

Healing, Reconciliation and Power. A Tool for Use in Congregations. Afro-Asian Mission Consultation on the Ecumenical Response to the Challenge of Healing Ministries in Afro-Asia in Bangalore, India November 13-20, 2004, Christian Medical Association of India, New Delhi, 5-32.

Foreword

Healing and reconciliation have always been a part of social dynamics. Individuals and institutions take upon this role to ensure the well-being of all. The church has always understood healing and reconciliation, along with preaching and teaching, as essential functions of its calling. It has responded to this call through a 'holistic approach' by going beyond the healing of the body to the soul, bridging the individual to the community and addressing the global realities while keeping the local context at the centre.

However, the mandate to heal and the power of healing have been understood and exercised in a variety of ways, sometimes giving scope for mutual contradictions, competition and distortions. Our rapidly fragmenting world compels us not only to be healers of divisions, but also to re-envision our understanding of brokenness and the call to heal and to reconcile.

“Come Holy Spirit – Heal and Reconcile” is the theme of the forthcoming World Conference on Mission and Evangelism in Athens in 2005. As part of the preparations for this, we need to take into account the reality of a rich diversity of experiences in Africa and Asia.

Therefore the World Council of Churches in cooperation and co-organisation with the Christian Conference of Asia and the All Africa Council of Churches planned a consultation on “Healing, Reconciliation and Power”, which was hosted by the National Council of Churches in India and the Christian Medical Association of India.

The consultation on “Healing and Reconciliation and Power” brought together 60 missiologists and health workers – from the Ecumenical, Evangelical and Pentecostal spectrum – from Asia and Africa and took place at the Ecumenical Christian Centre, Bangalore, India, from November 14-20, 2004.

The importance of this consultation was to explore and share our spiritual roots and personal and communal stories on these themes. This sharing resulted in a concerned letter written by members of the consultation to the churches to encourage their congregations and others involved in the healing ministry to reflect on these issues and to put them into practice. With this in mind it was decided to produce the report of the consultation in this form, to enable those who are interested in the healing ministry to also be part of the experiences that were shared at the consultation and to reflect on these themes in small discussion groups.

Dr. Manoj Kurian, Executive Secretary, Health Programme, World Council of Churches |

A Letter to the Churches, Congregations and Christian Educational Institutions

We were 60 participants, who gathered at the Ecumenical Christian Centre, Whitefield, Bangalore, India from November 14-18, 2004 for an Afro-Asian Mission Consultation on 'Healing, Reconciliation and Power'. This was in preparation for the

Conference on World Mission and Evangelism, to be held in Athens in May 2005. We came from different continents and represented 27 different countries and many more contexts. We came together to consider the theme, 'Healing, Reconciliation and Power'.

We listened, engaged, debated, shared, worshipped and prayed together for four days. We heard very moving stories of pain, rejection, alienation, sadness and hope. We heard of inhuman atrocities and miraculous survival. We struggled with these themes and their meaning in our own realities and in what we had heard. We were made aware of the widespread nature of violence and brokenness in our families, communities, countries and our world. We heard stories of how the church in Sierra Leone is involved in the peace process, and of the failure of the church to address the genocide in Rwanda. We were humbled and enthused by the stories of individuals who embodied the servant role of Christ in the horrendous situation of HIV/AIDS.

Through the personal testimonies we heard and the bible studies we meditated on, we realized that all of us, even the ones who seem powerful, are in fact, vulnerable. We learned too that vulnerability could be powerful. In many testimonies we saw that vulnerable love could overcome hatred and bring about reconciliation. We realised that in giving us free will, God chose to be vulnerable to us saying no to God, and that in the incarnation, God was supremely vulnerable as a little baby. Through out his life, Jesus was vulnerable because of his openness to people. His confrontation with authority was usually for others, not for himself. In his death, Jesus made himself vulnerable by resisting violence. From the Bible Study on John 13, we were challenged by Jesus' action of washing His disciples' feet to be servant leaders.

During these four days we made strong friendships, and learned the importance of accepting each other despite our differences, and of celebrating our diversity. We reflected on the way each one of us used power in our lives. We were inspired and challenged to live with openness and vulnerability as we went back to the routine of our daily living.

We are committed to working together in our own contexts as well as in the national, regional and global arena. The Asian and African Christian Conference of Asia and All African Conference of Churches, AFRICQ and CAACC have been encouraged by us to take this process forward in the next few years. Details of the conference will be available for you later.

We recommend these documents to the congregations for study and deep reflection and discussion, and invite you to join us as we work together in God's ministry of healing and reconciliation.

The Participants of the Afro-Asian Mission Consultation on Healing, Reconciliation and Power |

Introduction

Objectives of this document

We offer this report of the *Consultation on Healing, Reconciliation and Power from Afro-Asian perspectives* as an attempt to share with you, what we have experienced, encountered, and learned, to enable you to build your own healing ministries and become a healing community in your own places. In particular we aim at:

- *Strengthening congregations, churches and the churches' educational institutions (seminaries and theological colleges) to become aware of their role in the healing ministry and to respond with compassion and hope to people who are broken by physical, mental, emotional, spiritual sickness and deep pain.*

- *Making congregations aware of the relationship between healing and issues such as Reconciliation, Vulnerability and Power.*
- *Providing tools and resources for reading, study and reflection so that they can inspire and challenge those working in the field of reconciliation and healing.*

Healing and reconciliation have always been a part of social dynamics (cf. the South African Commission on Reconciliation and Truth). Individuals and institutions have chosen to engage in this role to ensure the well-being of all and reach out with compassion to those affected by injustice, oppression, discrimination, war and its effects on people. For the Church, healing and reconciliation has been an important feature of its calling and as important as its preaching and teaching mission. Through the ages, churches have responded to this call by going beyond the healing of the body, to the soul, by bridging the individual to the community and addressing the global realities while keeping the local context at the centre. Healing and reconciliation thus is a process where justice lies at its heart. Healing and reconciliation involves the whole of creation. Thus it transcends and has a cosmic and universal relevance to particular faith systems.

The mandate to heal has been understood and exercised in a variety of ways, sometimes giving scope for mutual contradictions, competition and distortions. Our rapidly fragmenting world challenges us not only to be healers of divisions, but also to enter into dialogue where there is mistrust. It also compels us to re-envision our understanding of brokenness and vulnerability and the call to heal and to reconcile.

'Come Holy Spirit – Heal and Reconcile' is the theme of the forthcoming World Conference on Mission and Evangelism in Athens in 2005. As part of the preparations for this, we need to take into account the reality of a rich diversity of work related to the theme in Africa and Asia. By bringing together 60 health professionals and social workers at grass root levels as well as professionals from a variety of issue related organisations from the Ecumenical, Evangelical and Pentecostal spectrum in Asia and Africa, it not only attempted to establish a link between these two important regions and their people (Afro-Asian Ecumenical Solidarity process for Healing and Reconciliation), but enabled the participants to engage in the process of sharing experiences, methodologies and issues related to the challenge of healing and reconciliation. It extends the challenge to churches; to make them analyse the themes in their own local situations to become healing and reconciling communities, for Christ came that all may have life and life in abundance.]

The Work of this Consultation

For the participants of this consultation, this was a special event, as South-to-South exchanges, such as this 'Afro-Asian Mission Consultation on Healing, Reconciliation and Power', do not often occur at an inter-continental level.

The consultation worked in the following ways:

Worship: Regional and mixed groups focused on a theme around a biblical text which participants had studied in their respective home groups. Worship was held in the morning and in the evening. Some of the material used will be found in the section titled 'Resources'.

Keynote addresses and discussions: On three central issues to this consultation, Healing, Violence [Reconciliation) and Vulnerability, presentations were given by Prof. Dr. Musa Dube (Botswana), Rev. Dr. Deenabandu Manchala (India/Geneva) and Canon Baguma Gideon Byamugisha (Uganda). Each presentation was followed by lively and experience centred discussion among the participants.

Panel contributions and discussions: This method was used to listen to the experiences specific participants brought to this consultation.

Participants from South Africa, Sierra Leone, the Philippines, Indonesia, Rwanda shared in the first round; participants from Hong Kong, Fiji, India, Japan, Singapore, in the second round.

