



HERMANAS DE LA CARIDAD  SISTERS OF CHARITY OF
E VERBO ENCARNADO E INCARNATE WORD

May 2017

Seeds | By: Katty Huanuco, CCVI and Jennifer Reyes Lay |

We would like to begin this May edition of Seeds by reflecting on all of the wonderful actions and events that have occurred during the past month to protect and care for our common home! In April we not only celebrated Earth Day with prayer and action, but also joined with thousands of Catholics around the world in the #Mercy2Earth campaign, recognizing as Pope Francis has said, that care for our common home is our 8th Work of Mercy.

Members of the Congregation in the U.S. also joined in local marches for science and for the climate to encourage their government to be a leader in addressing climate change and investing in renewable energy and technology. In Peru, members of the JPIC Committee and Office attended the Panamazon Social Forum (Fospa) learning about the threats to the Amazon rainforest and all the people and creatures who call it home. And Sisters and Collaborators in the United States and Mexico participated in our sustainable events webinars connected to our corporate action for the care of creation.

We also want to highlight this month a couple of articles on women. First is our second theological and social reflection for 2017. We know women are equal in dignity and rights to men, but the political, social, and religious systems that are set up often do not reflect this inherent equality. We thank Sandra Lassak for her powerful reflection on this topic. And the second is a reflection from one of our Incarnate Word Missionaries, Selene, on the intersections of being both black and female. Thank you Selene for your powerful reflection as well!

As always we want to hear what you are doing in the areas of Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation so that we can continue to encourage and inspire one another in our communal work to uplift the dignity of all people and be good stewards of our common home. You can contact the JPIC Office with any questions or concerns at: jplic.office@amormeus.org. Thanks!

Human Trafficking

'A GIFT TO HUMAN TRAFFICKERS': REPORT WARNS OF DANGERS OF TRUMP IMMIGRATION POLICY

Donald Trump’s hardline approach to immigration has been branded a “gift to human traffickers” amid concerns that stricter deportation and border regulations will push undocumented migrant workers underground, putting them at greater risk of slavery and human rights abuses.

The new administration’s immigration policy – which hinges on the construction of a US-Mexico border wall and immediate repatriation of illegal immigrants – will force criminal networks

to use more costly and potentially more dangerous trafficking routes by air and sea, say global risk analysts Verisk Maplecroft.

According to a report by the company, the controversial stance adopted by the White House towards migrant workers and immigration will be a major driver of human rights risks for business in 2017. Developed countries are warned that human rights abuses are surfacing closer to home for western companies just as legislation strengthens and scrutiny of business practices increases.

Saket Soni, executive director of the membership organisation National Guestworkers Alliance, said the Trump administration's new regulations will only exacerbate existing problems and proves that the US government is "part of the problem".

"Trump's policies are a gift to human traffickers," said Soni. "We know firsthand what Verisk Maplecroft's report confirms: criminalising immigrants makes them more vulnerable to forced labour, human trafficking, and modern-day slavery. Trump's mass criminalisation will drive immigrants further into the shadows, where increasing numbers of them will face forced labour conditions."

The report, entitled Human Rights Outlook 2017, draws on Verisk Maplecroft's portfolio of global human rights data and its interactions with multinational companies to assess the top 10 human rights issues affecting business in the year ahead.

"The US is already classed as 'medium risk' in our index measuring modern slavery around the world, and the commodity risk that we've done shows that there are already extreme risks for migrants, including those on farms harvesting apples or citrus fruits," said Maplecroft's principal analyst, Alexandra Channer.

"There's already a significant problem for undocumented workers in certain industries in the US. So the impact of these policies will be worsening an already serious issue, which we could see potentially widen to different industries, for example the transportation and hospitality sectors."

There are an estimated 8 million undocumented migrants in the US. They comprise more than 10% of the labour force in Nevada, 9% in California, 8.5% in Texas and 6.2% in Florida, according to the report.

The agriculture, construction, manufacturing and hospitality sectors are the most dependent on migrants for informal, low-paid work, with commodity risk data revealing that the risk of migrant labour exploitation is already "high", or "extreme", in fruit production in Florida and California.

Ironically, as a result of the Trump administration's directives to put "America first", US companies with supply chains reliant on low-skilled, migrant labour face an increased risk of modern slavery, as these sectors often include informal and casual labour, hidden subcontracting and corrupt recruitment practices, the report warns. Stricter deportation rules for undocumented migrant workers will push them further underground, potentially exposing them to criminal trafficking gangs, while a US-Mexico border wall would increase criminal trafficking fees, leaving migrants more deeply mired in debt and vulnerable to exploitation, according to the study.

