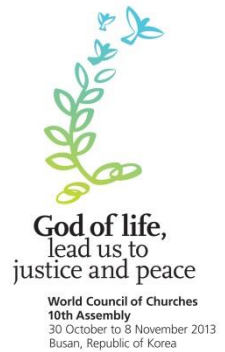


## **Beginning the Pilgrimage Towards Justice: a study guide for congregations and ecumenical pilgrims**

**Dr Emily Welty**

Part of the pilgrimage journey entails meeting other pilgrims along the way and being shaped by their stories. This short study guide provides the opportunity to encounter seven fellow pilgrims and to hear about the ways they experience the struggle for justice in different contexts.



This conversation took place as part of the plenary session on justice during the World Council of Churches 10th Assembly in Busan, South Korea on 6 November 2013. To watch the full proceedings of the plenary, go to <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r488zJ39RiE>.

The prevailing globalized culture seems to accept and legitimize social, economic and ecological injustice - so much so that human ecological abuse, exclusion and impoverishment of the vulnerable and the denial of the rights and dignity of many particularly people with disabilities, women, children and people with HIV/AIDS are increasingly seen as inevitable fallout in a world gripped by the logic of dominion, growth and greed. This institutionalization of injustice is an outstanding mark of our present civilization posing very serious challenges to the moral and spiritual integrity of our generation. Injustice has always been a part of human history; but the injustice of our generation to the earth and to our own brothers and sisters does not seem to have parallels.

Churches need to recognize the moral imperative of confronting injustice as an integral part of "costly discipleship". For the WCC, in particular, justice has been at the core of its work. We all know WCC's involvement in the struggle against apartheid, in solidarity with women, for eco-justice. This is part of the legacy of the ecumenical movement.

Joining together on a common journey as pilgrims requires trust, mutual sharing of resources and a commitment to share our stories and struggles in an environment of care and discipleship. You are invited to join this common path, traveling together towards peace and justice.

*Martin Khor is executive director of the South Centre, an intergovernmental policy research and analysis institution based in Penang, Malaysia. He is an expert in issues of international trade justice, globalization and development.*

“There are two ways of looking at justice. You can do justice when something has gone wrong – you wipe up the mess, try to give money to the poor and so on. But that doesn’t really get to the roots of the problem. So what we need to do is to look at the policies that have been designed to lead to poverty and injustice. And then we need to tackle those policies at the root if we are really to solve this problem. So I just want to bring out four major issues.

- 1) The world financial crisis. We are all suffering from it and the reason is that the governments, particularly in the United States and Europe, have designed the economy in such a way as to give priority to the financial institutions. It wasn’t like that before – after the Second World War finance was relatively tame and regulated. You couldn’t transfer money abroad unless you were trading and so on but today they have deregulated so that finance becomes a monster in itself that needs to be reregulated. ... So because of the greed of those who control these financial institutions and work on them, they have disrupted the whole global economy including in the developing countries, including the unregulated flows of funds from the developed countries to the developing countries. When the funds come in, it causes a lot of problems... And when the funds flow out – because interest rates have gone back up in Europe or in the United States then you cause a lot of devastation. So the re-regulation of finance is something that is very important that we need to call for, we need to understand the issues and we need to call for reforms.
- 2) Trade Rules. We have rules in the WTO and new free trade agreements – for example, we are negotiating the trans-Pacific partnership agreement in this specific part of the world and they contain many provisions, many rules that are very unfair. For example the rules on agriculture allow the rich countries to continue to subsidize their agriculture sector to the tune of 400 billion dollars a year when developing countries are not allowed to subsidize.

I did a study on Africa and I found that the African countries were doing very well on agriculture and food production but then when the World Bank and IMF came in because these countries fell into debt, they were asked to cut their tariffs down to almost zero and withdraw their subsidies to agriculture. As a result, the efficient farmers of Africa could not compete against the cheap imports that were coming in that were being sold below production cost - whether it is chickens from Europe or rice from the United States or tomatoes from Europe - Africa is not able to produce its own food. And what do we do? We say “oh these Africans don’t know how to produce their own food.” And we feel very good for our conscience when we donate food as food aid. We say that it is justice. It is not justice.

