



world council of churches - US office



U.S. Conference for the World Council of Churches

A letter from the U.S. Conference
for the World Council of Churches
to the 9th Assembly
of the World Council of Churches

Feb. 18, 2006
Porto Alegre, Brazil

Grace to you and peace from the God the Holy Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. As leaders from the World Council of Churches member communions in the United States, we greet the delegates to the 9th Assembly with joy and gratitude for your partnership in the gospel in the years since we were last in Harare (Zimbabwe). During those years you have been constant in your love for us. We remember in particular the ways you embraced us with compassion in the days following the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, and in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina just months ago. Your pastoral words, your gifts, and your prayers sustained us, reminding us that we were not alone but were joined in the Body of Christ to a community of deep encouragement and consolation. Even now you have welcomed us at this Assembly with rich hospitality. Know that we are profoundly grateful.

Yet we acknowledge as well that we are citizens of a nation that has done much in these years to endanger the human family and to abuse the creation. Following the terrorist attacks you sent "living letters" inviting us into a deeper solidarity with those who suffer daily from violence around the world. But our country responded by seeking to reclaim a privileged and secure place in the world, raining down terror on the truly vulnerable among our global neighbors. Our leaders turned a deaf ear to the voices of church leaders throughout our nation and the world, entering into imperial projects that seek to dominate and control for the sake of our own national interests. Nations have been demonized and God has been enlisted in national agendas that are nothing short of idolatrous. We lament with special anguish the war in Iraq, launched in deception and violating global norms of justice and human rights. We mourn all who have died or been injured in this war; we acknowledge with shame abuses carried out in our name; we confess that we have failed to raise a prophetic voice loud enough and persistent enough to deter our leaders from this path of preemptive war. Lord, have mercy.

The rivers, oceans, lakes, rainforests, and wetlands that sustain us, even the air we breathe continue to be violated, and global warming goes unchecked while we allow God's creation to veer toward destruction. Yet our own country refuses to acknowledge its complicity and rejects multilateral agreements aimed at reversing disastrous trends. We consume without replenishing; we grasp finite resources as if they are private possessions; our controlled appetites devour more and more of the earth's gifts. We confess that we have failed to raise a prophetic voice loud enough and persistent enough to call our nation to global responsibility for the creation, that

we ourselves are complicit in a culture of consumption that diminishes the earth. Christ, have mercy.

The vast majority of the peoples of the earth live in crushing poverty. The starvation, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the treatable diseases that go untreated indict us, revealing the grim features of global economic injustice we have too often failed to acknowledge or confront. Our nation enjoys enormous wealth, yet we cling to our possessions rather than share. We have failed to embody the covenant of life to which our God calls us, Hurricane Katrina revealed to the world those left behind in our own nation by the rupture of our social contract. As a nation we have refused to confront the racism that exists in our own communities and the racism that infects our policies around the world. We confess that we have failed to raise a prophetic voice loud enough and persistent enough to call our nation to seek just economic structures so that sharing by all will mean scarcity for none. In the face of the earth's poverty, our wealth condemns us. Lord, have mercy.

Sisters and brothers in the ecumenical community, we come to you in this Assembly grateful for the hospitality we don't deserve, for companionship we haven't earned, for an embrace we don't merit. In the hope that is promised in Christ and thankful for people of faith in our own country who have sustained our yearning for peace, we come to you seeking to be partners in the search for unity and justice. From a place seduced by the lure of empire we come to you in penitence, eager for grace, grace sufficient to transform spirits grown weary from the violence, degradation, and poverty our nation has sown, grace sufficient to transform spirits grown heavy with guilt, grace sufficient to transform the world. Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy. Amen.

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