A 2015 BuzzFeed investigation found that migrant workers – both documented and undocumented – faced high levels of abuse at the hands of their employers, with thousands of workers on legal H-2 visas reportedly deprived of fair wages, imprisoned, starved, beaten, raped, and even threatened with deportation if they complained.

Channer said that migrants who fear they may be at risk of deportation, even if they are working legally in the US, will hesitate to report any labour abuses, such as delayed payment of wages or excessive working hours. "But failure to report even one abuse may lead to a slippery slope where conditions of modern day slavery [go unreported]," she added.

Irregular flows of migrants and refugees have led to an increased risk of modern slavery in European countries, said Channer, and could serve as a potential warning to the US administration, since “migration policies have not reduced the incentives to migrate and trafficking networks have simply adapted”.

“Traditionally people have thought this is a problem that’s isolated on Thai fishing vessels or in textile factories abroad, but this is an issue that affects economies that are low-risk,” she said. “We highlight blind spots – such as cleaners and security guards, or caterers that supply food at business headquarters in London or Paris or Berlin. These workers are all extremely susceptible to conditions of modern slavery.”

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) called Trump’s immigration policies “concerning” because of their potential impact on all involved. “Heightened immigration enforcement will push people underground and create a significant chilling effect on reporting labour abuses,” said Sarah Mehta, a human rights researcher for ACLU. “There are consequences for all workers, including US citizens, when the ability to organise and report abuses is thwarted by the threat of deportation.”

The report recommended tougher auditing processes for companies completing human rights assessments. It stressed that a greater risk of modern slavery in the US supply chain could deter international businesses from working with US firms, lest their own supply chains should be sullied.

“Companies and investors looking to avoid the moral hazard of forced labour need to be as concerned about the US as they are about Thailand,” said Soni. “Since Trump has made the US government part of the problem, companies and investors will need to partner directly with worker voice organisations to make sure that immigrant workers have the power to receive a fair wage, expose abuse without fear of retaliation, and combat discrimination.”

Article from The Guardian

MO ATTORNEY GENERAL COMMITS TO FIGHT AGAINST HUMAN TRAFFICKING

More than 150 years after Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, slavery is illegal almost everywhere. But it is still not abolished -- not even here, in the land of the free. On the contrary, there is a cancer of violence, a modern-day slavery growing in America by the day, in the very places where we live and work. It's called human trafficking. The time has come for a new abolitionist movement to confront this oppression and turn it back.

Each year, thousands of people, usually women and girls, are deceived, threatened or simply forced into commercial sexual exploitation. That is, they are forced to provide sex for money. Don't be misled, this isn't a crime confined to exotic locales. It happens all the time, even in a neighborhood near you. Sex trafficking occurs when a young woman is forced into prostitution at a truck stop; when a sexual predator lures a teen on the internet; when a family member makes a child sell sex for cash.

The International Labor Organization estimates that 4.5 million people are trapped in commercial sex exploitation worldwide, 98% of them female. Since 2007, the National Trafficking Hotline in the United States has received more than 31,000 reports of trafficking happening in this country. Nearly 2,000 calls to the NTH have come from my home state of Missouri.

Sex trafficking amounts to a form of slavery: It is forced, unchosen labor. Left unchecked, it threatens to disfigure our society. That's a danger I take personally. As attorney general of Missouri,

I am my state's chief law enforcement officer. I swore an oath to uphold the rule of law, and that means fighting violence and oppression wherever it exists, especially violence against the poor and vulnerable. The swelling epidemic of human trafficking makes a mockery of the law and its protections. Confronting this evil demands new thinking and decisive new action. And this is my pledge: In Missouri we will act, and we will act now.

Today I am issuing new regulations, which my office understands to be the first of their kind in the nation, that will deploy Missouri's consumer protection laws to target traffickers. It's a bold new approach designed to open a new front in the fight against trafficking.

Traffickers have become adept at evading the criminal laws currently on the books. Those laws can be difficult to enforce, not least because trafficking frequently involves activities committed in multiple jurisdictions and across state lines.

That makes trafficking cases time-intensive for law enforcement, and costly. And the truth is, many local police and prosecutors simply do not have the resources, time, training or manpower to bring a traditional criminal case involving trafficking to trial. The traffickers know it. As one recently boasted to a researcher from the Urban Institute, "You don't get locked up for pimping. Who gets locked up for pimping?"

We need a new approach. Unfair and deceptive business practices have been illegal in most states for decades. Yet traffickers routinely use what appear to be legitimate businesses—massage parlors, bars, nail salons—as fronts for their illegal exploitation. It's the ultimate business scam. As of today, that practice is illegal in the state of Missouri.

Here is how the new regulations will work: If traffickers attempt to use a business in Missouri to mask their criminal enterprise, we will find them out. We will shut them down. And using our consumer protection statutes, we will hold them liable, with both civil and criminal penalties. That goes for anyone involved in the traffickers' enterprise.