Another very bad rule in the WTO which is made worse by the free trade agreements concerns intellectual property rights and patented medicines. They are selling the AIDS medicine for \$15,000 per patient per year until an Indian company was able to produce it and today they are selling it for \$60 per patient per year. But new medicines are being sold very expensively. If you have cancer, you need \$6000 to treat a cancer patient per month. Now fortunately an Indian company is able to produce it for \$200 but then you need a compulsory license. It is very, very cumbersome. Many millions of lives are being lost that way. We have to re-examine intellectual property rules in relation to essential medicines like these.

- 3) Bilateral investment treaties – All of our governments were signing these treaties thinking that they would bring in foreign investments but now it is shown through the tribunals that the investor – the foreign company is able to sue the government for loss of future profits. And what is the loss of future profits? If the government introduces a new policy – environment or health or economic – that affects the future revenue of this company, the company can sue and claim back all the compensation in relation to future losses in an international court thereby bypassing the international laws. Many of our countries are now being sued. Ecuador had an award against it for 2.3 billion dollars because it cancelled the contract of an American company that had violated the contract by selling itself to another company. The court said yes, that company had violated that contract but nevertheless it has lost money so please pay this company 2.3 billion dollars. We have similar cases being taken up against Indonesia, against India, against many other countries.
- 4) And finally – on the environmental side – on climate change, biodiversity and so on. The rich countries have already violated their own environment and damaged the global environment. The industrial revolution and all the policies they have had since then – we have very limited environmental space left whether it is climate change or whether it is resources – they have to be shared in a fair manner. **Those who have already grown rich by exploiting the world's resources must now change their lifestyles.**

When I was a student, I was in the young Christian Students movement and we had this big debate among ourselves: is it enough to pray? Is it enough to do good work? It was pray vs. do good work – and of course we came to the conclusion that we have to do both. Be church and act. Look at Jesus Christ himself –he did pray of course, but he also acted. He went to the temple and he saw that there were greedy people who were excessively making profit by selling things. He said, get rid of these things – he went into action himself – spontaneous action.

Similarly he said that “I pity all these rich people because it is more difficult for them to go heaven than for a camel” – Jesus was very strict! – “then for a camel to go through the eye of a needle!” Now I don’t think he was saying “you people are finished and condemned.” I think he was saying – “You have to reform! You have to reform the system itself!”

The people have to reform the system. What is important is for the church – whether it is ordinary people or the leaders - to keep pace with current events as they take place and to analyze the root causes so that we are able to address these root causes rather than allow the situation to deteriorate and then we just do good by helping the poor through charity. **The poor do not need charity – they need us to tackle the structural causes and structures that give rise to this very sinful situation that we have today.”**

Questions to continue the conversation:

- How was your context affected by the 2008 financial crisis?
- Where and how have you experienced the effects of trade rules? When you purchase food, is it grown in your own country? Does this matter?
- Do you know much about your country’s bilateral investment treaties? Do you see this as an important issue for your church? Do you know how and where your church invests its money?
- Can everyone in the world maintain the same lifestyle that you currently have? If not, how might God be challenging you to stewardship?

Psalm 122: 1-4

I was glad when they said to me, “Let us go to the house of the Lord!” Our feet are standing within your gates, O Jerusalem. Jerusalem – built as a city that is bound firmly together. To it the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, as was decreed for Israel, to give thanks to the name of the Lord

*Dr Julia Duchrow is an international human rights lawyer working with Brot für die Welt in Berlin, Germany. She is an expert in human rights and civil society.*

“Human rights are of utmost importance to create an equal and just society because it creates accountability for state policies and state activities. I think it is nothing new to the World Council of Churches to work on human rights and enforce human rights especially with its Programme to Combat Racism in the past it has done really big work to shape the human rights perspective there. **I think it comes from the faith-based perspective that human beings are made in the image of God and that human dignity exists for all human beings no matter which faith they come from, no matter which race, which group, whatever – and even if they are persons with no faith.** The idea of the protection of human dignity is in the core as well of human rights.