Home groups: These were small groups consisting of six to eight participants, in which personal sharing, biblical reflections and presenting symbols for the theme of the day took place. The home group provided a safe space – a confidential, intimate time of sharing the deeper, and sometimes more painful experiences which shaped our lives.

Working groups: This was the place to wrestle with the theme of the day analytically, experientially and biblically. This group was a different ground for learning. Here insights were gathered, stories told and comments made, which find themselves in part in this report.

Social evenings: On several occasions we had the opportunity to celebrate our being together in fellowship. On one occasion, we were invited by the Urban Rural Mission Network of India, to celebrate in the 'Spirit of Bandung' (1954) our commitment to the struggles of the marginalized and oppressed for justice. Another occasion, the birthday of one of the participants brought us together in joyful fellowship with performances from the great variety of cultures and contexts we came from. We sang and danced and laughed together. We cemented our new found friendships with songs, dances, riddles, jokes and much laughter. |

The Challenge

Global Picture

There is no day when the international media does not bombard us with new stories of war, disaster atrocities, and terror attacks. This kind of sensational information creates a sense of helplessness and hopelessness among people of all social, cultural and religious contexts, not in the least among Christians.

It is not only the pandemic diseases such as HIV/AIDS, cholera, malaria and others, which feed the cry for healing. The physical and psychological outcomes of situations such as torture, military atrocities and rape also now scream for reconciliation and healing. They cry out for the vulnerable members of our societies to be heard and acknowledged.

Life in all its fullness is denied to many through economic exploitation, social oppression, prevailing forms of racism, castesism and growing unemployment in many parts of the world. For many it seems that there is no way out of the seemingly overpowering interests of global socio-economic governance. There is a need therefore, for reconciliation and healing in this field also.

There are numerous groups around the world involved on the side of “hope and resurrection”. Groups inside the churches and other religious communities, and those who are not necessarily linked to the churches, such as Amnesty International, ATTAC, Solidarity and issue groups gathered in the World Social Forum, help to give a face to the anonymous news and to the victims of global developments.

It is often these groups, which include peace workers who stand by people showing them a way out of the vicious circle of violence and hatred. There are stories of hope restored in people for whom there seems no hope; there are stories of people reconciling with former enemies and there are stories of people being healed from difficult and terrible illnesses, vulnerabilities and wounds.

Though the situation seems grim, we need to remember that it is not the horror and pain, or the infliction of wounds, or structural and physical violence that is shaping the future of the world. What really shapes our world is the effort of people who work in

numerous creative ways to break the vicious cycles of poverty, violence and injustice and who take our broken world by the hand and journey with it on the long and painful road towards Reconciliation, Healing and Empowerment. |

Understanding Healing

Called to be Healing Communities

The meaning of the word 'healing' differs in our understanding according to the traditions and backgrounds we come from. To some, it means cure from sickness. To others, it is acceptance of a difficult situation and learning to live with it. Others consider it to be a healing experience to learn to cope and live well in spite of irreversible tragedy. For most, it means being touched by God in some way.

A healing community is a group where such experiences are lived out and where people respond to brokenness and pain in our wounded world in a variety of ways – as medical personnel, faith healers, people who work with victims of violence and war, through interfaith relations and all situations which cause pain and brokenness. The Christian response to brokenness and suffering is to reach out and touch, or walk hand in hand with those who are broken and bring healing in any way we can. A healing community becomes powerful when people in the group live together in harmony with one another, caring for each other with love and compassion, thus drawing others to them to be healed by their care and love.

Where does the Idea of Being a Healing Community come from?

The commission to 'Go and do likewise', comes to us from Jesus, as He sent the apostles to preach and heal in His name.

The early church became a healing community as they ministered to each other and to others who came to them for healing and counsel. Thus our response to a world broken and in pain is a continuation of the healing ministry from these early days.

Read and think: Healing comes in many Ways

Mrs Boi Jalloh, of Sierra Leone shares a story of healing in her community.

One woman whose village was attacked, had to flee about nine miles to the nearest town. As they ran, hiding every now and then from their pursuers, she and her two teenage daughters were attacked by a group of armed men, who took away the few personal possessions they were able to save. The men also gang raped her and her daughters.

The women finally found their way out of the rebel-held territories, to the eastern part of the country, where they sought refuge with a relative. One of the daughters became pregnant because of the rape, and she became a teenage, single mother.

Much later as channels for healing and reconciliation were opened, the young girl testified at a public hearing on violence against women. By speaking out in public, she broke the silence on rape – a healing process for her – just to be heard and have her wounds acknowledged. |

The Human Rights Social Services Department of the Christian Health Association of Sierra Leone equips church and health personnel to provide psycho-social care to victims of war, and victims of community and domestic violence. This department has helped this young woman to acquire some skills/vocational training, so that she can take care of herself and her child who is now about seven years of age. She and her family have also received much counseling to help them come to terms with their suffering and pain.

Healing is not only Curing the Diseases...

There is also healing which helps us to accept that we may not be physically cured,

but may still find healing for our broken souls. Rev Dr Chen Nan-Jou, from Taiwan shares his story with us:

My wife, Du Ching-Chi, was diagnosed with ovarian cancer in December 1992. The doctor told us that there was a 30% chance that she could survive for more than five years. We were stunned and frightened by this news. After twelve cycles of chemotherapy, and two operations, the doctors couldn't find the cancer cells. We thought she was cured. After a year, my wife returned to her work as a school teacher.

However, five months later, the cancer cells returned again. After four more cycles of chemotherapy and treatment with Taxol, the most expensive medicine, the doctors said they were sorry, that even the most advanced medicine could not kill the cancer cells.

In time, my wife accepted the reality that her cancer could not be cured. She started to write something, which I didn't know about until five months later. She wrote an article called, "Facing the Suffering", subtitled, "God is an Eternal, Heavenly Mother". In her article, she tried to tell our son and daughter that their earthly mother was going to leave them, but that God would be their heavenly mother from now on, and would always be with them. From her article, I could see that she was quite at peace. She died in that peace on April 5, 1995.

Did my wife get healed? I say, "yes!" Physically, she wasn't; but emotionally and spiritually she was healed.

Trying to understand/Looking around

After having read these stories, can you identify the different forms of healing reported here. Can you think of some other forms of healing, either you or members of your family or community have experienced?

What were the central aspects of the healing process in both cases? Try to list them down and discuss them in your group.

Doing Something

You might suggest to your local congregation to hold a worship session on healing, where people can come together to share their experiences and thus empower others through this sharing.

You could also identify situations in your family/workplaces/communities which need healing. Then if needed, you could hold a service of healing and encourage people to attend this. |

Aspects of Healing

General description

In her passionate opening speech entitled, "Talitha Cum – To the Power of Reconciliation and Healing as God's Agents", Dr Musa Dube shared her thoughts on this topic by using the story of Jesus healing Jairus' daughter and the story of the woman who bled for twelve years, who touched Jesus' cloak and was healed. Says Dr Dube:

"Healing happens when a person is reconciled to all relationships that are essential to their well-being – these are spiritual, social, economic, political and environmental. In short, healing is life itself, and nothing is outside healing in our lives. Healing is where we experience God's power at work in all aspects of our lives. Healing is where salvation and liberation are located. We will be a vibrant church when we capture the centrality of healing. Crowds will throng our churches when we take the ministry of reconciliation and healing as central to our Christian mission." (For full text of Dr Dube's speech refer to section entitled Presentation of Speakers.)

Stories, Case Studies and Symbols

(for more stories or the abbreviated story in full, see in the section “stories”)

Symbols

Symbols were brought to the consultation which reflected the myriad understanding of healing we all experience. The symbols were personal and were shared in the 'safe spaces' that the home groups provided for such sharing. The meanings behind the symbols were also shared during the worship time. Some of the symbols of healing were oil, flowers, salt, photographs and memories.

What would be the symbol of healing that you would bring forward?

Stories

From a little hamlet in Cambodia.

We have had different crusades of healing in our country. When disease strikes anyone in our hamlets, the first thing we do is to take our sick to the traditional village healer. The healer has his twigs and holy water. He chants, sprinkles holy water, and performs strange rituals. Sometimes he uses herbs and plants as medicines. Very often, these medicines and rituals heal whoever is sick. Many times I too have experienced this kind of healing.