This modern-day effort of abolition must be the work of many hands. Indeed, it will require much of all of us, including a searching appraisal of the social attitudes and habits that make trafficking profitable. This work will not be finished in a day or a decade. But it is work worth every effort, so that, in the words of the Hebrew scripture, "the poor may have hope, and injustice shuts its mouth."

By Josh Hawley, MO Attorney General, appearing on CNN April 3, 2017

Environment

PRESENT IN THE PANAMAZON SOCIAL FORUM

Our Congregation, represented by the Congregational Office of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation, was present at the VIII Panamazon Social Forum (Fospa) held April 28 to May 1, 2017 in Tarapoto, Peru. It was an event that brought together more than 1,500 representatives of indigenous peoples, civil society organizations, academics and activists from the nine Latin American countries that share the Amazonian territory.

The Forum sought to articulate the social agendas of the participants in order to propose alternatives to the economic model that, as expressed in the statement of the Peruvian National Forum, violates the rights of indigenous peoples and threatens the environment.

Through the collective reflections and conversations by the various organizations, movements and networks of the Fospa participants, as well as the work of the past year and a half,

a final document was created called the LETTER of TARAPOTO. This document creates a roadmap for the struggles of resistance, and offers a proposal and needed change in order to preserve the Andean Panamazon in the framework of a new civil order.

It should be noted that Fospa was an autonomous and independent space that practiced a methodology of care, meaning it generated spaces of radical equality and encounter, inclusion, dialogue and negotiated well the diversity of feelings, thoughts, knowledge and perspectives in order to overcome historic and present inequalities, exclusion, patriarchy, colonialism and capitalist depredations.

Through three common axes: Territory, Care of Creation, and the Interculturality of the Amazon, Andes and Coastal regions, there were nine spaces for dialogue and debate. These included: Panamanian-Andean Women, Climate Change and the Amazon, Sovereignty and Food Security, Mega-projects and Extraction, Intercultural Community Education, Panamanian-Andean Youth, Cities to live in the Andean-Panamazon, Decolonization of Power and Community Self-Government, and Panamazon Communication for life.

With all that was experienced during Fospa, one of the most significant experiences - for me - was the format of coexistence with of nature that developed in the youth space.

The Youth Bureau made two field trips, one called the "Toxic Tour" route and the next the "Good Living" route, both of which took place in the native communities in Lamas. The first route showed the populations that suffer from problems of contamination of the water and air. This is a result of the liquid waste being dumped into the rivers and streams. The second route showed that resistance is possible, and the struggle to take care of the land is ongoing every day. Good living is possible.

After going through these routes, we took time to reflect on what we had seen and what concrete commitments these realities called us to. At the end of the day, these conclusions were presented to all the people gathered at FOSPA who participated in other spaces of dialogue.

For me, it has been really inspiring to see the leadership of the youth defending the Amazon (and the Andes), its biodiversity and its peoples, as an essential condition for the life of humanity.

Walking in the Amazon has made me vibrate! How wonderful is the creation of God! Struggles for the care of creation have concrete faces! We need to continue working from where we are for the defense of our common home! Our concern remains for the future, the most vulnerable populations, and for the generations to come, so we continue to articulate efforts that lead us to live the Laudato Si. We must continue to build better living conditions for all. It is our duty.

RAISING AWARENESS OF ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE THROUGH FILM

Every first Monday (or on a day close to it) since December 2015, residents of a senior living complex have been joined by Texas Master Naturalists, environmental activists, students, professors and the merely curious to see the latest screening in the Headwaters at Incarnate Word Environmental Film Series.

Kristina Treviño, a Headwaters volunteer and professor of chemistry and environmental sciences at the University of the Incarnate Word, never misses a film. Treviño first saw the films announced in a newsletter for volunteers and continues to attend because of her strong belief in the efficacy of education and the message of the film, which she describes as "we are the change that the world needs."

"[The films] motivate me to keep educating my students and people about our world's position," she said. She encourages her students to attend the films and volunteer with her in the Headwaters preserve.

The Headwaters at Incarnate Word is “a sponsored Earthcare ministry of the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word [abbreviated CCVI for its Latin name],” according to Pamela Ball, its associate director.

“CCVI have made a conscious effort to save the last 53 acres of their original estate for the betterment of the Earth and the local community, and recognize the importance of reflection, eco-restoration, and environmental education,” said Headwaters Executive Director Alex Antram.

The educational rights to the films are purchased by Headwaters so that they can be shown numerous times and loaned to community organizations free of charge. Some of the organizations that utilize the Headwaters film lending library include the Sol Center of University Presbyterian Church, Adult Learning in Retirement, and Phil Hardberger Park Conservancy.