Human rights spelled out in different conventions and resolutions are the obligations of states to protect this human dignity by protecting the civil, political rights but also the economic, social and cultural rights. That means, for example, for the local levels – local governments, local authorities – that they have to provide for equal access to education and equal access to health but also on a global level, it puts obligations on states to create a good new framework for sustainable development goals in 2015.

Human rights don’t fall from the sky. They always have been the result of struggles of people to implement human rights but also to create new perspectives and new instruments of human rights and I think this is the role we have as church – to support these struggles to create new human rights instruments and to ask for the implementation of human rights.

There’s a new field to pay attention to - the activities of private corporations. We see that many private corporations – multinational corporations or companies – do violate human rights especially when they have this example of the Posco company in Orissa in India where about 30,000 people will lose their livelihood just because a company will construct a steel company and create deforestation there.

It’s really important to find ways to make private companies accountable to human rights and we have to support organizations and civil society. We have to stand side by side civil society organizations and unions and churches despite the fact that at the moment there is a mood that NGO laws are entrenched and that people are being put into jail. The political space for civil society activities to create a better human rights framework and ask for implementation and fulfillment of the state obligations is shrinking and I think this is where our responsibility lies – to support these.

I think that we see that many people who fight and question the root causes of the structures, who fight for better environmental issues, who demonstrate against nuclear plants or who question injustices are under pressure at the moment. Look at those who fight for justice and who fight against the ecological crisis and who question the system. They are under pressure. Stand

side by side with them. Support human rights defenders, protect them and show that you are side by side and that you support that struggle. I think that's what we have to do."

Questions to continue the conversation:

- Who is speaking prophetically for human rights in your context?
- What are the risks of speaking truth to power? How does the model of Christ empower us?
- How can we show our solidarity with those who risk their lives for human rights for all?
- How can we hold private companies accountable to the citizens living in the countries where they are working?

*Intercessions for Justice*

Reader One: God of life, listen to the groan of the dispossessed and displaced.

Reader Two: We pray for farmers, indigenous peoples, and the poor, whose land has been stolen. We pray for the powerless, whose land has been occupied. God of life,  
Everyone: hear our prayer.

Reader One: God of justice, listen to the cry of those who hunger and thirst.

Reader Two: We pray that those who have too little will have enough. We pray that those who have more than enough will be moved to share. God of justice,  
Everyone: hear our prayer.

Reader One: God of peace, listen to those who yearn for healing.

Reader two: We pray for people suffering violence of body, soul and mind. We pray for the vulnerable in our homes, in our churches, in our countries. We pray for the wounded and tortured in places of conflict. We pray for those who commit violence. God of peace,  
Everyone: hear our prayer. Amen.

*Bishop Josip of Pathara is from the Ecumenical Patriarchate and is the general vicar of the Archdiocese of Buenos Aires and South America.*

“Someone once asked the Teacher, “What is the greatest commandment?” And the Teacher replied, “You shall love the Lord, your God with all of your spirit, you mind and your heart.” This is the greatest commandment but there is another that is similar. “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” And so, the Teacher gave us another commandment in another part of the Gospel that relates with the first one. It is the new commandment: “that you all love one another as I have loved you.”

According to our perspective, that is the foundation of justice – the commandment of God, the commandment of love – because there is no justice without love, there is no justice without God.

Our God, who since the beginning of all things, created with love. Our God who maintains all of his creation with love, our God who redeems that creation with love and endlessly perfects it until the second coming of Jesus Christ – all of that is God’s justice. All of that is God’s love to which we are called. Because of this, we cannot achieve justice, we will not have peace if we do not have God. It is because of this that there is only one path to true justice and true peace – to return to Christ.

