, protected guerrillas operating in Venezuelan territories, the stealing of gold and precious minerals, neglecting hospitals and educational institutions when so many are in need, robbing the nation of their goods—you name it, we’ve seen it, and it’s not a horror movie script. This apocalyptic panorama produces a great indignation, a thirst for justice, a great feeling of helplessness. And then we remember the words of our Redeemer: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.” (Matt. 5: 6).

What’s a Christian to do? What is a pastor going to preach, a seminary professor to teach?

Something must be said: keeping quiet when crime and evil are being practiced on a collective scale means turning ourselves into involuntary accomplices of the evildoers. We should follow the example of the prophets: denounce evil and proclaim the justice of the Lord. But this does not mean stirring up violence, going to war or making miserable the lives of those who (mistakenly) support the unrighteous acts of oppression,



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lies, and destruction. It does make us outspoken witnesses of unrighteousness, while at the same time embracing them in acceptance, grace and a stubborn patience (makrothumía, isn't it?).

That's no easy task when it seems that so many who surround us comply with that context of unfaithfulness. But the Spirit of the Lord stirs us deeply inside, as happened to Jeremiah:

But if I say, "I will not mention his word or speak anymore in his name," his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in;

indeed, I cannot (Jer. 20:9).

Rembrandt represented Jeremiah as seen from above, resting his head on his right hand, thinking, lamenting, and pondering how the violent and unfaithful encouraged more and more injustice, leading to more violence, until destruction erupted. We understand Rembrandt's Jeremiah, not just as an art masterpiece, but as a remembrance of prophetic endurance.

When Jesus was acclaimed by the people at his last entrance in Jerusalem, some Pharisees complained about the shouts of joy and hope. He answered: "I tell you, . . . if they

keep quiet, the stones will cry out."

We claim, we expose, but we also bless and serve, in hope and prayer for peace and justice.

José Otamendi is the chair of the Brethren in Christ Church in Venezuela, and has also served as pastor of the Jesus Redeemer Brethren in Christ congregation in Montalban, Caracas, and as a professor in the Seminario Evangelico de Caracas. He and his wife Victoria have one son, Erik, married to Maraly.

The Heart of Our Ministry

By Stephen Badiger, West India

A FEW YEARS ago, we were looking for innovative ways to train our leaders, ignite their passion for Christ, and encourage them in faith. My wife had just found the *Focusing Our Faith: Brethren in Christ Core Values* book by Terry L. Brensinger in our church library and started reading it. As a new Brethren in Christ leader, she found the core values striking and fascinating. We would discuss the various points of the core values, and in one of our discussions, we came upon the idea to use the core values as a training program for our church leaders! We decided to display the core values (see photo), discuss them, and model a program to make them the way of life for our leaders and members.

Most of our leaders come from agricultural backgrounds; they understand the language of trees, soil, crops, and nature very well. So we decided to make a chart with a tree and we wrote the core values on each branch of the tree. We had to translate the values into the two predominant languages—Hindi and Kannada—that are spoken in our church. The challenge during translation was to consider the dynamic nature of language and that "word to word translation" can change the entire meaning of the actual text. We carefully translated, reviewed, and took feedback from a few friends before finalising the translated text. During our monthly leaders meeting, we presented this chart, explained the core val-

ues, and invited open questions and discussions. We designed a program where we asked each leader to choose one core value for a week and then explain their experiences and challenges with practising the value. This gave an opportunity for everyone to learn the different ways in which the core values can be practically put to use and also opened



up discussions on how to overcome the challenges and difficulties. Displaying the chart in the church office also made it visible to everyone, giving an open door for communicating openly about different issues.

Our culture lauds service and many people flaunt their service to gain recognition and accolades. But "serving compassionately" is so important to the Christian believer, and one of the core values that is dear to our heart. We keep a record of the wellbeing of our church members; most of them are

migrants who have come from disadvantaged sections of society or from poverty. When we find out that a family is in need, someone has lost a job or is sick, we immediately arrange for provisions—food, and if they have children, stationery items and toys—and deliver them to their house. This is all done discreetly. Little did we know how much of an impact we were making.

A few years ago, there were heavy floods in Kerala (a state in South India), and many lost their homes. One of the pastors from Kerala who resides in Goa sent out a distress message to all churches to help the needy and affected. We announced the same in our church and started to list items to be sent in the relief packages. I must admit that we did not expect much contribution from our church members as most of them are in dire poverty themselves. The following week when the time came for the contributions to be given, we had to call a mini truck to carry the donations! Every family from our church brought in boxes of provisions; some of them even thoughtfully added some candies and snacks for small children. My wife and I were moved to tears to see the selfless sacrifices of our church members. In a culture where most people only receive, our church members have also grown to be givers in spite of their circumstances. "We still have a roof over our head and these people don't," was what one of the women exclaimed while

giving her box of donations. The experience changed us in many ways.

One of the challenges while serving compassionately is keeping safety practices in place. Many times we don't think twice about patting a child in appreciation or giving a hand shake. My wife contracted chicken pox and suffered for many weeks because a child who attended Kidz Up one week with chicken pox did not tell us about it. We repeatedly tell our church members that it is okay to share when someone is not well.

Pursuing peace is a seemingly simple core value with many hidden challenges. We had a child two years ago and I visited my wife frequently while she stayed in her hometown where she had access to better medical treatment than in Goa. During one of my visits, I received a call from one of our church leaders who complained to me about how one of the leaders was stirring up disharmony falsely accusing me. It was a stressful time of my life, when I was trying to balance my ministry life, work life, and personal life with my newborn child and wife living in another place. The leader who was stirring up strife always wanted to be in the limelight, but we have always managed to sort things out. This time was different as he started visiting every family in the church trying to start a fight. I immediately planned a trip to Goa all the while praying for God's wisdom and discretion. "Is this the last straw?" I thought.

