

GROWING Together

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JUBILEE: RENEWING OUR VISION

Y2K! The third millennium! People are approaching the year 2000 in a variety of ways. A retired school teacher from Winnipeg plans to cycle around the world. A factory worker in Detroit will fly to Nepal to watch the sun rise over the Himalayas on the first day. Britain is building a dome. Members of a doomsday cult have settled in Jerusalem awaiting Armageddon. In the Third World most will wake up to another day of famine and war.

There is yet another response. In Canada, supporters of the Ecumenical Jubilee Initiative are calling for a radical new social vision. With Christians worldwide, they are determined to bring healing and hope to deeply indebted Third World nations.



THINKING ABOUT DEBT

Mozambique, a country in east Africa, has a population of 16 million, mostly rural. It is ranked as one of the least developed countries in the world. Its debt has grown to \$5.8 billion in less than 15 years, an increase due primarily to poor weather conditions and a 16 year war waged by South African-supported rebels. In 1994, Mozambique spent more on debt payments than on health, education, and the justice system combined. Despite government, labour and business agreeing to raise the minimum wage, the International Monetary Fund opposed it.

In Mozambique only 33% of people have access to safe water; 70% of the rural population lives on less than \$1 a day; life expectancy is 46 years; and nearly one third of children under five are malnourished. Massive cuts to education and social services have increased women's responsibilities for family well-being, yet they are ill-equipped to bear the burden. Despite these grim facts, Mozambique pays some \$100 million annually, in interest alone, to Western nations.

THE BIBLICAL VISION

Some 2500 years ago, when the people of Israel were returning from exile, they faced the task of rebuilding Temple and country. In this setting the teaching of Jubilee took root. Three distinct ideas stand out: First, Jubilee ensured that all had access to land. It was designed to prevent ownership by a wealthy few. Second, Jubilee aimed at protecting the family. Failure of the family farm in one generation did not mean that they would be forever landless. Third, Jubilee rested on a central affirmation of Israel's faith: "*The earth is the Lord's.*" It is God who cares for and blesses God's people.

Jubilee was proclaimed on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. To know yourself forgiven by God meant you would forgive your debtors and help your neighbour. Jubilee thus became an expression of hope that God would someday restore all of creation to its original purpose: a community of *shalom* or *right relations*, a community in which freedom and justice flourish.

WILD HOPE TODAY

Christians involved in the Jubilee Initiative see 2000 as an opportunity. They ask: How can we practice Jubilee? How can we create just and peaceful relationships among all humans and all creation?

The answer lies in a renewed vision. Cancel debt, redistribute wealth, re-examine lifestyles, and respect the earth.

Jubilee is a wild hope. Jubilee is larger than any one person. It invites and challenges faith communities to see beyond what we are to what we can be. It seeks to live out the vision Jesus proclaimed in his first sermon at Nazareth: "*The Spirit of the Lord ...has anointed me to bring good news to the poor ...to proclaim release to the captives ...to let the oppressed go free.*" (Lk 4:16-18).



GROWING TOGETHER is a series of five monthly Sunday bulletin inserts for the ecumenical education of Christ's faithful.



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