Headwaters is sponsoring films for the coming “Children in Nature” series at Phil Hardberger Park on May 13.

Ball said the films are offered “to raise awareness of issues of environmental justice with the hope of building a community of like-minded people, and to broaden contact with them and the Headwaters.” The film series also aims to “initiate or reinforce each individual’s connection to the Earth and need to be a steward of the Earth.”

Following the March 6 screening of Leonardo DiCaprio’s *Before the Flood*, Ball waved a sheaf of papers in the air and exhorted viewers to act upon what they had seen and heard by making personal changes. Some possible actions on the list that Ball distributed included reducing beef consumption, embracing electronic billing, changing to Energy Star-rated light bulbs, stopping food waste, buying local products, and unplugging unused electronic devices.

She asked every person to commit to making one change.

“We provide ways that individuals can create change; not only changing their habits but communicating it to others,” she said.

Antram said the series is offered to “raise awareness of environmental issues including environmental justice (or lack thereof), inspire an individual and collective conservation ethic, and reconnect people with nature.” These objectives are part of the Headwaters’ goal “to help build a conservation community in San Antonio – across ages and including lay people,” and to take nature to the public including people with mobility limitations.

The Environmental Film Series, which is free and open to the public, continues on first Mondays at 3:30 p.m. in the Christus Heritage Hall at 4707 Broadway St.

(original article appeared in the Rivard Report, April 2, 2017)

Living Laudato Si: Incarnate Word Academy

Part of the mission of Incarnate Word Academy is to “make a positive impact on the world,” which includes all of creation, not just human beings. Bringing in the whole of creation to their mission, it is no surprise to learn about the many ways they actively engage students, staff, and families in making a positive impact on the world by caring for our common home.

One piece of creation which is vital for life is water, and this is an area that IWA has actively been involved in protecting and making accessible for at risk communities around the world. A couple years ago students and staff listened to a presentation about the organization Water With Blessings, and were inspired to get involved to support clean water for communities in countries throughout Africa, Asia, and Latin America who don’t easily have access. Through various class fundraisers students raised money for many water filters as part of this program.

At the local level IWA also installed a water fountain in each building where you can easily fill up your reusable water bottles and students, faculty, and staff are all encouraged to use reusable bottles or cups rather than plastic water bottles.

In line with eliminating waste, recycling is very present throughout IWA. There are single stream recycling bins in every classroom, and even when students or faculty leave the classroom they promote recycling wherever they go, making sure to always bring an extra bag for recyclable products in case there isn't one available.

Energy is another way that IWA collaborates with the surrounding community. Sr. Pat Kelly CCVI started the energy care program through Ameren, providing reduced energy costs and winterization for poor and vulnerable families. IWA continue the legacy of Sr. Pat Kelly by hosting an annual blanket drive where 200-300 blankets are collected and distributed to those in need, as well as sending groups of students and faculty/staff out into the community to winterize the homes of those in need. IWA also hosts the annual Trivia Night fundraiser for Energy Care and students, staff, and faculty all volunteer to make that possible.

Incarnate Word Academy has dreams for the future about continuing to beautify the areas around campus and even looking into the possibilities of starting their own community garden. Through the many programs and initiatives they currently have and will develop in the future, we lift up and thank IWA for incorporating into their mission a concern for making a positive impact on our mother earth, our common home.

Sister Story: Sr. Bernadette Azuela

Our sister Bernadette Azuela (1931-2008) believed in social justice and lived accordingly. When we hear her name, we are reminded of her creativity, her prophetic witness with the poor, and her loving care for God's creation. In this reflection, our sister Ivonne Ramirez shares with us a few of her memories of Bernadette, many of which continue to live on and inspire our ongoing actions and decisions for justice, peace, and the care of creation.

For me, Sr. Bernadette Azuela was a sister that deeply involved herself in whatever she was doing. If she heard something interesting on the radio, she would call to congratulate whoever said it. In the same way she would also speak out when she disagreed with something or she saw an injustice.

In this way she arrived to San Andres Tuxtla and started to get to know the people, inviting some to accompany her to the Center of Social Rehabilitation (CERESO) and became more and more involved in the prison ministry there.

Later on, she became interested in ministering to migrants, especially those from El Salvador who were fleeing to Mexico to escape the war. She got a house in Chapantongo Hidalgo in order to offer hospitality and assist them with finding jobs in the surrounding areas. But many of the Salvadorans preferred to return to their home country, or in Mexico they preferred to stay near the Capital where they could stay better informed and connected to others.

Sr. Bernadette therefore decided to dedicate the house to promoting ecology and finding economic alternatives that could benefit the community. Her famous "pomade" against pain made from various herbal medicines was a big success because it was very effective, not just for rheumatic pain but also of other aches and pains.