A little home in South Africa.

I developed a severe stomach ache in 1987. No medicine could control the pain. One day someone told me, “I think God is calling you to full time ministry.”

“No way”, I thought. But the pain kept bothering me. Finally one day, ten years later, I decided to say 'yes' to the call. I committed myself to full time ministry. Believe me, ever since that day I have never had that pain. I was completely healed through obedience.

A slum congregation in South India.

I, the pastor, was one who had serious questions about faith healing and its authenticity but had taken | pastoral visit of the sick as a serious part of my vacation. Every day I realized that health is a gift from God. On my first day in my new congregation, I saw a few battles of water near the altar table. “What is this for?” I enquired.

“Please bless this so that we could use it if we fall sick”, said the people.

“But, I don't have the gift for healing”, my inner being muttered. An elderly lady almost reading my mind said, “We won't be able to afford the doctor or the medicines anyway.” I prayed for the blessing of the water and then continued the struggle against the structures that created the pain. One day it so happened that there was a testimony time for the women's group in the church, which I happened to be part of. I heard at least five women sharing their experiences saying, “I fell sick and went to the pastor to pray and used the blessed water in faith. I was healed. Or my child was healed.”

I realised that day that healing comes from God and that God could use anyone, even me as a channel of healing.

How do I/we discover the issue in my local context?

In South Africa, rape and violence towards women cause untold pain and suffering. The Tamar Campaigners tell those who are broken and wounded by rape, “We are with you. We share your pain.” They promote awareness and help women to speak up against their ordeal.

The Bible study programme provides a safe space for women to identify with the text. Many women and girls reading the story of Tamar find that for the first time since their ordeal there is someone whom they can identify with. Someone who has been through a similar experience and whose pain and anger they too understood. The text and the discussions, which arise from it, liberate and heal the girls and women.

The issue of rape is tackled by the UJAMAA CENTRE (Formerly known as the

Institute for the study of the Bible-Worker Ministry) in this unique way.

The Tamar Campaign arose out of a series of Bible studies held in poor and marginalized communities around Pietermaritzburg in the province of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. The text, 2 Samuel 13:1-22, the story of the rape of Tamar, is used in contextual Bible study where the emphasis is on reading “with” rather than reading “for” or “to” those who are unfamiliar with the Bible. Explains Mr Phidian Matsepe,

“We allow the readers to read and interpret the text from their own context, cultural background and life-experience. The story of the rape of Tamar has proved to be a vital healing resource in a society, which seeks to help heal and reconcile those lives, which are broken and destroyed by the violence of rape. Most women don't know this text and when they read it and apply the truths learnt from it into their known lives they are surprised by its power to liberate and heal.”

Dr P. Zachariah, from India said that in India, the Christian community is vastly involved in health care:

“At the time of independence, we inherited about 700 hospitals. Apart from these, a few newer hospitals were begun based on principles of Christian fellowship and health care was taken into the community where the needs were the greatest. The role of the healing ministry extended to specially include those who were marginalized by diseases like leprosy, the handicapped, the visually and hearing challenged. The role in nursing too played an important part in the healing ministry. Young Christian women were willing to come forward to help look after and meet the needs of others.”

Dr Zachariah made us think about what our relationship as healed communities should be when we are a minority church in a pluralistic setting. He said that as we attend to the needs of the broken, our constituency should become larger. That although Christ is | central to our healing ministry, there should be no boundaries.

Dr Sara Battacharje, of the Christian Medical College and Hospital, Vellore, shares this story with us:

I have about 60 inpatients and 160 outpatients in my clinic each day. One day a new-born baby was referred to me with a skin ailment – one that was fatal. The mother was very young and didn't know what was happening. I asked her where her husband was, and she answered “I don't know.” Exasperated by the situation, I told her I needed to talk to somebody in her family. Two days later a middle-aged woman came to see me holding the baby in her arms. “Why do you want to see me?” she inquired timidly. I took her to my office, sat down and talked to her. I asked her of her relationship to the patient. “This baby is my grand daughter; my son's child”, she said. “My son married my younger brother's daughter as is the custom in our community.” When they got married, the girl,” (referring to her daughter-in-law) “was sickly and my son had to spend a lot of money on her, sometimes even borrowing money to take care of her. It was not a happy marriage. One day they had a quarrel. He was very angry, so he beat her. She left him and went back to her family. My son then disappeared and has never come to see her since then. Later she found out that she was pregnant. When the baby was born and when they realized it was sick she brought the baby to me.”

I explained to this lady that the child's situation was bad and that it would take special skills to care for it. The woman looked at the baby she held in her arms. With the weight of responsibility on her shoulder, she stared at me with tears streaming from her eyes and asked, “Does God not know that we are poor people? Why does God behave so cruelly with us? Why does he allow such suffering to poor people?”

Then she told me that they came from a tribe that catches snakes and sells the skin for a living, but because of the 'Animals Right Act' passed by the government, they earned their living by catching rats now instead. Sobbing, she requested me to discharge them from the hospital because they didn't have the money to sustain them in the hospital. I offered to have them stay in hospital for a week to show them how to take care of the child so that they could take care of the child themselves at home. They conceded, and after a week left and never returned again.

How do I/we engage meaningfully?

To continue with the previous story, Dr Sara says,

“In this situation as a healer, the only thing I could do was to share her pain. There was no treatment for the baby; no answer to her economic problem; or whether they would even find her son. So I live with this question every day – What is healing in this situation? Surely God knows that she is poor? Surely God cares for her; for the baby; for her son who ran away? But I was not able to assure her of this. All I could do was to listen. This is also my role in the healing ministry.”

Try to reflect on what this story could mean for you in your own local situation as a member of a congregation, as a minister or as a teacher. |

Understanding Reconciliation

Called to be Reconciling Communities

African languages have the expression that “a person is a person through other persons”. They remind us that we would not know how to be a human being if we didn't learn it from other human beings. We are created and programmed for a delicate network of relationships of interdependence. We are meant to complement each other. All kinds of things go horribly wrong when we break that fundamental law of our being. Not even the most powerful nation can be completely self-sufficient. In many cases, Christian communities need to rediscover this for themselves.

Where there is conflict and misunderstanding, we need to remember this truth and to know that “we are, because of the other”. This knowledge should help us to become a reconciled community. God reconciled us with him in Christ. This relationship, which is basic to our faith, is essential for an understanding of us as a reconciled Christian community.

Where does the Idea of Being a Reconciling Community come from?

From the Creation story, we learn that our sin separated us from God. Yet, God in His love for us reconciled us to Him through His son Jesus Christ and gave us also the task of reconciling those who are separated from each other (2 Corinthians 5:19). Thus it is important that as a Christian community, we live out the reconciliation we have received in our interaction with each other, and with those outside our own spheres.

Read and think: Story

Listen to these stories of reconciliation.

A young girl in Taiwan

A young girl in Taiwan was raped and murdered. The mother was totally distraught, and in a state of profound shock. At this time of trauma, her church was very supportive and kind.

A few months went by and she learned that the murderer of her daughter had been arrested, tried and sentenced to death. The woman had a deep yearning to confront the killer of her daughter. She sought the advice and assistance of Prison Fellowship Taiwan, who in turn consulted with the prison authorities where the offender was jailed.

The prison authority initially refused to grant permission for her to meet this man as they wanted to avoid a potentially explosive confrontation. But the woman persisted and because of the good relationship between the prison authorities and the Prison Fellowship Taiwan, eventually permission was granted on the condition that they met with bars between them.

The murderer and the victim's mother met on several occasions. Each time the mother

repeatedly told the man of her deep pain, her sleepless nights, and the disturbed confusing emotions she had experienced since her daughter was murdered. She asked him: “Why did you do it? How did you do it? What exactly did you do? Why did you really kill her? What did she do to you?” Each time, the man remained silent and expressionless. |

One day, the ice in him melted and he expressed great regret and remorse and wept in contrition. The Prison Fellowship Taiwan which facilitated this encounter began teaching him about repentance. He confessed his crime to the girl's mother and asked for her forgiveness. The lady accepted his repentance as she was a Christian and felt the need to forgive, to experience healing. She learned too that the prisoner was an orphan, brought up in an orphanage and had never experienced parental love.