The following day, I set up a meeting with the leader and asked him about his accusations and doubts. He started complaining about different things and not the actual accusations. I silently listened to everything, took out the list that he had been accusing me about, asked questions and answered his questions. He was silent at the end of our meeting saying that he had misunderstood. It was difficult for me, but we shook hands and prayed. I asked him to pray and decide whether he wanted to continue to be a church member. Two years later, he is still a church member who calls every week with updates about his family and himself. His actions hurt me deeply, but God's love helped me to act with discernment and love.

For many families, pursuing and living in peace is not easy—for instance, the family that stays in a slum area surrounded by vio-

lence, jealous people who start a fight over petty issues like a little dust in front of their door, or the family that stays in government housing where the neighbors always pick a fight with them just because of their faith. It is very difficult to have a decent discussion with these neighbors. These are challenges that many of our leaders and church members constantly face. Praying for a change of heart in their adversaries and strength for the affected families seems to be the only solutions.

Living simply is simple and difficult at the same time. It is simple for obvious reasons but difficult in the context of our Indian culture where if someone is "simple," they are mocked. The word "simple" is often used negatively to describe unpleasant, unwanted things or persons. We encourage decluttered lives by example; we give away clothes and household items that we don't use for more than six months every year. We live in a culture where people are lauded if they're always busy, constantly hustling, constantly working. We encourage our leaders and church members to set a day of rest so they can spend time with their families and with God. But for the people struggling to make ends meet, this core principle is often confusing and needs explanation. Another challenge is the increasing popularity of the prosperity gospel in our country where the televangelists and preachers on social media try to confuse people with a theology which says that true Christians should live a king-sized life.

We have free internet access, low tariffs for internet and free SIM cards in our country. People might not have access to food, but they have access to unlimited high speed internet. This presents a tough challenge and poses a big risk to real and actual Christian principles. Debunking the forwarded messages and sermons seems to be a common thing now for leaders. We are praying and brainstorming creative ways to overcome these culture-specific challenges to become a wholesome and loving church.

Aubrey Malphurs said, "Every Christian organisation, as well as its leadership, needs to bring out, dust off, discuss, refine, develop, display, and implement its predominant values if it desires to make significant spiritual impact in the twenty-first century." This

holds true. In our current context of a global pandemic, the core values of serving compassionately, living simply, and pursuing peace have become the heart of our ministry.

Stephen Badiger is the director of the West India (Goa) Brethren in Christ Conference and senior pastor at the Margao congregation. He is a tax consultant by profession and runs his own accounting firm, ZBD Financials. His wife Karunya works with him in ministry and they have a two-year-old son, Zebedee.

Editor's Notes

A heartfelt thank you! As we close out 2021, I'm happy to report that you have contributed more than \$5,000 through subscription renewals and extra gifts. I am so grateful to God and to all of you for the generosity and support that communicates how much you value the ministry of *Shalom!* For more than 40 years, I have had the privilege of talking to and with many people through these pages. More often than not, when I have asked you and others to write, you have graciously accepted the invitation and contributed to the important dialogue that helps *Shalom!* accomplish its mission of being a "journal for the practice of reconciliation" by "providing biblical, theological, sociological, denominational, and personal perspectives on a variety of contemporary issues." Thank you, thank you, thank you!

Looking ahead to 2022: Topics for 2022 have not yet been chosen. Some possibilities at the top of my mind at the moment: lessons from the pandemic, teaching peace, engaging in difficult conversations, and foundations for active peacemaking. Please contact me if you have other ideas for topics or if you would like to join the legions of writers who have contributed to these pages over the past 40 years. See page 2 for contact information.

You Have Seen Me and Cared

By *Patty Zapata, Spain*

ORIGINALLY FROM ECUADOR, *Patty and her mother Angela have been a part of the Brethren in Christ community in Madrid since 2001. Like many immigrants who come to Spain in search of economic stability, Angela and Patty followed the bread maker of the family in hopes of a brighter future. Angela had come to Christ in a Nazarene church in Quito and found a church home among the Brethren in Christ in Madrid. Patty grew into adulthood and her faith in Christ in the Madrid church community and now serves in many different capacities, from compassion ministries to serving the teens and young adults in the cell group ministry.*

Would you say the church community in Madrid serves with compassion? If so, how?

Oh yes! I would say that it's part of the church's DNA. What impacted me the most as to the church serving with compassion was something very personal.

We were newly arrived in Spain. Our family was going through some very hard times. There was literally no food in the house. We had not told a soul about our condition. I remember that an announcement had been made that on a certain Sunday, food was going to be collected for a love basket. I didn't know that the church was in the habit of doing this about once a month and provided groceries for needy families. I remember thinking, "We have nothing to give," and being embarrassed about it. The Sunday evening that the food was collected, Bruce Bundy showed up at our house with not one, but two love baskets. It turned out that the congregation in Hoyo also chipped in. They brought so much food that we ended up sharing with other neighbors around us. There were even money gifts which helped to pay our utility bills—the exact amount that was needed. We discovered later that people normally did not give money, but that certain members had been impressed by God to do so in our case. I remember my father being upset that we were going around telling people that we were in need, and he had a hard time believing that we hadn't told anyone. From that moment

on, I knew I wanted to be a part of blessing others.