She responded to the need to accompany her mother in her final years, but also always found time to actively participate in commissions and congregational activities, as well as

continuing to care for the house in Chapantongo through which many different people and lay missionaries have passed.

When her mother died she dedicated herself completely to the Community of Chapantongo where she left a profound impact and had an active participation in the Social and Pastoral Ministry of the Diocese.

Bernadette struggled through various difficult illnesses but never let them defeat her spirit. A good part of her healing came from her “natural recipes” and above all her generous and perseverant attitude. Her sudden death had a profound impact on the surrounding community.

Bernadette died as she lived, always working on behalf of others with a special commitment to justice and the dignity of people who are the most marginalized in society.

Human Rights

UPDATE ON SOLIDARITY WITH PERU

El ‘niño costero’ in Peru exposed the precarious conditions in which millions of Peruvians live. As the Office of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation, we witnessed the mudslides and floods uncovering the lack of basic services and poor land management that affect our people in many parts of the country.

We visited the families in Carapongo and Cajamarquilla in Lima, bringing some help but above all our faith and commitment to accompany them in this process of reconstruction. Like us, thousands of young people and adults across the country gave their time and energy to help the thousands of families that were left with nothing. For me, those actions were very life giving and continue to motivate our commitment to the care of our common home: because the cry of the earth is the cry of the poorest.

One situation that worried us in our visits to vulnerable families in Lima is that although people have received support from different institutions, we observed conflicts between affected neighbors. These conflicts prevent them from organizing better. To understand this conflict, we recognized that the designation 'damnified' is understood as any person affected entirely, generally those who have been left without accommodation or housing. They do not have the capacity to recover their housing or possessions. While an 'affected' person is someone who suffers disruption in their environment from the effects of the disaster. And of course, they still require immediate support for the continuation of their normal daily living.

In light of this we have seen a strong call to work on accompaniment and listening, as well as conflict management in these neighborhoods. It is also necessary to promote a culture of care, especially in the responsible management of the garbage that prevents the channels of rivers from becoming obstructed.

With the commitment to continue supporting these communities after the emergency, we continue to work together with the different Religious Congregations in Peru. In fact, it is necessary to mention that these visits are carried out together with other working groups which we are part of as the JPIC Office: such as the Permanent Commission on Human Rights - JPIC and the Kawsay Peru Network of the Conference of Religious in Peru.

With all our heart we thank you for collaborating with us to make these gestures of hope that have led to solidarity with the most vulnerable families in Lima possible. Thanks a lot!

A REFLECTION ON RACISM AND SEXISM

Wednesday, March 8th I found myself amidst a line of women, linked hand in hand in solidarity for women’s rights locally and internationally. We wore the color black to honor and

remember those who lost their lives fighting for equality, representation, and justice. Additionally, we represented those in societies where women have limited presence outside of the traditional roles. As we looped around the Mercado Modelo and up towards the Plaza de Armas, I could not help but wonder where were all the other women in Chimbote? How does the struggle differ for Afro-Peruvian Women? and better yet how does my own experience as a Black Woman from the United States relates to the diaspora in Peru? Perhaps these questions do not have definite answers and maybe that is how it should be, for the vagueness leaves room for growth and improvement.

In conversations with Chimbotanos I often hear “We live in a machismo society.” This statement holds true in a consistent subtle manner. In the way that few women drive, men are not expected to contribute to the household besides providing income, and the domestic violence both physical and verbal that often goes unresolved, are just a few examples. Machismo, the strong and often aggressive masculine pride, is so rooted in the culture that often citizens do not realize that it is a problem worth correcting. Knowing that a female is unequal and treated more like an object rather than a whole person who deserves respect, can lead to complacency and jadedness if unable to find an outlet. The greater problem lies in when one has grown up in such a society that to consider an alternate way of living is beyond anyone’s imagining. However, that does not mean that all women are satisfied with the imbalance of power and willing to remain mute. I believe there is an undercurrent of dissatisfaction with the treatment of women both in Chimbote and even globally that has been made evident with campaigns such as “Ni una menos” and informational fairs encouraging women to speak up and step out of the abusive relationship.