In subsequent meetings Prison Fellowship Taiwan obtained permission from the authorities for them to meet without bars between them. The lady told the murderer of her daughter that she would like to adopt him as her son. She reached out to hug this man and both of them embraced for a long time as they cried and cried. She faithfully visited him each day, bringing home-cooked food and personal items, as well as the love of Christ, until the day he was taken to the gallows.

I was a small Boy when War tore our Country apart.

My mother had to go away to another part of the country and I and my father and brothers and sister had to stay in the city. Then the soldiers came and began rounding up all the adults. We children ran away into the countryside to be safe and then to villages where we thought we had distant relatives. But there too, the soldiers were attacking the adults. So we ran away into forests and swampy places where the soldiers could not come. Unfortunately this was malaria area and many of us died of fever, diarrhea and starvation. Then we heard that the soldiers were coming here too. So we had to run away again. My little sister was very sick and could not walk and would not come with me. “You go”, she said, pushing me away from her.

My heart was so broken. How could I leave my little sister behind? I did not know what to do. I was only eleven years old. Again and again my sister urged me to go. So weeping, I left her behind and went back to the city to find my father and my brothers. Often I starved as there was no food anywhere. Finally I reached the city and could not find my family. I was told that they had all been killed. My heart which was already so broken, just fell to pieces. I had no family. I didn't know if my mother was alive. I didn't know if my sister whom I had left behind was alive. I didn't really want to live myself. But then something miraculous happened. One day, as I went through a village, I saw my mother. I just ran to her and hugged her and put my head on her lap and began to weep. Slowly the warmth of her love flowed into me.

I, who was so angry and sad inside, till, I had someone to love me again. Love brought healing. Then there was also the need to be reconciled within myself to the loss of my family. Love helped bring this acceptance and reconciliation too.

Rebel soldiers had captured a village and were cutting off the hands of men and women in an orgy of violence. One young man pleaded to be spared as he had no father and had to look after his family. But the soldier cold heartedly chopped off his hand with a machete. As he could no longer work and as his hand needed treatment, he came to the city and stayed in one of the camps. There he heard about Jesus, and learned about forgiving his enemy. He became a Christian and in his heart forgave the man who had cut off his hand.

One day while he and his friends were sitting in a bar, in walked the soldier who had cut off his hand. He did not seem to recognize the one armed man. In fact, he sat at the same table as the wounded man. After a while, he asked the soldier, “Don't you recognize me?”

“Well, do you remember that one day you came to my village and cut off many hands and feet? Do you remember a young man pleading with you to spare his hands so that he could work and support his family? Well you cut off his hands anyway. I am that man.”

At this, the friends who were with him, jumped up to thrash the soldier. “Don't hurt him”, the armless man said. “I have forgiven him.” His friends looked at him as if he was mad. But he looked the soldier in the eye and said, “I forgave you in my heart a long time ago, but I am glad I saw you today, because I know that in my heart there is no hatred towards you. My only regret is that I cannot embrace you with two hands.” |

Prisoner Mr K's daughter

Prisoner Mr K's daughter was taken into the Prison Fellowship (PF) Home when he went to prison. When she visited her father, she was so impressed Mr K by her good behaviour. One day he said to the PF volunteer accompanying his child, "I do not know what motives you have for the good that you have done to my daughter. I will never be able to repay you for the good things that you are doing for her. At that time, the PF volunteer shared the gospel with Mr K. With tears streaming from his eyes, he said, "If that Jesus is your God, I want him to be my God as well."

A year later Mr K was released and he returned to his village at the foothill of the Himalayan Mountains. With a loan of US\$50 from PF Nepal, he bought a small hut took his daughter back to live with him. Some time later a group of overseas sponsors of the children's home visited Mr K. They walked for an hour and a half from the main road to reach his village. Mr K was overjoyed to see these people when he understood that they were the financial supporters of his daughter while he was in prison. He entertained them with tea and cakes in a very simple village way, and began to share with the group how blessed he had been by Jesus since the time that he had become a Christian. He had a job and was resettling into normal life. Mr K told the group that, because of the reality of Christ in his life, he had since shared his new faith with the villagers and 50 families have believed in Jesus Christ. Such is the reconciling, healing power of God.

Trying to understand and looking around

After having read these stories, identify the elements and the process of reconciliation reported here? Try to list them down and discuss them in your group. Could you think of other forms of reconciliation, which either you or members of your family, community have encountered?

Doing Something

Analyse where in your local context reconciliation is needed. Which are the groups involved? What do you know about them and about the backgrounds of the conflicts, which divide them?

You might list a number of steps, learned from the above or other stories in this brochure, which address the process of healing aiming at forgiveness and coming to reconciliation.

Suggest to your local congregation committee to hold worship/meeting on reconciliation, where people find a space to address the issue, discuss their grievances and find a space for entering a process of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Aim at lasting initiatives, as healing the past and reconciling for the future is a long process. |

Aspects of Reconciliation

General description

Reconciliation is the healing that comes through repentance and forgiveness. Thus, repentance is key to reconciliation and healing. "Forgive 'them' and 'us', Father", should be our motto in this work of healing and reconciliation. All that grieves and hurts, all the figures the manipulations, the desire to have things one's way, the need to be right, are all for the moment. So, too are all that pleases and make us happy. In the final tally, the only things that matter are things, which will last for eternity. We cause so much grief and pain to each other because of ambition, greed and pride. We want the applause, the credits, the awards ourselves. There comes a time, when we realize that all that matters is not power or fame, but the love one has given and

received. We need to ask ourselves, “Why are our messages on Love so hollow and ineffective?”¹ Both the 'hunter' and the 'hunted', the oppressor and the oppressed, the victor and the vanquished have an innate yearning to find a meaning for existence and a need for personal, spiritual and social fulfillment. It is in this area that we have a special contribution to make to world civilization and reconciliation as people and leaders of faith.

Stories, Case studies and Symbols

(for more stories or the abbreviated story in full, see in the section “stories”)

Symbol

During the panel discussion on reconciliation, Linda Komoro from Sierra Leone and Boi Jemeh Jalloh showed us a bullet that was now shaped into a cross. This once powerful symbol of violence and fear was now turned into one of reconciliation. Can you think of a symbol of reconciliation?

Stories

Linda and Boi told us that although the church did not use its powerful and influential voice to prevent the ten-year civil war, it did step in at a crucial time to initiate the peace process between the rebels and the government. Once this was under way, the church in Sierra Leone held a dialogue with the government and set up the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The TRC helped war victims reconcile with those who had caused them such pain and suffering. It also helped them reconcile within themselves as victims of war. There were others programmes of reconciliation too. The surrender of arms and ammunition in exchange for development and aid was also encouraged.

Dr Erlinda Senturias from the Philippines spoke of her personal experience of having to flee from her home in Mindanao when trouble broke out between the two communities. She described the pain of the conflict between the Muslims and Christians. Her reconciliatory work began when she decided to return home and live and work within the Muslim community in a college sharing their space and accepting their faith as being an important part of who they were as a culture. |

Beatrice Mukansinga from Rwanda shared her very painful feelings about the ethnic genocide that almost wiped out her country. Her courage in the face of loss and suffering was an example to us all. Her compassion and commitment to her faith led her to set up an organization dealing with suffering women. As a pastor's wife she came in contact with women who were broken and tormented by rape. The organisation, which she began, 'Speak I'm Listening' does just this. It allows women to come to them and cry out their pain. To ask why this terrible thing happened to them. To know how to move on with their lives.

Many of the rape victims conceived and bore children. As single mothers they faced the problems and responsibilities of raising children on their own. The children who are almost ten years old now want to know about their fathers. The women are in a dilemma. “Can we tell them the truth?” they ask. 'Speak, I'm Listening' counsels them and guides them despite a future, which is full of uncertainty for both them and their children.

Dr Patrick Chong, the Regional Director of Prison Fellowship Asia (a branch of Prison

¹ Cf. From 1948 to 2048: A Hundred Years of Working for Peace, Reconciliation and Healing as a means of Achieving True Power – The Perspective of the Vulnerable.

Fellowship International), trains national leaders of those people who do prison visitation, enhancing their ministry skills and ability to deliver the programmes and services PF offers prisoners, released prisoners, victims and their families.