In the end, the issue of justice in this world is not a moral or ethical issue. Ultimately, I believe it is a spiritual issue. **If we want justice and peace, we must accept Christ. Without Christ, there will be no justice. Christ is hope. Christ is God’s justice incarnate. Christ is with us and if Christ is with us, we are the images of Christ in this world.**

This world has many injustices. This world of injustice seems very difficult to change – perhaps for us it is. Maybe for us it is very difficult and almost impossible, but for God, it is not impossible. If God is with us and above all things (and I will be bold) with God in us, nothing is impossible. That is why, if we want justice, we need to return to Christ. There are many ways, all the ways the Holy Spirit has allowed and allows, in all the religious spheres in which the presence lives. Because the Spirit is freedom, the spirit is diversity and because of this we have many ways to do it. Do we have it in us or not to choose if we want Christ, if we want peace and justice? If this is what we want, the course will take us first to Christ, then to peace and justice through love.

[What is the way towards justice?] I would like to finish with just this brief meaningful wish. I wish that Christ be with you all – nothing more. When we leave this assembly, we all keep Christ in our horizon and we all identify with him and go and ignite Christ’s presence in us. ...and not only with words, but with courageous, prophetic actions, without losing ourselves but also leaving behind all the preconceptions that tie us to ourselves, to our confessions, perhaps, to our own religiosity as well – in order to be free and to serve Christ in the world. Christ be with you all.”

Questions to continue the conversation:

- In contexts of injustice, what does it mean to love our neighbor as Christ has loved us? When you hear these words, who is the neighbor that is difficult to love and how might the love of God be made visible?
- What would it look like for the world to “return to Christ”? How would you see changes in your own family, church, community and nation?
- Bishop Josip challenges us to think of justice in terms of love. How might the work of justice look differently if we frame it in these terms?

*Prayer of confession and reassurance*

Leader: When we ignore the beauty of creation,

Response: how terrible for us.

Leader: When trees are torn down and forests become deserts,

Response: how terrible for us.

Leader: When bees die and mango trees no longer have fruit,

Response: how terrible for us.

Leader: When we mine the land for its gold and oil yet millions have no food,

Response: how terrible for us.

Leader: When we know what we should do yet walk the other way,

Response: how terrible for us.

Leader: For we bring God’s anger upon ourselves, and we walk into outer darkness.

God of all creation, hear the confession of our hearts. Send your Spirit to renew the whole creation as we proclaim the everlasting love of your Son.

Response: Amen.



*Rev. Phumzile Mabizela is the executive director of the International Network of Religious Leaders — Lay and Ordained Living with or Personally Affected by HIV (Inelera+). She is an ordained Presbyterian minister and a powerful activist for gender justice and advocacy for people living with HIV/AIDS.*

“As a religious leader who is openly living with HIV, I would like to congratulate the World Council of Churches for giving me a platform to speak for myself. **I think that one of the injustices that has been perpetuated by the church is taking and using our authority to speak on behalf of those who are not in the forefront.** And it is important for us as people who are directly affected by issues to be able to speak for ourselves. We also have this gift of dignity and we have a lot to share with the church.

**The issue of justice should not be an optional extra for the church. It should be the core of our ministry.** It’s not only the responsibility of NGOs to understand some of these governmental frameworks and policies but we as a people who believe in a God of justice should understand them and hold our governments accountable.

On the issue of healing – we as the church have lied to people. We have privatized the whole idea healing and we have told people that if you don’t have faith, you shall not be healed. We need to be prophets and say to people – you have a right to healing and give people appropriate, accurate information.

**Therefore it is our responsibility to empower ourselves with comprehensive strategies that have been developed all over the world to help us fully understand HIV not only as a medical issue but also as a social justice issue.** It is very sad that in this meeting, almost 30% of us are from rich countries and these are the very same countries that have deprived people like myself who are living with HIV of the right of access to medicine. This is greed and we need to call it as such. We need to challenge them and the advocates and make sure that all the people in the world who need to have access to medicine, have access to medicine because medicines are a gift from God. Medicines need to be seen, not as a curse. We know that there are pastors who are telling people “stop taking your medication, you will be healed if I pray for you, you can treat these conditions but it’s only God who heals”.