“El que no tiene de Igna tiene de Mandigna”

Outside of the immediate context of Chimbote, the themes of racism and sexism touch women of color in Peru and the United States in parallel ways. As a Black American Woman raised in the land of freedom and the American Dream, the color of my skin and my gender automatically set me back from my peers. The moment I enter into the workforce my pay would most likely be less than that of my male counterparts and my features would not be deemed as beautiful but rather something to mock and change as a result of historical events. Recently throughout the United States, women of color have been making some headway with obtaining greater representation in the media and visual images. According to a Huffington Post article, Black feminists are pushing to be incorporated into the daily perception of beauty rather than as exotic or appropriated. The movement initially focused on reproductive issues, equality in health care prevention of sexual harassment, and other pertinent issues. However, Lindsay Hoffman, the writer, explains that “[today] the movement is pushing for the return of African-American women to African standards of beauty, as seen in the natural hair movement. In a society where only one type of beauty is celebrated, the Black feminist is working so that we not only call silky hair and light skin pretty but also coarse, kinky hair and dark skin.” TV shows such as “Scandal” and “Because of Jane” help to portray African American women who are intelligent, influential, and graceful. Opposed to the common “Angry black woman” or the “servant” stereotype. Thus improving the idea that Black woman can obtain high level positions and/or be educated. Fortunately, Black feminist are aiming to include voices of all minorities and to address the multifaceted nature of the woman.

The progress of the Black feminist movement has encouraged Latinas with African ancestry to unite by creating a label for themselves: Afro-Latinas. Unfortunately, media often omits or rather diminishes cultural diversity both within the United States and Latin America. The issue of colorism, which is privileging lighter skin over darker skin, within Peru specifically, creates a false reality that is then attempted to be made real via individual interactions and governmental legislation. From a CNN article commenting on the complexities of prejudice in Peru, the piece explains that “the country has socio-economic gaps along race lines and its inherent, if subtle,

discrimination can mean an indigenous woman may only ever work as a maid; a black man may only ever aspire to be a hotel doorman.” In other words, fair skinned women with the ideal body type, following European beauty standards, are those who have the best entertainment roles, jobs, and overall societal treatment. Yet this ignores so many of those who have contributed to the country’s story. But as a foreigner, I did not want to force my experiences and understanding of racism to that of Peru’s. Therefore, out of curiosity I asked Peruvian women their perspective on racism and gender discrimination in Peru.

Initially, their responses invited me to think that racism does not really exist in Chimbote or Peru at large. Instead the use of words such as “Negra” and “Morena” are used to identify someone because of their difference just as one might say “Gorda” or “Flaca.” However from Afro Peruvians themselves, their experiences say otherwise. From a Youtube channel, Una Chica Afroperuana, two girls talk about comments they are tired of hearing. Comments such as, “eres bonita para ser negra/ you are pretty for a black girl” and “la mayoria de cosas negativas, lo vinculamos con el color negro/ the majority of negative things are described with the color black.” In other words, being black is associated to being not good enough and the very word has negative connotations. One has to wonder why hardly anyone says “you are pretty for a white girl.” These examples show that perhaps the racial discrimination may not be as apparent or oblivious as in the United States but it exists nonetheless.

If we follow the definition of the word “racism,” the belief that a particular race is superior or inferior to another thus determining cultural or individual achievement; then clearly Afro-Peruvian women are combating against more than machismo. Fortunately, their voices are beginning to be acknowledged. From a BBC article In 2010, Frecuencia Latina, a popular Peruvian channel, suspended a popular comedic character called El Negro Mama due to threat of legal action from Lundu, an African-Peruvian civil rights organisation led by Monica Carrillo. In 2012, an Afro-Peruvian woman became the first to win a racial discrimination case in Peru. Activist groups such as Ashanti Peru, based in Lima, make it their mission to strengthen Afro identity, leadership, human rights, and culture, locally and nationally.

Regrettably, women are still dealing with too many setbacks in today’s society, but if we choose to unite under dignity and love for one another, change is possible. With organizations such as La Casa de la Mujer, Lundu, and Ashanti Peru, the fight to continue uplifting women regardless of economic standing, cultural makeup, or skin color will persist. While keeping in mind women’s rights and equal representation. Thus, using International Women’s Day, not just a day to celebrate the power and beauty of women, but rather the reminder that yes, we have come along way, but we still have a long way to go! In the words of Bell Hooks, an American feminist and social activist, “The moment we choose to love we begin to move towards freedom.”

By Selene Mitchell - Incarnate Word Missionary

Peace

U.S. CATHOLICS: WRITE YOUR BISHOP TO ENCOURAGE HIS SUPPORT OF ACTIVE NONVIOLENCE.

“Instruments of reconciliation” is a new national campaign to amplify active nonviolence in the U.S. Catholic Church. Catholics in other parts of the world might adapt the information for their local situations.

Catholics in the United States are asked to choose one of three dates during May to share their hope for greater teaching and commitment to active nonviolence with their bishop and to invite him to affirm active nonviolence as the “nucleus of the Christian revolution” by 1) sharing

and speaking about Pope Francis' World Day of Peace message broadly within their diocese, seminaries, and other ministries and 2) concretely committing to an initiative to scale-up practices of active nonviolence.