For the last 8-10 years, Patty has been part of heading up the Love Basket project. During the worst part of the pandemic, the Love Basket was not deterred. Thanks to global compassion funds for Spain, Patty would don her mask, stand in the long lines at the grocery store, and gather grocery carts full of food for needy families.

How has the pandemic impacted serving compassionately?

We have had to be more creative. Sometimes, it's more about being an encouragement. When Karlo came down with COVID-19, we were all preparing for the worst. It didn't look like he was going to make it. His wife, Kenia, and their two small children were really hurting. When we asked her if there was anything she needed, she answered that they had plenty of food, because people kept dropping off food. So my mother, my sister Abby, and I bought some flowers and toys and made a big sign. We stood outside their apartment building while they looked out the window and encouraged them from a distance. These window visits then became popular as others were confined because of COVID-19.

How does the church demonstrate living simply?

Another part of the church's DNA is opening your home. To do this, living simply is a must, so you can be generous with others. During the financial crisis in 2008, we lost our home. My father left us, and when we started looking for a new place to live, we told God that we wanted our home to not be just for us, but for all those who may need it. At first, we opened our home to a nanny who had no place to go on the weekends, and then more people started coming over to eat on Sundays. Before they would go, we had a time of prayer which then turned into one of the main prayer groups in the church community. We have opened our home to refugee families, single mothers, and anyone who the Lord sees fit to send our way.

How does the church pursue peace?

That's harder to answer. For me personally, I have learned that much of pursuing peace and reconciliation is learning to forgive. I've had to forgive many people in my life to find inner peace and peace with others. Just recently, I had a misunderstanding with another member in our community. When we finally talked, we realized all the negative emotions were part of a misunderstanding. My first impulse was to write off that person or think about leaving the church. However, we've been taught over the years, "Conflict is not bad. Unresolved conflict, however, is terrible! So, go resolve it." We are a cell-based church, so there is a lot of opportunity to learn how to resolve conflicts in a healthy manner. We ask ourselves, "Is this a safe place to talk openly and honestly?" If it isn't, then we need to ask the Holy Spirit to help us.

Another area of pursuing peace is tied in with serving compassionately. Years ago, in one of our home groups, the group decided to go to the homeless and provide hot drinks, soup, and sandwiches. One member, who had grown up on the streets as a child, discovered that no one was helping feed the homeless on Saturday evenings. They raised money and volunteers within the church to go out, and the Love Project was born. In addition to a small meal, people volunteered blankets, clothing, etc. (Madrid can get below freezing at night in the wintertime.) One evening, one woman started to cry, and someone from our group asked if we could pray for her. (We had been practicing healing people on the street, but that's another story). She said that she was fine, just overwhelmed at the love: "No one sees us, but you have seen me and cared." I think she experienced God's peace and love that night.

"You have seen me and cared." The Brethren in Christ Church in Spain is all about letting people know that God sees them and cares in very practical and hands-on ways.

Patty Zapata is a member of Circulo de Esperanza Brethren in Christ Church in Madrid, Spain. She was interviewed by missionaries Bruce and Merly Bundy.

The Core Values: Not an End in Themselves

By Danisa Ndlovu, Zimbabwe

OUR CORE VALUES propel us to live Christ-like lives within our different contexts and/or situations. Our values move us to live out our beliefs or faith as James 2:26 says, “faith without works is dead.” I’d like to share some stories about pursuing peace and living simply in Zimbabwe.

Pursuing peace

We were sitting around the table as church leaders discussing issues of peace in Zimbabwe when one of the church leaders said, “We are happy that Bishop Ndlovu is here. We need him because the peace agenda and teaching has been a part of his church life and tradition for centuries.” I was taken aback by the statement as I never expected it, but at the same time it made me proud, in a good way, that church leaders from other denominations were aware that the Brethren in Christ Church values pursuing peace with everyone (Rom. 12:18). For us pursuing peace with everyone and holiness (Heb. 12:14) are like the two sides of the same coin.

The Brethren in Christ Church in Zimbabwe is predominantly in Matabeleland South and North. In the early 1980s soon after independence, the government released a North Korean trained army that swept through the Midlands and Matabeleland to flush out so-called dissidents. Innocent people were battered, maimed and brutalized; women and girls were raped; pregnant women had their tummies ripped open, accused of having been impregnated by dissidents; some were forced into huts that were set alight and burned to death; some were made to dig their own graves, and others were thrown down mine shafts. More than 20,000 people perished mostly because they belonged to the wrong tribe.

When people share their stories from that time, it is as if these things happened yesterday. Many have not had the opportunity to grieve and find closure. We are ministering to people who are hurting, angry, traumatized, and still grieving. The pain has been buried in their hearts for years. I have met people who have suffered in silence for years, not sharing their experiences with any-

one. The anger, hatred, and desire for revenge has been transferred to the victims’ children, some who were not even born when violence was perpetrated. Given the opportunity, these young people would avenge what happened to their loved ones. To live “at peace with everyone” in our context is a painful and challenging process. However, reading the rest of the verse, “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you,” does provide space for God’s grace to patiently work in us so we can arrive at the point of living at peace with everyone.

COVID-19 has also brought its share of troubles, such as domestic and gender-based violence in families as they find themselves “imprisoned” together in their homes for weeks and months. The lockdowns have also resulted in numerous child pregnancies and the loss of jobs and incomes, resulting in strained relationships in many families. Peace for many is elusive.