How do I/we discover the issue in my local context?

There is a need for reconciliation in all our communities. Bob Sidal from Fiji tells us how difficult it can be:

My great grandfather, a Hindu, came to Fiji from Madras and spoke Tamil.

I attended a Methodist Mission School, and when I was 12 (in class 8), I was told about the love of Jesus in the Fijian language. The Head Teacher who later became a minister of the Methodist Church in Fiji, gave me a New Testament in the Fijian language. I took it to my Dad, who read it. Rev Dreu, the Minister would come often to visit us, and my father became a Christian. Rev Dreu nurtured our faith and baptised us in 1966. He called my father 'son' and us children as 'grandchildren'. I learned about Jesus, read the Bible and sang hymns in the Fijian language, long before I knew Jesus in Hindustani.

When we became Christians we were made outcast by our extended family and the Indian community. We were totally dependent on the Fijian community in this isolation. In the island of Taveuni, the population is 11,000 of which only one thousand are Indian. The Indians stopped inviting us to weddings, and family occasions. We continued with the Fijian Methodist community singing and praying together right up until the first coup in 1987.

In 1987, on a Thursday afternoon, I was shocked to hear about the coup – that a military officer, Rabuka, had marched a coalition government led by a Fijian but the majority of which was an Indian party, out of parliament at the point of a gun. Rabuka said, “God told me to stage the coup to save my country, vanua, from the Indians.” For the first time in my life I realised I really was an Indian, a foreigner, a vulagi, a visitor in the country of my birth. Those with whom I had eaten and worshipped till now, cursed me, saying that my people were trying to take over their land. My mother and my siblings and myself, felt totally betrayed by our own Christian brothers and sisters. We had nowhere to go. By then several other families had become Christians and we had our own church in which we worshipped in Hindi.

The Indian community reacted by saying, “What are you Christians doing? Is this Christianity? Is this how our Jesus loves?” Only then I realised what price we pay to become an Indian Christian in Fiji. I felt and still feel that I had no country, no flag, no national anthem. I learned in a deeper way to depend only on Jesus and to go deeper into the enormous love that Jesus has. I put my name forward for the ministry and went into theological college for diploma level training at the age of 40.

Another coup took place in May 2000, a year after an Indian party had won the election and an Indian Prime Minister was appointed. Once again guns were used, and this time the Cabinet (which included some Fijian Ministers), were held hostage at gunpoint in Parliament for 56 days. During this time I was a parish minister in a circuit outside Suva city. We had Fijians in our congregation who had joined the circuit after the first coup because they wanted to stand in solidarity with Indian Christians. I had a colonel of the army in this church, and I made him my chief steward.

When the second coup happened, a lot of Indian settlements were burned and Indian families fled into the bush in the middle of the night as their homes were ransacked. During these dark and terrible 56 days, all schools were closed, curfews and military law imposed. I called my school and church and orphanage staff to our home every morning for prayer and Bible study to hold them together as a congregation and to pray for our country. The gathering included Fijians, Indians, Rotumans, and other races and we wept and prayed together.

One morning an Indian man knocked on our door while we were praying. I invited him in and he told his story. His home had been raided. Fijian youth who were previously his friends, threatened him and his children with cane knives. They entered his home and took every piece of furniture, clothing, food, even light bulbs out of his house. All the spices and Indian condiments that they didn't want, were poured out of the containers into the centre

of the room, covered with oil and ground in into the floor with their feet. He asked me for help, and I employed him to help rebuild our boys' primary school which had been burned down on the first night of the coup.

Recently the government held a reconciliation week. There were inter-faith prayers in which some Indians participated. Some of the coup instigators openly asked for forgiveness. This was done on a national level.

How do I/we engage meaningfully?

Reconciliation is the healing that comes through repentance and forgiveness. We need to create a safe space for this. We need to build of such spaces and enable a process of reconciliation among people. From Sierra Leone, we see the following model:

In our work with victims of war, the Council of Churches works through the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone in promoting community-based healing and reconciliation. These activities comprise facilitation of the return of former combatants, and former collaborators of the warring factions into their original communities. The process involves dialogue with the community and religious leaders to accept the offender back into the community. The offender is expected to give public acknowledgment of the atrocity committed, and shows remorse as part of the re-entry process. It also involves reconciling the memories of the war whereby communities carry out healing ceremonies, during which stories of atrocities are retold, who was buried where; who underwent which form of violence and where. To affect some kind of closure, community memorial services are organized. Part of our work is also preserving memories of the war, and marking war graves. |

Understanding Vulnerability

Being a vulnerable Church

In New York, a congregation hung a banner from their bell tower, which read “Our church has AIDS”. The congregation had recognised what Paul writes in 1st Cor. 12 on the suffering of the body. The fact that the vulnerability of one of the members leads to the vulnerability of us all. This truth is not only true in the much discussed area of the pandemic of AIDS, but also in situations where injustice, violence and racism have their effects on peoples lives, leaving them victims to structural and personal oppression and injury. As a church we should be able to recognise that all of us are vulnerable in some way. We need to admit this to each other in a world where strength and wealth seem to be the only things that count. As a church community we need to live by different rules and not by the rules that govern the world's life.

Where does the Idea of Vulnerability come from?

Vulnerability means being exposed to pain, hurt, danger or attack. Our world today bears many signs of vulnerability in sections of our communities which are marginalized because of economic situations, age, disease, poverty and so on. Globalization, materialism, greed, the lust for power and violence and fragmentation also contribute to the deepening fragility in human life and relationships thus making it easier for many people to become vulnerable.

Vulnerability as a term is mainly used these days in connection with IT problems. Systems are vulnerable to viruses and other harmful influences. However, in the realm, of Christian reflection, vulnerability is closely linked to two factors. The

dominant being God's own vulnerability where He chose to become human and came to earth as a little baby. When he chose to be vulnerable by becoming a servant instead of a ruling king. When he chose to be vulnerable by being wounded and not fight back. When he chose to die on the cross.

Christianity also experienced vulnerability in the area of Mission, when West Mission had to come to an end and concepts reflected there, to be scrutinized by those, who grew out of the early mission endeavours, becoming "full partners in mission" and claiming the need for mission in the homelands of the western churches.

Read and think

For many people, this session on vulnerability was specially meaningful. It began with the morning Bible reading that described Ezekiel in the valley of the dry bones. Our speaker Vinod Victor spoke about his experiences of seeing dry bones in a mass grave. Following him, other speakers too recounted how they had seen 'the valley of dry bones' in their own countries where 'ethnic cleansing' had taken place.

We all recognised that in some way or other we are all vulnerable. Our vulnerability can cause us to close up and become hard and unfeeling, or it can bring about a change through which we become an instrument of peace for someone one else. |

Canon Gideon in his very moving speech gave ten points to consider while we reflected on the theme of vulnerability. He made us aware of the fact that vulnerability is not to be monopolized by only one section of society – that is the poor, the displaced, the sick, the victims. Being powerless makes one vulnerable, but at the same time, being powerful and having too much power makes one equally vulnerable. Both, the hunter and the hunted, the victim and the oppressor have an innate yearning to find meaning and spiritual fulfillment in life. That makes them both vulnerable in different ways. He said that we need to address the vulnerability of both.

Story

Sister Anne Grey entered the order of the Colombian Sisters in 1997 after spending a year as lay missionary in Sierra Leone. For the last 19 years she has worked and lived in the very heart of Hong Kong developing a ministry among the sex workers there. In our imagination she took us on a journey to Hong Kong – through the narrow, crowded lanes, up the tall, high rise buildings to a small room in the drop-in centre where she works.

Says Sister Ann, "I started by just walking the streets to find out what was happening as I knew nothing about the sex industry! I worked in a project under the Hong Kong Women Christian Council, and we called ourselves the Concern for Prostitutes Group. Eventually a young American woman and a Maryknoll Sister joined me and our group came to be known as 'Action for REACH OUT'.