As Pope Benedict wrote, "For Christians, nonviolence is not merely tactical behavior but a person's way of being, the attitude of one who is so convinced of God's love and power that he or she is not afraid to tackle evil with the weapons of love and truth alone. Love of one's enemy constitutes the nucleus of the 'Christian revolution.'"

In a time when violence continues to dominate our families, our neighborhoods, and our cities – and violence is increasingly becoming the way our country deals with conflict – we want our bishops to know there are voices for active nonviolence within his diocese. We want to encourage them to embrace Pope Francis' call to active nonviolence. We want to support our bishops in their efforts, like Pope Francis, who pledged the assistance of the church in "every effort to build peace through active and creative nonviolence." Some dioceses – such as the Archdiocese of Chicago – are already experimenting with a commitment to a culture of nonviolence and practical steps to greater active nonviolence to address tensions and crime within the diocese. Pope Francis wrote them a letter of encouragement.

We believe a concerted effort during the month of May will have a positive impact on our bishops and U.S. church. May is traditionally "Mary's month" and Mary is the "Queen of Peace." The bishops themselves will be meeting over the summer. In May we expect the bishops of the United States of America to receive more than 10,000 letters encouraging them to bold teaching and practice of active nonviolence—and committing ourselves to do the same.

Immigration

SOLIDARITY MARCH AND MASS WITH IMMIGRANTS AND REFUGEES

On Saturday, April 8, 2017 hundreds of people gathered at the campus of St. Louis University to stand and march in solidarity with our immigrant and refugee neighbors. This Solidarity March and Mass at the St. Louis Cathedral Basilica was sponsored by the Archdiocese of St. Louis and co-sponsored by a number of other religious congregations including the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word. Present at the march representing the Congregation was Sr. Anne Marie Burke, Sr. Pilar Neira, and Jennifer Reyes Lay.

The group gathered began the event with a series of prayers and songs in both English and Spanish, and reflections led by immigrants and refugees and those who serve them. Then after about 30 minutes we began a march of solidarity down Lindell Ave. for about one mile, carrying signs of support welcoming immigrants and refugees as a faith commitment. There were also songs and chants as we marched both in English and Spanish.

The march ended at the Cathedral Basilica of St. Louis where a Mass of Solidarity was celebrated. The Mass was a beautiful multi-cultural celebration incorporating seven languages throughout in prayer and song. The homilist exclaimed with great joy that this was the first Mass celebrated in Spanish in the Basilica and the whole congregation gathered applauded and cheered! It was truly a beautiful witness of the diverse Catholic community in St. Louis coming together to celebrate our faith and show our commitment to standing together in these difficult times.

News

SUSTAINABLE EVENTS WEBINAR

On May 17th and 18th the JPIC Office hosted webinars in English and Spanish on sustainable event planning. Around 60 people participated in these webinars including many participants from our various CCVI sponsored ministries and institutions. These webinars were in line with our congregational goal of ensuring at least 50% of all materials and food/drink items used in meetings and events are environmentally friendly.

Content of the webinar included a brief review of the corporate action for the care of creation and then a concrete list of how to know if you are planning a sustainable event. Participants were able to reflect on what they are already doing and share ideas about ways to improve. We are grateful for all that is already happening throughout the Congregation and our institutions, and will continue to support one another in hosting even more sustainable meetings and events!

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Theological and social reflection

COMMITTED TO LIFE

The focus of gender in light of current challenges

By Dr. Sandra Lassak*

Talking about feminism and theology may seem like a contradiction, which isn't surprising given the inequality between men and women: the structural oppression of women, femicide, divorced couples, and discrimination against homosexuals among others.

Despite the fact that for decades women have been doing theology in our churches and theological spaces, most of these spaces remain highly patriarchal, if not downright misogynistic. The identities of women are fixed, formed around constructions of gender and sexuality justified by a religious and theological discourse which promotes the ideal woman as: virgin, submissive and servile. From this dichotomy of macho men and servile women a whole system of inequality and oppression based on gender has been constructed and continues to be maintained in some ways to this day.

Theology seems to be a field of men, despite the fact that women have been doing theology for decades, and it is because within the pyramidal structure of the Church we are outside the positions of power and decision making. Changing or questioning the structures and ideologies of this system is not in the interests of some male pastors, priests and theologians because it would weaken the power they

want to maintain. That is why we find so much resistance and rejection to gender theories, because it is an approach that shows the unjust inequalities and offers help to overcome them in order to build communities of equals.