In this challenging environment, the Brethren in Christ Church in Zimbabwe endeavors to live and propagate the message of peace. Our task is to help people deal with inner pain, harbored anger, and hatred towards perpetrators of violence. The church desires to be a safe space where people can talk about what happened in their lives without fear of being judged. The church is available to accompany the hurting to the feet of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, where burdens can be left and the future freely faced. We cannot underestimate the power of Jesus’s words breaking through these situations, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid” (John 14:27), and, “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

Living simply

Simple living has nothing to do with having much or less. Rather, it has to do with one’s attitude toward possessions or the things we acquire in life. It begins with a

recognition that all we have is from God, the giver of every good gift (James 1:17). Whatever God gives to us, his ultimate purpose is that we share with others. Living simply is the ability to be in charge of the possessions we have, no matter how meager, instead of being possessed by material things we own. The widow who gave “two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny” (Mark 12:41-44) gave everything she had. In her poverty, money did not possess her!

The idea of living simply is not an affront to being rich, but rather a call for being rich through honesty and hard work. It is a slap in the face to those who have embraced the manipulative prosperity gospel.

In a research paper titled “Prosperity and Health Ministry as a Coping Mechanism in the Poverty and Suffering Context of Zimbabwe: A Pastoral Evaluation and Response,” Vhumani Magezi and Peter Manzanga traced the origins of the prosperity gospel movement to its well-known proponents in Zimbabwe and showed the damage it has caused to the church. Prosperity gospel preachers are selling poor congregants all kinds of stuff, including armbands, holy oil, and holy water.¹ Religious scholar Reason Wafawarova wrote, “[P]rosperity gospel has the ironic effect of keeping people in poverty When these promises fail to materialize, as is the case most of the time, the follower is simply blamed for not giving enough money in offering, or for lacking in faith.”² Magezi and Manzanga conclude, “God is manipulated in prayer, faith, and giving so that his blessing might be released upon his people. It is a ‘gospel’ of hopelessness propelled by the desires of its leaders at the expense of the disadvantaged and innocent Zimbabweans.”³

Such teachings, which for the most part are based on false interpretation of scripture, are being used to acquire wealth through deceit. As we purpose to live Christ-like lives, these voices that are opposed to living simply seem to be getting stronger and more attractive to our young pastors and youth. Paul in 1 Timothy 4: 1-2 said, “The Spirit clearly says

that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron.”

Living simply is therefore not a goal intended just for the rich but rather intended for all regardless of one’s social status. It is exhibited in opening up one’s heart, arms, and home to help those who might need help. It is seen in accommodating others, particularly those who are less privileged. It also means appreciating other people’s culture and everything that makes them who they are. Living simply comes out of a loving and generous heart that reaches out to be a blessing to others to the glory of God.

The end result of embracing this value is what we see demonstrated by the Macedon-

ian Christians’ attitude in its willingness to give in the midst of adversity: “Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity . . . they gave as much as they were able, even beyond their ability. . . . They urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service (of giving) to the saints. . . . See that you also excel in this grace of giving” (2 Cor. 8:1-7). I believe that while the majority of Christians in Macedonia were poor, some were rich. The commendation is for all of them without discriminating.

The richness of these core values is that they are not an end in themselves; otherwise, we will be teaching salvation through works. Instead, they are an expression of our desire to emulate Christ as we follow in his steps.

Danisa Ndlovu is global director for Faithwalk Ministries International and chairs the Board of Trustees of the Ecumenical Church Leaders Forum in Zimbabwe. Currently serving as chair of the General Conference Board of Brethren in Christ Church Zimbabwe, he is a former bishop who also served as president of Mennonite World Conference.

Notes:

¹Vhumani Magezi and Peter Manzanga, “Prosperity and Health Ministry as a Coping Mechanism in the Poverty and Suffering Context of Zimbabwe: A Pastoral Evaluation and Response,” *Skriflig (Online)* 50, no.1 (2016): 1-10. Available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/ids.v50i1.2076>.

²Reason Wafawarova, “The Curse of Prosperity Gospel,” *The Herald*, February 20, 2015, www.herald.co.zw/the-curse-of-prosperity-gospel/.

³Magezi and Manzanga.

Teaching Peace and Service in the Midst of Challenges

by Barbara Nkala, Zimbabwe

THE BRETHREN IN Christ Church has been in Zimbabwe for 123 years since it was established by missionaries from the United States. The first missionaries laid a good foundation that has continued to stand the test of time. Challenges are part of life but they have not prevented the church from teaching and practising the values of serving compassionately and pursuing peace.

Serving compassionately

In the story when Jesus tells about the final judgment in Matthew 25:31-46, he commends giving food to those who are hungry and thirsty, warm hospitality to the homeless and strangers, and care for the sick and showing empathy to prisoners. Jesus says, “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it for me” (Matt. 25:40).

There will always be needy people among us. We have been doing a lot to provide for various needs in our various communities. There is provision of school fees, uniforms, and transport to and from school for needy students, as well as orphans. The sick and elderly are visited as well as some inmates in prison. The Women’s Fellowship has sent girls to school, with one girl who successfully completed a degree programme in 2019.

In 2020, Zimbabwe was not spared from the COVID-19 pandemic. Leadership and pastors risked their lives as they served compassionately. Many church members fell victim to COVID. Pastors had no option but to visit the sick and the bereaved to encourage, counsel, and pray with the affected and their families. They were also required to handle funerals. Some of them also became infected with the virus in the process.

