

GROWING *Together*

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OVERCOMING VIOLENCE – A DECADE

A 10 year old agrees to have sex to avoid a beating. People stand by while an elderly person is robbed. A teen takes up a shot gun and sprays classmates. Neighbour fears neighbour. For too many, violence is a way of life. For most of us the results of violence are all too familiar.

Can the Church do anything?

It happened in Harare, Zimbabwe, in 1998, at the 8th Assembly of the World Council of Churches¹. Two Saskatoon participants described the moment: It was as if the Spirit had spoken — this assembly of Christians from all around the world made a decision — a Spirit filled spontaneous decision that all churches would band together to stop the violence that is threatening the life of the planet. During the next ten years the WCC will provide leadership in the “Decade to Overcome Violence”, 2001-2011. The delegates spoke with one voice. Violence in the world must be confronted, and the churches challenged to make a difference.

Together as Church, we have the resources and we should have the motivation. Because of the example and words of Jesus, we know how to stop violence. As he was hanging on a cross, he forgave those who had placed him there. He not only refused to meet violence with violence, he replaced it with healing and love.

In 1948, the first WCC Assembly in Amsterdam, Christians from nations emerging from war against one another met face to face. Confessing their failure to walk as Jesus walked, they received each other’s forgiveness and began anew. While it is not easy to do, Christians know the strength and growth brought about by confession and forgiveness. Christians know there is another way, called reconciliation and peace.

¹The World Council of Churches (WCC), formed in 1948, is composed of more than 342 churches in 120 countries. It represents about 400 million Christians.

Imagine the changes. Children could grow up without fearing for their lives. People in cities could walk without fear. Men and women could learn to talk through differences instead of using hands or weapons to hurt. Throughout Scripture the vision of peace is concrete and practical: swords can become plough shares; David forgave Saul for trying to kill him.

What will we do? The strength of the “Decade” will come from people working together. We may work in our own parish or congregation, but it will be more effective if we gather neighbour churches to study issues and take action. Experiences of people in one part of the world will provide strength and understanding for those in another. (Check out the WCC website.) We can begin small, learning from others, telling our stories. We can discover how to help children in schoolyards work out differences peacefully instead of bullying. We can seek out local peace builders and ask for their help. Together we can overcome the practice of violence.

The Central Committee of the WCC closes its first message to the churches about this Decade with these words: “The Gospel vision of peace is a source of hope for change and a new beginning. Let us not betray what has been given to us. People around the world wait with eager longing for Christians to become who we are: children of God embodying the message of love, peace with justice and reconciliation.”

**Peace is possible. Peace is practical.
Seek peace and pursue it.²**



²For information, stories and news, connect with the website: www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/dov

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

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