Since it emerged in the 1980s, feminist theology has been a theology articulated from the marginalized experiences of women and at the same time a critique of the patriarchal character of Theology. Based on realities and concrete experiences of women, feminist theology was part of the feminist movement, sharing the struggles for a social and political transformation, for equality, and dignified conditions for all. Therefore, feminist theology is not a theology only of women and for women, but is a theology that problematizes 'gender' and therefore should be important to all.

Clarification of feminism and why it is important to continue talking about feminism

Declaring oneself a feminist puts you in a position of suspicion accompanied by images and prejudices such as being a macho dressed as a woman, a lesbian, a woman who hates men, etc. However, national and international news indicate that misogyny, oppression and violence against women continue to be one of the biggest problems today at the global level.

In times of capitalist expansion, new excluded groups are spreading with greater speed and brutality, and among them are women. Social, political and economic interests have created structures of inequality throughout the centuries. And although thanks to the struggles of so many women - which have occurred throughout history – there have been some changes achieved, there is still a long way to go to have societies and communities of equals.

Women still belong to the most disadvantaged group. They are the most affected by violence, poverty and discrimination as well as by the ecological crisis. They suffer from the effects of climate catastrophes, land grabbing and the destruction of life's foundations. Faced with this situation it is imperative to ask for new forms of solidarity including regional, national and international. How can we, in these struggles for better living conditions, dignity and equal rights, connect and share among all women, who from different local contexts are organizing to promote processes of change (for example, the 'Ni una menos' or Women's March)? How can we and should we be part of this work as Christians?

In Latin America, religion has sold itself out by having an important role in the construction of gender legitimizing a patriarchal, capitalist and heteronormative social and economic system. Therefore, doing a social analysis we cannot leave out a religious analysis and a critical theological view. It is also important to see the variety and diversity of experiences of oppression, recognizing the same structures of inequality and power behind them. Because at the core of talking about and analyzing gender relations is talking about power relations.

The conception of gender does not depend on an a-cultural biological determinism, but rather on each culture and worldview, “in that sense, every society, every community, every group and every person has a particular gender conception, based on their own culture.¹” We learn from childhood to identify with the worldview and conception of gender roles in our culture. Because in the nation we live, as Simone de Beauvoir one of the first great women's rights defenders said, “One isn't born a woman, one becomes a woman.”

¹ Lagarde, Marcela, “El género, fragment literal: ‘La perspectiva de género’, en Género y feminismo. Desarrollo humano y democracia. Ed. horas y HORAS, España, 1996, pp. 13-38.

Current challenges

According to theologian Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, theology always has to do with dreams and visions of a more just and united world; an issue that deeply touches humanity.² For this reason, it is necessary to articulate a de-patriarchalization and decolonization from and with the women who, in their daily struggles, face colonial, capitalist and patriarchal oppression.

They are peasant women, indigenous, from popular urban sectors and also women who question - from their individual and collective experience - colonial and patriarchal relations; who fight together to overcome all kinds of oppression. In this way "... feminism is not just another theory, it is a theory, a conception, a worldview, a philosophy, a politics born from the most rebellious women against patriarchy,"³ says Bolivian Aymara, Julieta Paredes. Practically, feminism is a way of life, "a new way of understanding life and human relations,"⁴ as theologian Ivone Gebara puts it.

The reality of our world, challenges us to permanently relocate in different senses, to leave the offices, the classrooms, the parishes, and place ourselves in the 'street'. Displacement impacts us, we will have to move from traditional spaces of religion and oppression and search for new spaces where more integral and equal spiritualities can be lived.

From the pluralities we have to construct new forms of heterogeneous and inclusive communities of coexistence with all people, with nature, and between countries and continents, and break down the mental as well as social, economic and political barriers and hierarchies.

What nourishes us is a spirituality of resistance and rebellion fueled by the sharing of realities and daily struggles, of solidarity and sisterhood. This spirituality is made real through action, a collective and diverse expression that seeks to build new relationships and another world of which we all dream. This is the only way we will be able to offer relevant contributions to the questions and problems that people live today. Because the discipleship and following of Jesus requires us to be part of the processes towards equality and justice.

Questions for reflection:

- What would it mean to decolonize and de-patriarchalize?
- What does it mean to do theology from our context, our social and pastoral commitments?
- For what would I want to make a commitment?

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² Vease Schüssler Fiorenza, Elisabeth, *Discipulado de Iguales, Una Ekklesia-lógica Feminista de Liberación*. (Mujeres haciendo Teología desde Bolivia – Volumen III), p.214-235.

³ Paredes Julieta, en: Gargallo Francesca, *Feminismos desde Abya Yala, Ideas y proporciones de las mujeres de 607 comunidades de nuestra América*, Ciudad de México 2014, p. 96.

⁴ Gebara, Ivone, *Las aguas de mi pozo. Reeflexiones sobre experiencias de libertad*, Montevideo 2005, 133.