In 2013, the church established Brethren in Christ Compassionate and Development Services (BIC CDS) to provide relief when there are humanitarian challenges such as devastating droughts, floods, and other extreme weather conditions. CDS solicits funds from individuals, organizations, and donors locally and internationally. Financial resources are disbursed to cater to various needs across the church. Pastor Ndabenhle Ncube, the national director and programme officer for CDS shared that they work with 1500 volunteer farmers in Gwanda District, 70 percent of whom are women. He said, “CDS has been promoting conservation tillage and usage of early maturing seed varieties in an effort to mitigate against negative effects caused by weather changes. The method has proved to be sustainable and

profitable as it takes advantage of natural ecological processes to conserve, improve and enhance soil fertility. The church has rendered support to communities by funding installation of water pumping sets powered by renewable solar energy sources, drilling boreholes and rehabilitating small earth dams where need is greatest.” Some of this has enabled much needed self-sustenance activities in areas.

In 2019, a major disaster occurred in the eastern part of Zimbabwe, where unprecedented heavy rains caused floods that destroyed a whole community of people, leaving survivors destitute. The church, through its members, joined many other humanitarian organizations in mobilizing needed resources to render help in Manicaland. The same was done for the Binga flood victims in 2020.

The advent of COVID-19 has seen the church spring into action to offer help where it can. The church set up a fundraising committee to solicit funds among local church members to help provide our hospitals, clinics, churches, schools and congregations with needed protective clothing, masks, sanitizers, and thermometers. The value of giving is still lacking among our people, but teaching is

ongoing. When the current bishop, Sindah Ngulube, took office, he encouraged each member of the church to contribute \$5 US, collected by each congregation and district and presented during our General Conference. The plan was to distribute the funds as follows: \$1 to leadership development, \$1 to missions, and \$3 to evangelism and church growth. Not everybody gives, but that was a good start.

Pursuing Peace

We continue to teach peace in the church. We dedicate the month of September every year to peace teaching and sermons. In all congregations, Sunday school, sermons, and cell groups or midweek services, peace is the focal theme. During the annual general conferences, there is a workshop called “Peace Building.” Rev. Siphetho Dube facilitated these workshops for a number of years. He shared many success stories about resolving conflicts among individuals, family members, and church members. One of the stories he shared concerned a woman who showed great bitterness and resentment to-

wards her in-laws who mistreated her because she had no children. Rev. Dube and other facilitators tried to impress on her the importance of forgiving those who had wronged her as Christ also forgave us our wrongs. He said, “We demonstrated how failure to forgive makes one a slave to resentment and anger, causing chronic headaches, heart problems and ulcers. . . . She shed many tears but at the end she expressed gratitude for the lessons learned and confessed that a big burden had been lifted from her heart. She said she felt greatly empowered to face her in-laws with a new attitude and peace of mind.”

Peace clubs have also been introduced in Brethren in Christ schools. It is a wonderful thing that our children can be introduced to peaceful ways of dealing with conflicts and solving problems at a young age.

I remember a classic case of the church becoming a peace broker in 2019. The government commissioners for peace and reconciliation had requested a venue for their meeting with people at the Bulawayo Cen-

tral church. Discussion soon became very heated as participants did not see the sense of having people they believed sympathized with the perpetrators of Gukurahundi* being in the team sent to broker peace. The situation was turning ugly when the church leaders stepped in as peacemakers and separated the warring factions, trying to speak peace to the volatile situation.

Barbara Nkala is married to Shadreck Nkala; they have three adult children and six grandchildren. She is a former teacher; former publisher at Longman Zimbabwe. Later she coordinated the translation and publication of the contemporary Shona and Ndebele Bibles and Chichewa New Testament as national director of International Bible Society-Zimbabwe and Malawi. Currently, she is regional representative for Mennonite World Conference, Southern Africa.

“A series of massacres of the Ndebele people orchestrated by the North Korean-trained Zimbabwe National Army in 1983-1987.

Service, Peace, and Simplicity

By Zach Spidel, United States

THE THREE CORE values to which this edition of *Shalom!* is devoted are not unique to the Brethren in Christ, but they are particularly characteristic of us. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the aspiration to embody these values is particularly characteristic of us. For instance, our historic commitment to non-participation in war as a matter of obedience to Christ distinguishes us from many other churches.

Of course, our witness in these areas has never been perfect, and one could fairly ask about the true measure of our continuing commitment to at least two of these values, but neither our inconsistent historic witness nor the uncertain measure of our current commitment effaces the ongoing significance of our aspiration toward these values. That aspiration exists officially in our core values, but it lives and grows in the hearts and upon the hands of many among us who are seeking to follow Christ in service, peace, and simplicity. I wish, in the remainder of

this article, to share testimony to that effect—to tell some of the stories I know of people living these values.

Service

Over two decades ago, I remember bishop John Byers taking it upon himself to clean the bathroom under the boys dorm at Memorial Holiness Camp very early each morning throughout the camp week. I only know of this because Luke Keefer Jr., then a leader of the camp, shared the bishop’s quiet act of service with the camp against the bishop’s wishes as an example to be emulated. The bishop was an older man then with the stiffened joints age brings to all. He had served the denomination nearly his entire life and was an eminent man among us. Yet each morning of camp, in the pre-dawn dark, he got down on his knees in front of the toilet, which I and my friends made such a mess of, and he scrubbed our muck away while we slept unawares just above him. I’ve thought of that on multiple occasions when I have



been tempted to neglect some service or to seek praise as consolation for service rendered and I’ve been helped, each time, to choose as Jesus instructs us by the example of the late bishop.