"My objectives are to give the women in the sex trade the experience of being treated as a normal person, and particularly as a normal woman. Men, treat sex workers as objects which satisfy them temporarily. Most other people want to deny their existence. I just want to be with them and accompany them in their hard journey through life. I want them to experience the love of God, without necessarily being preachy and moralistic, because then they would react negatively towards the church. Many of the women have children, but few people stop to ask them about their children's health, how they are doing at school and so on. Yet, these mothers are the same as mothers everywhere. They need to talk about their children. People think sex workers don't have the same caring, nurturing feelings towards their

children as other mothers because of their profession. Some even consider them to be bad mothers because of how they earn their living. Often the reason they do the kind of work they do is because circumstances have made them the sole breadwinner in the family.”

Trying to understand and look around

Now that you have read this, identify the examples of vulnerability reported here. Can you think of other stories of vulnerability, either in your family, community or peer group?

What are the central aspects of vulnerability? How does the Bible describe vulnerability? Which stories from the Bible come to your mind when you think of vulnerability? List them down and discuss them in your group. |

Doing something

- The vulnerable can be the bullied, the chronically ill, battered women and children, the elderly, the outcast such as an HIV/AIDS infected person, the disabled and those ignored and marginalized by society in many ways.
- Vulnerability is something we all need to learn more about. We need to hear the stories of those who are vulnerable to identify with them and thus discover our own vulnerability.
- One of the activities you could do is to encourage your congregation to foster encounters where people in the vulnerable groups mentioned above can come and share their stories and find understanding, support and healing in their struggles.
- You could also discuss the many aspects of vulnerability Christ deals with during his earthly ministry during Bible Study. How do we as Christ's disciples use our vulnerability as He did to embrace those who are in a position of vulnerability? |

Aspects of Vulnerability

General description

If we are really serious about seeking to understand and to undertake the ministry of healing in our mission, then we should fully investigate and invest our energies in the role of reconciliation. Reconciliation of people to their Creator, reconciliation of people to one another, which may be within families, communities and institution, or between ethnic groups, races, classes, genders, religions, nations. We should also reconcile people to their environment, which may include educating ourselves on environmentally sound methods of living within and depending on the earth. But it may also focus on reconciling many groups of people who are structurally denied any access to the land and resources of the earth. Reconciliation is referred as “the process of restoring a broken relation between different parties” (Setako: 2000:176). According to Tinyiko Maluleke, “Reconciliation is a process that leads to just and life affirming relations between person, between persons and creation and between person and structures/institutions, in short between all creation. If 'Shalom' is a state of peace, justice and just-peace, reconciliation is the road that takes us there and the glue that keeps us there.” However, Tinyiko Maluleke, who has written extensively about South African TRC, warns that we must “remember James Cone's statement that reconciliation is only between equals.” Justice, therefore, is central to sustainable healing and reconciliation's. Indeed, Jesus, who came to reconcile creation and humankind to God made efforts to pay attention to all sides. It is thus clear that a

significant part of his ministry included preaching the kingdom of God and healing people, physically, spiritually, mentally, socially and politically. This healing ministry included reconciling people to God, to one another and to creation. Notably, this involved spending a significant amount of time with the less privileged-groups of people who were in the margins of society, because they were alienated from social, economic, political, spiritual and basically all life-affirming relations. The ministry of Jesus thus involved prophecy that is, speaking against the powers that be and their institutions for using their power to oppress than promote life-affirming relationships.² Such ministry includes also the recognition of mutual vulnerability as a base of the relationship on which reconciliation is built. This mutuality will enable us to become a reconciled, healed community.

Who are the vulnerable?

Both, the 'powerful' and the 'powerless', are vulnerable. The former are made vulnerable by having too much power, exercising too much force and too much self-consideration to the extent that they can't think, make decisions and act rationally. They do not imagine another way, a better way of doing or saying things exists, other than their own. They are corrupted and imprisoned by the type of information that comes to them; the inappropriate attitudes they have in themselves and others; the type of skills, services and force at their disposal, and the environment of 'status-quo' sustainers from which they are operating. They are the 'Cains' of this world.

- *Suffering from the 'elder brother' superiority syndrome;*

- *Stronger in physique, economics, politics, military and psyche; |*

Have been around a little longer in the business of grabbing and amassing wealth and have resources at their disposal with which to formulate, advance, execute and evaluate their prices and plans.

- *They use the 'shock and awe' approach to solving human problems.*

- *The powerless are made vulnerable by the too little power at their disposal.*

- *They lack accurate information, appropriate attitudes, skills, services and a supportive environment for self-protection, self-propagation, and self-enhancement.*

- *They are weaker in physical health (due to inadequate nutrition calorie intake; multiple diseases and infections, worry and depression), or in politics and economics.*

- *They are younger either in age or in experience and lack resources with which to formulate, advance, execute and evaluate their ideas and plans.*

- *They use the 'peck' and 'retreat' methods for self-defence and protection and for solving other human problems.*

- *They quite often fail and have a low life expectancy. They are the 'Abels' of this world.³*

Symbols, Stories and Case studies

(for more stories or the abbreviated story in full, see in the section „stories“)

Symbols

Symbols of vulnerability offered during the morning worship service were candles, a white rose, the Chinese character for woman, an apron and a book which exposed

² Cf. Musa Dube, Talitha Cum. To the Power of Reconciliation and Healing as God's Agents, 60.

³ Cf. Gideon Byamugisha.

the thoughts and feelings of the writer.

Morvin Sidal from Fiji shared this with us during the morning worship.

“My symbol today is an apron. It represents the way I want to serve, and reminds me of how Jesus, knowing who he was, and that he had come from God, and was going back to God, tied a towel, or an apron around his waist, took a basin and knelt to wash the disciples' feet (John 13). Jesus knelt and, in kneeling, assumed a vulnerable position. He once stooped in front of a woman caught in adultery, now he knelt before his disciples.

An apron reminds me also of Mothers' Day in May 2000, when my husband planned a special service and lunch to celebrate the mothers of our church. He had a lot of yellow aprons printed with “Happy Mothers' Day” in red ink on the front. He gave them to the men as they arrived at church early to prepare the lunch for the women following the service. During the service when it came to the celebration of the Lord's Supper, my husband called the women to the table first. After they were served, he called the men to put on their aprons, and come to the table of the Lord to receive the body and the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our Fijian men are very big, very strong, and they are the leaders in our families and society. But when they put the aprons on, and knelt at the table, they appeared so vulnerable, and so humble.

After they had received the Holy Communion, they stood and, still wearing the aprons, served the women their lunch.” |

What symbol would you bring forward?

Stories

Sister Ann shared this story from Hong Kong. A Ling is a Hong Kong woman born into a poor family. She had to leave school very early before she finished her education. In order to help her parents support her brothers and sisters, she began work in a factory. She met a young man, fell in love and they were married. However, she discovered her husband was addicted to heroin and had borrowed huge amounts of money to support his drug habit. Unable to pay back the money to the loan sharks, who are usually connected to the Triads, he was told the only solution was for A Ling to work as a sex worker in one of the many night clubs owned by the Triads. A Ling was horrified but, because she loved her husband and believed this was the only way she could save him, she agreed. As it became more and more difficult for her, in order to block out a lot of what she had to do, she gradually also became addicted to heroin. As time passed, she and her husband divorced, so she no longer had to support him, but she continued in the sex industry to support her own drug habit.

When I first met A Ling she was in her late thirties and not as pretty as she had been so could no longer work in the nightclubs. She was working on the streets, waiting for clients to come and approach her. Her one goal in life was to make enough money each day to buy heroin so that she could escape from the sense of hopelessness that filled her life. Often she had no money for food or to rent a room so she spent the night in the public toilets – not the cleanest of places by any means.

One day she came to our centre, having eaten nothing the previous day, and began to eat all the snacks we had laid out. As she ate, she apologised for eating so much, but I told her, “Eat them and we will buy more.” She then asked if I needed to wait for people to donate money before I could buy more. When I said yes, she turned to her friend and said, “How about if we earn some money today (and note she said 'if' – there was every possibility she'd earn none) we give some to REACH OUT?”

In the 13 years in which I have been involved with the sex workers, this has been one of my most moving experiences. Here was this woman who had nothing – no food

and no place to stay – and yet she could still think of others. She knew that after she left, other women would come to our centre for help and she wanted, in her own way to be a source of strength to them as well.

How do I/we discover the issue in my local context?

We need to ask ourselves, “Who are the vulnerable in our communities and congregations?”