Then there is the issue of gender injustice. We as the church, we have used our sacred text to justify gender injustice. That is why women continue to be violated. That is why we have such high rates of rape within our countries – it’s because the church is silent and has actually influenced people’s attitudes towards how we view women. I would like to say that **we as women are the backbone of the church. If we were to walk away from the church, there would be no church.** Therefore, it is important for our leaders to reinterpret the Gospel so that it makes sense to me as a village woman who is living with HIV. **This patriarchal and androcentric language we have used for a very long time is very destructive and has diminished the image of God within me.**

As the church, we have the responsibility to be advocates. When we get invited to important meetings that are organized by the UN agencies, let us use those opportunities to hold them accountable and to challenge them to remember the poor and the poorest who also have a voice and who can be agents as well.

Prayer is very important and that is something that we can do very well. However, prayer on its own shall not bring us justice, it needs to go together with action where we speak out as advocates and as prophets. **We need to go out of our safe ministries and distress those who are comfortable and comfort those who are in distress.** I really believe that important issues like our sexuality – whether it is heterosexuality or homosexuality – should be right in the center of our mission. **We cannot ignore the fact that we as the body of Christ, we are diverse and we need to embrace that diversity and actually use it to strengthen our voice to strive for justice.**

Questions to continue the conversation:

- How can the church move from a position of speaking for the powerless to empowering people to speak for themselves and listening?
- How does the language that we use for God shape the way we see ourselves as God's creations?
- How does the church in your context work for gender justice?
- What does it mean to distress those who are comfortable and to comfort those who are distressed in your community?

### *Prayer of Confession of Injustice*

God, you ask for our courage to protect the powerless but we prefer to remain safe, preserving ourselves for future challenges.

You ask us to speak out for justice but we whisper, in case we are heard. You ask us to stand up for what is right, but we would rather blend in to the crowd.

You ask us to have faith, when doubting seems so much easier.

Lord forgive our calculated effort to follow you, only when it is convenient to do so, only with those who make it easy to do so.

Together we pray, God forgive and renew us; inspire us and challenge us so that we might risk the journey, to your kingdom with you. Amen.

*Rev. Tafue Lusama is general secretary at Ekalesia Kelisiano Tuvalu and chairperson of the Tuvalu Climate Action Network. He is a prophetic advocate speaking out against climate change and its effects on marginalized people.*

“I would like to talk about justice and injustice and climate change. I come from Tuvalu – an independent small island country in the middle of the vast Pacific Ocean. The highest point in my country is 4 meters above sea level – and mind you, this is just a point. The rest of the country is below that. My people are facing the brunt of the negative impacts of climate change. Their very lives are being challenged and are at stake. The traditional way of life of the people which they have depended on for survival has been challenged. Every sphere of life is threatened – from food security to health to our very identity. In fact, the totality of our very survival and existence as a people on the face of this planet is at stake.

Mind you, I am not only speaking about Tuvalu here – I am speaking about every individual country in the Pacific. The low-lying vulnerable countries in the world are facing the same threats from climate change. This challenges also our spirituality because if we look at the flood narrative we see that those who caused the problem were the ones who were swimming in the sea and the victims – or those who did not take part in creating this problem, were the ones who were on the ark of salvation. **In the face of climate change, the question always comes up – why us? Why do we have to face the consequences of something that we have no part in? Why are we being punished? And where is justice in this?**

How do we ensure the people who are being affected by climate change are given unassailable rights and assurance of life continuity and their dignity and that their identity will continue? **For me personally and my people, we don’t want the pity of the world. We want you to stand in solidarity with us in action.”**

Questions to continue the conversation:

- How is the flood narrative heard in your community when related to climate change?
- How might your home and context be affected by climate change now or in the future?
- What are our responsibilities to those affected by climate change?