In this regard I also think of my associate pastor, Susan, who has spearheaded the formation of a weekly ministry (in partnership with a local non-profit) serving our church’s neighbors hot cooked meals and distributing clothing and household goods to any in need. I think of the man who came into our parking lot just last week. He was so high he passed out on our sidewalk before bouncing up in a hysterical fit of energy. He asked, in a rattling chatter, for food and clothing which we watched him absent-mindedly abandon as he staggered away. I think of the fact that

Susan and our volunteers will not hesitate to give him more of both next week should he reappear. We give to any who ask because that is what Jesus has taught us to do.

I think of what happened when I was 15 years old and a new Christian learning the ways of Jesus at Fairview Brethren in Christ in Englewood, Ohio. My family's roof needed to be replaced, all the way down to the rafters, and we could ill afford to hire a crew for such a job. Learning of our need, the church organized a weekend work project. Over the course of two days the roof was torn off and an entirely new one installed. Men and boys clambered up and down a handful of ladders, scrambled with hammers and nail guns above, cut wood and hauled shingles below. Women and girls cooked food and served drinks, ran errands, picked up materials, and cleaned up the piles of refuse the roofing work created. I recall dozens of people being present at the height of the work each day, and I recall the overwhelming and wonderfully warm sense of the presence of God in the midst of that communal act of service.

Peace

I remember E. Morris Sider taking me and 20 some other fellow students through Harold Bender's classic text, *The Anabaptist*

Vision. I recall that I became immediately and, as it turns out, enduringly convinced that Christ calls his people to entirely renounce violence at the personal and political level. I remember both how disorienting and painful and ultimately exciting I found it. I remember my own deepening repentance for the ways I had romanticized, celebrated, and argued for war in the past. I remember the peaceful demeanor with which Dr. Sider took us through that book of peace, and how peace has remained on my mind ever since.

I remember the gathering of young adults organized specifically to discuss and debate Christian pacifism that occurred about 10 years ago at Fairview. I recall those committed to the peace position were a minority, but that all of us took the question seriously and were committed enough to Jesus to take an evening of our week and devote it to biblical and spiritual discernment on this topic. I recall a friend who came into the evening sure that Christian pacifism was unbiblical and even unethical, but who began a journey that night that would lead him to wholeheartedly and enthusiastically embrace the peace witness of our fellowship.

I remember being asked to write for this journal each quarter—a journal devoted to peace—and being delighted to find, with

each article, so many voices devoted to that challenging and beautiful dimension of the Jesus way.

Simplicity

I have fewer stories I can share here. What I can share is the longing I feel when I reflect on that absence, and the one example of personal success I can count in this area among many other failures. I have lived for the last 10 years in a home I bought, with help from the church, for \$26,000. My house—now a home for my wife, my daughter, and me—is a small place in an untrendy (to say the least) neighborhood. We love our home and have slowly invested in it. The small mortgage has enabled us to be generous with our church and with our neighbors. This one experiment in my own life only serves to stoke my longing for a more comprehensive simplicity. I can't help but wonder if this—which I deem to be the most neglected of our values in the US—is the one to which God is most urgently summoning us.

Zach Spidel is pastor of The Shepherd's Table, Dayton, OH.

Baby Steps

By Chris Higginson, Canada

THE NEW TESTAMENT places a premium on truth-telling. The apostle Paul writes to the church at Ephesus, "we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ" (Eph. 4:15). The Greek word translated "love" in Ephesians 4:15 has the idea of not covered or uncovered. So, followers of Jesus are to be people who are uncovered. We don't pretend. We don't wear masks (metaphorically speaking). We seek truth, we embrace truth, we speak truth—in love.

Before June 11, 2008, I did not know much at all about what was called the "Indian Residential School System" in Canada. That was the day then Prime Minister Stephen Harper issued a public apology on behalf of the Government of Canada to

Aboriginal Peoples of this country for Canada's role in the Indian Residential School system.

As is now widely known and acknowledged, much pain, misery, and abuse were heaped on Indigenous peoples through the residential school experience. And what further complicates this whole tragic scenario is that so much of the abuse inflicted was by people representing the Christian faith. In so doing, some church leaders weaponized the Christian faith, abusing those under their authority.

In his apology, Prime Minister Harper acknowledged that there were two primary objectives for the residential school system: 1) "to remove and isolate children from the influence of their home, families, traditions,

and cultures" and 2) to force Indigenous children to "assimilate into the dominant culture."¹

In recent years, my wife and I have begun reflecting on our part in all of this. For starters, she and I needed to acknowledge that, as part of the dominant culture, our attitudes and our perspectives made the residential school experience possible in the first place. Our attitudes and perspectives allowed the assimilation the Prime Minister spoke of to take place. The attitudes and perspectives of the dominant culture of which we're part took away cultural practice and use of language, separated parent from child and child from parent, thus separating Indigenous peoples from their own culture.

As a pastor, it's becoming much clearer to

me all the time that we, the church of Jesus, must acknowledge our racism both past and present. I readily confess that we have a lot of work to do in addressing racism, both within our church and our surrounding communities.

It is so easy to acquiesce to the cultural biases of the dominant culture. But Jesus is calling us to be motivated and animated by his unconditional and radical love. And so, we confess and repent. We repent of those times we have knowingly or unwittingly failed to advocate for marginalized Indigenous peoples as Jesus would clearly call us to. Jesus invites us to replicate his reconciling life and work in seeking reconciliation and peace with Indigenous peoples.

Earlier this year, a whole new wave of pain and grief began as unmarked graves containing the remains of 215 Indigenous children were discovered using ground-penetrating radar at the site of a former residential school in Kamloops, British Columbia. More and more such discoveries are expected at the sites of other former residential schools across Canada.