The vulnerable are like the elder brother in the Prodigal son's story. The one, who knows everything and who thinks, that only his views matter. They are also like the younger brother who is powerless when he is far from home. They are also the father, whose heart is broken.]

How do I/we engage meaningfully?

The working groups unanimously felt that as healing communities we need to affirm our solidarity with the poor, the sick, the lonely, elderly and stand beside them.

A friend from Africa shared these thoughts. “I live in a place where there are many orphans. The government and the church just cannot cope with this problem. Not only can they not cope, they don't know what to do either. Our church communities if they are healing communities need to open their doors to providing homes, care and nurturing for those children who have lost everything. School fees are the biggest problem for orphans after food. Some provision needs to be made for this as well. Education gives independence and stability. For a vulnerable child, education also gives security.”

The Church's Integrated Life Development Programme of the Church of South India South Kerala diocese helps the families of life prisoners in various prisons in Kerala. Education of children, Alternate life possibilities of spouses, shelter and summer camps are some of the priorities. Vulnerability assumes newer forms in each of their lives.

Case Study: Indira was a brilliant student doing graduation in Mathematics. A pleasant home, parents, a younger sister and brother. One fine morning tension within home resulted in a tragic disaster. The mother angry at the father stabbed and killed him. The mother was put in prison and the children were abandoned and felt the stigma of being the children of a murderer. The Church stepped in. It took up the responsibility of shelter and protection, education and upbringing of the three vulnerable children.

Do you find similar situations and need for action in your environment? |

Understanding Power

What do we mean by Power?

Power in and of itself is morally neutral; it is an important and necessary factor in all human relationships. It is the energy, the potential to act, to effect and to shape. However, human uses of power often tend to turn violent. Many of its visible manifestations are associated with aggression, domination, destruction and violence, making power assume negative connotations. Commenting on the contemporary notions of power, Max Weber said: “Power is the probability that one actor within a relationship that will be in a position to carry out his/her own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests.” It is perhaps this probability to fulfill one's desires by any means that makes power not only attractive but also violent and dreadful. Therefore, what makes power prone to abuse is not the

exercise per se but the motive and manner in which it is exercised. Therefore, various forms of power whether economic, physical, social, military, political, technological or even intellectual tend to turn violent as they serve the interests of those who possess them.⁴

Where does the Idea of Empowerment come from?

Empowerment is a multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives. It is a process that fosters the capacity to implement power in people, for use in their own lives, their communities, and in their society by acting on issues that they define as important.

Jesus during his ministry empowered ordinary people to look at their lives as it was, to make necessary changes to enable them and others to live a wholesome, meaningful life. We, in our various jobs and roles through life, need to do the same. We need to help people evaluate their lives, and help them make changes that will empower and enable them to live a creative, meaningful life.

Read and think

Dr Musa Dube spoke of the power that all of us have been given. She asked us to think about two things.

1. How we use the power given to us.
2. How we distribute the power in and amongst us.

There are three ways of using and distributing power.

First there is the model, *power to*. This is God given power that we are all given. The power to, is the power that enables us to do things, to walk, work, think, plan, create, and implement our goals and achieve them both individually and in community.

Secondly, there is *power over*, the power that suppresses, silences, dominates and leads to ill health by denying others their God given right to exercise their "power to". The power over is the one that operates through violence and is likely to produce more violence.

The third is the *power with* that is the power which happens in relationships, in communities, through consultation, and where all voices are listened to and given consideration. |

Story

- One of the members reported that a friend of hers had been through a very frustrating time. The board of her theological college had employed a new Principal who had no administrative experience or theological training. When the lecturers who had been excluded from the process of hiring their new Principal protested, the board of directors asked her to resign. This kind of power is used to dictate, exclude and humiliate.
- A representative from a country torn by war said that he still remembers with fear the power of a soldier's gun. "The first time I saw it I was about eleven years old. That gun killed my father and my brothers. For me it is a hateful symbol of power."
- An African representative spoke of the power of love. The love of a mother, who taught her to treat the whole world as her brothers and sisters. "My mother is dead now, but the love she gave everyone she met still lives on in everyone she touched and blessed."

⁴ Deenabandhu Manchala, Searching for the meaning and implications of Healing and Reconciliation in a Violent World.

- Southern Christian College (SCC), a church-related school operated by the United Church of Christ in the Philippines has declared a decade of solidarity with the Indigenous peoples (2004-2014). In developing a program along this line, SCC has created a space to enable the indigenous people to develop their concepts and strategic plans on their claim for right to self-determination. These are all led by the indigenous peoples themselves.

Trying to understand and look around

The Bible is full of stories of empowerment of the weak. For our own work in congregations and beyond, it is helpful to identify the stories and the steps taken in these stories in order to empower people and communities.

Doing something

Find out and discuss:

- Who holds power in your community? What kind of power is it?
- Who benefits from it? Discuss: Who in your church benefits from power?
- Who are the groups needing empowerment and where is power used for empowerment?
- Can power be a tool for healing and reconciliation? |

Aspects of Power

General description

In our search for understanding our role of healing and reconciliation in mission, the key lies in how we want to use our power as God's agents. We must all have power this God wills for us. God gives power to all of us. What brings problems pertains to two issues: how we use our power and how we distribute power in and amongst ourselves. There are three types of using and distributing power. First, there is the model "power to". This is the God given power that we all have and are born with, by virtue of being made in God's image. The "power to", is the power that enables us to do things – to walk, work, think, plan, create and implement our goals and achieve them individually and within community. The "power to", is therefore, the power of agency and one that we can use sometimes for advocacy or empower others. The latter comes into the picture partly because power must be shared, because we live in community and to be in community is to know how to share, but also because some members of our worlds are denied power based on age, disability, gender, ethnicity, class, sexuality, race, religion, nationality, or health status. "Power to", however, is an inherent power to all of us. The second use of power is the model of "power over" – that is, power that suppresses, silences, dominates and leads to ill health by denying other parties their God given right to exercise their "power to". The "power over" is the one that operates through violence and is likely produce violence, for it uses force, denies people their human rights and the oppressed may resist their domination by using force. The realm of state use of force, militarism, civil wars, rape, spousal violence, child abuse, racism, ethnic cleansing/conflict, caste stratification, gender inequality, religious, cultural intolerance, colonialism, globalization, terrorism, environmental abuse etc. belong here. The use of "power over" is not a healing use of power, for it does not reconcile or lead to just and life-affirming relations. "Power over" violates God's image and leads to ill-health by creating unhealthy relationships. "Power over" is the root of injustice and suffering in our world. The third model of the use of power is "the power with", that is power which happens in relationships, in

community, through consultation and where all voices are listened and taken seriously (Ackerman 1996: 220f.). Power With is a model that seeks to ensure that all members of our communities are given the respect and space to exercise their power individually and in community. It is shared power. It is the first and last two uses of power that can help us to take our places as God's agents of reconciliation and healing.

Symbols, Stories and Case studies

(for more stories or the abbreviated story in full, see in the section “stories”)

Symbol

A bullet, a pen, a picture of a gun and a dollar note were presented as symbols of power. What symbol would you bring forward? |

Story

Dr. Sigit Wijayanta shared the following:

Reflection on Church and Power Play in Conflicting Areas

The Church as an institution is often faced with conflict. The Church prioritizes on protecting its members from those who attack it. In a conflict situation, the endeavor to save the church members is a work that never ends, whereas the need of concrete reconciliation of the parish is often neglected.

The role of the church in the conflict in East Timor (now Timor Leste), in caring of the victims are carried out by Christians outside the church. In the case of Ambon, CD Bethesda and YAKKUM Emergency Unit are the representatives of church, but they are outside the church institution. The staff of CD Bethesda and YAKKUM Emergency Unit are not only Christian, but also Muslim; so they do not have difficulties to enter segregated areas, and they can serve and be accepted in both conflict areas, Muslim as well Christian.

The conflict in these three areas is solved in different ways.

In Ambon, conflict occurs in the centre of town. There are an equal number of Christians in the government and in the resource economy and so there is a power bias to the struggle. Maluku Protestant Church is the biggest church and is a haven for those Christians who come under attack from others. Sometimes men with weapons guard the church and this gives the impression that the church is a nest for Christian soldiers. Because of this image, it is difficult to dialogue with the Muslim groups.