*God of life, lead us to justice – of the table of abundance where there is room for all, where there is generous sharing so that no one lacks signs of your grace. God of life, lead us to justice and peace of people gathered around an open table of solidarity – a table at which you will wish to sit – so that together we can celebrate our faith.*

*Dr Lukas Andrianos is a Madagascar citizen living in Greece and working for the Ecumenical Patriarchate. He is an expert in sustainable development and ecological economics.*

“I live in Greece and Greece as all of you know is suffering from the economic crisis in Europe. So I would like to share with you the story of my life in that context. So just to start, I want to thank God for this moment. It is historical for eco-justice. I want to thank also our Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Green Patriarch, Holiness Bartholomew, for taking part as delegate for eco-justice issues.

I was born in Madagascar in a family that was very Christian but mixed with Catholic and Protestant. I was granted a scholarship to study in Greece for doctoral studies in ecological economics and sustainable development in Crete. During my studies my mother came to visit me but she passed away and I experienced the kindness of the church – a Greek church – at that time. I married a Greek lady and we have now three small kids and I am very concerned about the future of my kids.

Before the economic crisis in Europe, life in Greece was simple, normal – but beautiful. After the economic crisis, life is very difficult in Greece. Many people lose their jobs. My wife is jobless since the economic crisis. I also lost my position at the university and they stopped funding my job at the Orthodox Academy of Greece. Many, many people are suffering from hunger and homelessness – not because they don’t have food but because they don’t have money because of bankers - because of all the rich institutional, financial systems with their taxes, structural greed and power.

Many people are just killing themselves; we hear every day about suicides because they are hopeless. They find money is everything. If you don’t have money, there is no meaning to live. The economy of greed promotes hate, promotes hunger.

So I would like here to challenge the WCC and to thank the WCC because the issue of eco-justice has been raised. But that is not enough. I would challenge the WCC to undertake more actions and concretely denounce the economic and financial greed which is governing our lives. I pray that the WCC and all of the churches will be the living hope for this world and we will not serve the gospel of prosperity but we will live the gospel for the poor, the gospel of humanity and the gospel for the economy of life.”

Questions to continue the conversation:

- How have you and your family been affected by the economic crisis?
- How is the church responding to those in despair?
- Are you serving the gospel of prosperity or the gospel of the poor? How can your community encourage you and support you in working for the gospel of humanity?

*Shyreen Mvula is an activist and international speaker from Malawi who advocates for justice and health issues, particularly HIV/AIDS.*

“My name is Shyreen Mvula – I would like to talk about some of the things that we as young people who are living with HIV want from the church. I was born with HIV. I am 19 years old. As young people who are living with HIV, we want something to be done in the churches, not only in the hospitals. We want to be counseled spiritually. We want to be healed. We want healing ministries through our churches. I want something to be done in our churches.

Second, we also want sex education to be done in our churches because now sex education is only done in the hospitals. We don’t want this. We want sex education to first be done in the churches.

As young people who are living with HIV, we have got a lot of questions. I wonder if I may get married and have children. So it is very important that reproductive health should be discussed in our churches because some of the questions which we have can be answered by our church leaders.

Besides that, I am HIV positive. I don’t want to have children who are HIV positive. I want to have children who are HIV negative.

And lastly I would like to end on this – HIV and AIDS is not a punishment from God. It is just a disease. So join us in the fight against this disease.”

Questions to continue the conversation:

- How can the churches engage in healing ministries for those living with HIV/AIDS? What is your church doing now? How could it do more?
- What is the role of the church in providing sex education? How might the messages shared by a church differ from those shared in other places?

*Prayer*

God of Justice, you have poured out your gifts upon us.

Through your Holy Spirit,

May we use them to live out your reign of justice.

God of Life, lead us to justice and peace.

*Proverbs 8: 20* I walk in the way of righteousness, along the paths of justice...

*Song: Until all are fed*