As pastor of a church whose building is situated between two large First Nations communities, we were encouraged by BIC Canada denominational leaders to take a first step, a baby step, in the direction of speaking truth in love and pursuing peace and reconciliation in uncovered fashion. For us, that baby step took the form of a land acknowledgment. A land acknowledgement is a for-

mal statement that recognizes the unique and enduring relationship between Indigenous peoples and their territories. Acknowledging the land is an expression of thanks and appreciation, honouring the aboriginal people who have been living on and working on the land upon which we now reside. Such acknowledgement is to pause, reflect, and recognize the long-standing history that has brought us to reside here.

To ensure that the land acknowledgment we intended to make was both accurate and appropriate, and didn't create any unintentional offence, my wife, Jean, reached out to the band offices of both the Chippewas of Saugeen to the south of us, and the Chippewas of Nawash to the north. Jean said she was determined that our land acknowledgment statement must be "heartfelt, respectful, and correct." Here is Jean's own description of her conversations with our First Nations neighbours:

"Staff at both band offices were friendly, approachable, and very open to discussion. All the individuals I spoke with were more than willing to share experiences and accept our willingness to move forward in hopes of creating a better understanding. Even my request to help with correct pronunciation of unfamiliar words was met with a pleasant and fun exchange, with my attempts being repeated until I had the pronunciation correct."

As I sit at my desk inside our church building, it seems appropriate to close with

the words of the land acknowledgment statement itself that we read on Sunday, June 20, 2021 in our in-person and online worship services. This was the first such statement made by our church in its 30-year history.

"I want to acknowledge the Traditional Territory of the Anishinabek Nation: The People of the Three Fires known as Ojibway, Odawa, and Pottawatomie Nations. And I further want to give thanks to the Chippewas of Saugeen, and the Chippewas of Nawash, now known as the Saugeen Ojibway Nation, as being the traditional keepers of this land upon which our church building sits, and I want to express our thanks for allowing us to do in and from this location the work we believe Jesus has called us to."

One last thing: our church family was saddened to learn of a COVID-19 outbreak on the Saugeen First Nation this summer, but the baby step of a land acknowledgment statement in June opened the door for our church family to help restock their food bank in July. Another baby step.

Chris Higginson is acting lead pastor at Sauble Christian Fellowship (Be In Christ Church of Canada), Sauble Beach, ON.

Note:

¹Quoted portions of Prime Minister Harper's apology retrieved from www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1100100015644/1571589171655.

Peace Club at Choma Correctional Facility

By Keith Mwaanga, Zambia

AMONG THE BIGGEST hindrances in practising "pursuing peace" are stigma and discrimination. Prison officers and community members in Zambia have stereotypes, prejudices, and misconceptions toward returning citizens. For example, some members of the community, and in certain cases family members, believe all prisoners do not deserve love and forgiveness and should be treated as criminals who are dangerous to society. Worse still, others believe inmates are unclean and should never be loved. I think this view is not fair and should be discouraged.

The Peace Club movement in Zambia fits well with the Brethren in Christ core value of pursuing peace. We are sharing and demonstrating the love of Christ by reaching out to the "least of these." Through the restorative justice programme, we are helping people to reconcile and experience forgiveness. Through counseling services in the Choma Correctional Facility, we help inmates by:

- Counseling them regarding stress and trauma that they experience when they return to spouses who had extramarital

affairs;

- Providing a welcoming place for them;
- Listening to their feelings, accepting them in genuine care, and remaining respectful of their experience;
- Assisting them in remembering their past ability to get through difficult times and invite them to tell stories of self, family and community as well as encourage them gratefulness for victories;
- Allowing them to mourn and express feelings of loss;
- Encouraging them to explore new oppor-

tunities;

- Strengthening and reinforcing present healthy relationships and encourage new relationships;
- Advocating for them to the higher authorities when needs arise;
- Connecting them with their families and friends for moral and material support;
- Conducting training using the Peace Club curriculum, and visiting and monitoring Peace Club activities.

Several years ago, I described my work in an article for MCC:

“While I provide overarching training for inmates and officers, inmates themselves give leadership to the peace club on a day-to-day and week-to-week basis. All peace club members meet at least every Friday. Together, they work through the peace club curriculum to learn about alternative ways to address conflict, the problem of gender-based violence and how to walk along a journey toward reconciliation in their lives. . . .

“In my role supporting the peace club in Choma, I visit the correctional facility at least twice a month, and more often as the need arises. My primary role with this peace club project is to provide counseling to inmates in the Choma facility. I try to provide a welcoming space for prisoners, listening to their feelings, accepting them in genuine care and remaining respectful of their experience. I assist them in remembering past experiences of getting through difficult times, inviting them to tell stories of themselves, their families and their communities and encouraging them to both to express gratefulness for victories and to mourn and share feelings of loss. In our conversations, inmates imagine life after prison and we discuss opportunities and challenges they will face after release. I also advocate for them to the higher authorities and help connect them with their families and friends for moral and material support.”

“The Choma peace club has had a positive impact during its short lifespan. The facility has the highest percentage of early releases in Zambia, due to inmates’ good behavior, which prison officers attribute to the positive impact of peace clubs at the institution.”¹

Alfred’s Peace Club testimony

I was sentenced to four years with hard

labor at Choma Correctional Facility. After the conviction, I felt like the world had come to an end and I was now in another dimension. After I was convicted, I told myself not to give up for the sake of a family I left outside the walls.

In January 2019, I was introduced by a fellow inmate named Henry to a reformatory programme called Peace Club. Because of my involvement in the Peace Club, I was pardoned in May 2020, more than eight months before my sentence was over.

Under the guidance of our patron pastor Fred Musiwa, a chaplain in correctional services, we were trained by a Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) team. During the training, Keith Mwaanga from MCC gave me the opportunity to study a module and teach my fellow inmates as a facilitator during the training workshop.

After the training, it was time to execute on the ground what we had learned. I was elected chairperson for Peace Club and worked with a committee to lead inmates that formed the club. The Peace Club played a huge role at the facility and had a positive impact to me as an individual and all inmates at the facility. Peace Club members became ambassadors of inmates to the officers and played additional roles:

- Offering counseling to inmates;
- Presenting peer educational dramas;
- Reducing alcohol and drug abuse among inmates to zero;
- Resolving conflicts among inmates;
- Reducing prison escapes and recidivism;
- Improving the health services delivery to inmates;
- Promoting the Victim Offender Reconciliation Process;
- Opening communication with inmates;
- Writing and relaying reports to the patron and officer in charge about what was occurring and what needed to be done.

With the above initiatives, inmates were able to receive counseling that reduced prison trauma. The programmes helped inmates to be reconciled with their society. Every Tuesday was set aside for tutorials in each cell where inmates were taught the Peace Club modules.

Peace Club has managed to reduce the level of self-stigmatization among inmates, as they are taught that when they are released

from the facility they can be fully reintegrated into the society and be normal citizens again

Personally, Peace Club kept me mentally stable and gave me the much needed hope that once I left the facility I could have a second chance in life. Peace Club gave me a sense of duty. I left the facility and managed to successfully reintegrate into society. I travelled back to Zimbabwe, my home country, and within a few days after my arrival I managed to secure a job as a franchise development manager. At the time I wrote this, I was being called for interviews for several senior management roles in various companies.

Keith Mwaanga works for MCC Zambia and is a pastor in the Zambian Brethren in Christ Church.

Note:

¹Keith Mwaanga, “Piloting Peace Clubs in Prisons in Zambia,” *Intersections: MCC Theory and Practice Quarterly* 6, no. 3 (Summer 2018): 11, <https://mcc.org/sites/mcc.org/files/media/common/documents/intersectionssummer2018-web.pdf>.

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bia, supported about 1,000 children in going to school. The bishop’s office is at the centre of soliciting the funds to ensure that children are supported.

The two core values, serving compassionately and pursuing peace, are shaping the church. The church is making an effort to address the injustice and promote the dignity and rights of its members and the community. The living simply core value, as simple as it may appear, needs a lot of explanation to fit well in our setting and context. Generally, the 10 core values have shaped the church in Zambia to worship God better and serve him well.

Levison Soto is an ordained minister and overseer for the Sikalongo District of the Brethren in Christ Church in Zambia. He holds a bachelor’s degree from South African Theological Seminary and is a candidate for a master’s in theology. He and his wife Saviour have two children.

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Shaping the Church

By Levison Soto, Zambia

THE BRETHERN IN Christ core values are helping the church in Zambia to worship God and serve its people better. I'll share a few thoughts of how the church has been ministering to the people through these core values: serving compassionately, pursuing peace and living simply.

Matthew 25:40 says, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me." The church is always encouraged to show acts of kindness to the vulnerable of the community. The core values have helped the church to minister well because of the situations that are happening and the needs in our church and country. The compassionate and peace committees work together because of felt needs in a number of areas.

Gender-based violence

In striving to promote, teach, and practice tangible peace-building strategies in our churches and communities, the peace committee working together with MCC and the church is trying to build and protect the dignity of humankind. Many of our members experience different forms of gender-based violence: physical abuse, emotional, social, economical, and psychological

During the leader's retreat, a survey was conducted that was revealed that about 25 percent of members experienced one or two

forms of abuse in their homes. Women suffer a lot of physical, economic, and psychological abuse from their husbands. Hence, to address these issues, we have encouraged the women's and men's ministries and local churches to form committees to address and talk about the evils of this abuse which has led to many unstable homes and marriages.

Early marriages, teen pregnancies, and children's rights

The traditional leaders, civic leaders, head teachers, and other stake holders are involved in a number of trainings. During the early marriage and teen pregnancy training, it was discovered that the challenges girls face are more than people think. The head teachers shared their records on the number of dropouts due to pregnancy, which are too high both in communities and Brethren in Christ schools (grades 7, 9, and 12). Working together with the educational secretary, the National Peace Committee, MCC, and other stakeholders, including parents, we are looking for how to help these girls go back to school. Also, through these trainings and meetings, some girls were removed from early marriages and reconciled back to their parents.

The church has a lot of work to stop the abuse in the church and community. We have a lot of unreported cases of gender-

based violence in our communities. We hope through such trainings and other interventions by the church, our people will be given skills on how to fight this violence.

Peace clubs in schools

To fight the challenges of peer pressure, drug and alcohol abuse, and other evil acts by the young people in our schools, the church together with the school leadership introduced peace clubs in all Brethren in Christ schools. The peace clubs have contributed greatly to a healthy environment in schools. Peace clubs provide peer counseling and peer support. At one school, about 12 pupils were sent away because of drug abuse and other bad behavior. The presence of the peace clubs is helping to address such evil behavior. The peace club leaders are being empowered and equipped with more counselling skills to help in their work.

Orphans and vulnerable children

The church, through its compassionate ministry, has managed to address the issues of orphans and vulnerable children. Local congregations are taking care of these children, by providing school fees, food, and clothing. At some point before the challenges of COVID-19, many of the congregations with the partnership with Forgotten Voice and the Council of Churches in Zam-

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