North Maluku is outside the government power sphere, so the church is free from political bias. Here the church is able to care more for the victims of conflict.

In South Maluku, the people solve conflicts through their own traditional customs and do not depend on the church.

Where there is religious conflict, the church is faced with a dilemma as to what methods to use to reconcile with each other. Where the churches are far from the source of political power, the process of reconciliation is easier and quicker.

How do I/we discover the issue in my/our local context?

STEP I:

It might be helpful to ask in the beginning the same “Who are you?” questions, which Musa Dube points out at the end of her presentation to the consultation.

- *Are you the powerful colonizing power of the empire that makes people mentally and physically ill?*
- *Are you the skilled physicians who use their power to exploit and worsen the position of the powerless?*
- *Are you the powerful Jesus and Jairus, who are willing to use their power to empower and to heal the powerless?*
- *Are you the bleeding woman who is socially stigmatized, but who is willing to break the cultural and physical barriers to get her own healing? |*
- *There are many who cry, out of their pain, grant me justice! There are many bleeding women and nations, who have no more money to pay doctors, but who are desperately in need of healing.*
- *Are we sensitive enough to hear them when they stretch their hands to touch our clothes even in the middle of our fame? Are we prepared to stop and listen?*
- *Are we prepared to welcome them back to the family, not as strangers and aliens, but as daughters and sons?*
- *Are you the dying or dead young girl who is waiting for a healer to arrive? Even as we speak, there are many young girls and nations who are at the point of death due to the HIV/AIDS, globalization, poverty, violence.*

STEP II:

- *Having identified who you are, can you give examples for events where your power played an important role and those, where you could be of support for empowerment?*
- *Discuss these with friends and in your group or class.*

How do I/we engage meaningfully?

God's power of healing is always seen through ordinary people like you and me.

God's power of healing flows through all creation. There are three ways in which we can deal with it.

We can choose to let the power flow through our lives, direct it and apply it effectively wherever and whenever needed. Or we can prevent the power from flowing through our lives, thus avoiding to address the needs that surround us. We can distort the God given power to suit our own needs, at the cost of the welfare of others.

The Parable of the Good Samaritan illustrates how people can play all three roles. The bandit who waylaid the traveller, distorted the God given power to do evil acts and to cause suffering and loss. The leaders who walked by, avoiding the wounded man, refused to utilize the God given power to heal, to flow through them. The Samaritan used it positively.

It is good to picture ourselves in various situations and assess which role we have adopted – the bandits, the leaders or the 'good' Samaritan. Our well-being and the well-being of others around are determined by the role we take up and the roles we inspire in those around us. |

The need for Actions

Where do we go from here? – A Memorandum to ourselves

“We have gathered from different continents and are representatives of many countries. We were brought together to consider the theme healing reconciliation and power in the context of healing, reconciliation, vulnerability and power. We listened, engaged, debated, shared, worshipped and prayed together. We heard moving stories of pain, rejection, alienation, sadness and hope. We heard of inhuman

atrocities and miraculous survival. We struggled with concepts and the meaning of this theme into our own realities.

Through God's grace we survived, we listened to each other. We are going from here wiser, better informed and more determined to do something." These words of Gary at our closing worship call us to action. Action, which we have identified in our regional meetings, which have grown out of the numerous discussions and encounters. In the spirit of our committed encounter, we have identified issues and themes we need to tackle regionally and inter-regionally. We write them down here, as a memorandum to ourselves, so that we may not lose the spirit of this meeting, and may remind each other of the dreams and visions we have identified and support each other in our own struggles with Healing and Reconciliation, all for the benefit of our people.

In the spirit of our encounter we see the following areas of commitment for ourselves. We Asians see the need to engage in building a process where we have identified three inter-related foci on:

Asian ecumenical process on Ecology and Health involving issues such as Healing ministries, Ecology of health, Primary community health care, HIV/AIDS, Asiatic epidemics, Environment movement, Ecology and health education etc. There is a need to work for local educational projects on Health and Reconciliation and share these in an inter-contextual series of publications on Health and Reconciliation.

Asian ecumenical process on life and peace involving issues such as Reconciliation ministry, Uprooted people, People with disabilities, People in conflict situations, Other marginalized groups etc.

Asian ecumenical process on alternative communities involving analysis on themes such as Globalization, Sustainable development, Urban Rural Mission, Local economy of life, Economy and ecology etc.

We Africans see the need to engage in an:

African ecumenical process involving assessment and re-defining our work related to healing and reconciliation and share more deliberately information about this.

African ecumenical process involving much needed ecumenical learning and formation, for church leadership, local congregations. Topics should not only deal with the wider ecumenical agenda but in particular with issues relating to the experiences on healing and reconciliation at local African level. |

African ecumenical process concerned with Inter-faith Networking and collaboration as a model for healing and reconciliation; integration, assimilation and protection, which aims at healing the identity crisis of the minorities and Africans in diaspora.

We need to ask ourselves:

- How faithful and contextual are our sermons regarding Healing and Reconciliation? Will we not have to influence theological education more in this respect?
- Is healing and reconciliation possible in the absence of justice and restitution? What learning is available from African traditions?
- How can we face and deal with racism in our communities and continents honestly and practically?
- What are we doing to in Christian education to promote an understanding of healing and reconciliation? How can we contribute to the introduction of this subject in state schools?

Together we feel the need to embark on and promote among African and Asian Christians an:

AFRO-ASIAN ECUMENICAL SOLIDARITY PROCESS ON HEALING AND RECONCILIATION

aiming at:

- Common Agenda and Strategy Development
- Inter-local solidarity at inter-continental level
- Using common global ecumenical events as Afro-Asian platform
- Regional and inter-regional empowerment
- Coordination by a working group
- Educational guidelines through which current church leadership empowerment and engagement for Healing and Reconciliation is fostered;
- The build up of a database: Who is doing what in healing and reconciliation ministry?
- Sharing our information in mutually understandable language.

A task for us all

We know that this meeting and the opportunity to reflect on our work together in Afro-Asian fellowship, has made us critically aware of the many challenges before us. It has also made us aware how essential the exchange of experience is, not only within our regions but in Afro-Asian solidarity. We feel empowered by this experience and its chance to share our stories, victories and defeats. To share our struggles with the understanding of these issues in our societies in transition.

This results in the long lists of tasks which we see before us. These cannot be accomplished on our own. We need the support of our churches, congregations, mission | institutions, fellow Christians and ecumenical partners, to progress on the road to Healing and Reconciliation in the contexts of vulnerabilities and unjust power structures, so that our people can experience the liberating force of the Gospel.

But first of all, we need to uphold the spirit of this meeting, by staying in contact, continue to share our stories and enter into a bond of mutual accountability.

We see for the churches and congregations the challenge to more vigorously involve in:

- The renewal of the Church as a healing and reconciling community
- The development of spiritual and theological guidelines on healing and reconciliation
- The promotion of a people and local context centered dialogical strategy
- The strengthening of an inter-local strategy for people to people solidarity
- The establishment of efficient networks of communication including e-communications
- The creation of fora for healing and reconciliation stressing collective historical memories such as colonial experience, genocide, war etc.
- The recognition of justice as the central part of the healing and reconciliation process
- Emphasizing the social dimensions of healing and reconciliation
- Awareness building regarding the religious and cultural diversity in the process of healing and reconciliation
- Giving priority to primary community health care
- Widening our horizons by deepening the understanding of healing and reconciliation into the agenda of the whole creation
- Recognizing the ecological dimension of healing and reconciliation
- Revitalization and integration of past and existing initiatives and experiences into our strive for healing and reconciliation
- Last not least, the promotion of interfaith cooperation in the healing and reconciliation process

This demands that we enter into dialogue with churches to make healing the brokenness of humanity a paradigm for the missionary obligation of the Church in

African and Asian context and perspective. The processes we suggest and to which we want to hold each other accountable to, need not be left to the “experts”, but should involve all sectors of the Christian community as it is “all in each place” who experience situations of brokenness, vulnerability and marginalization, which need healing, reconciliation and empowerment.

We call on our churches, congregations, Christian educational institutions as well as theological educators to play a more active role in the ecumenical process on reconciliation and healing, presently leading up to the World Conference on Mission and | Evangelism and to the 9th Assembly of the World Council of Churches. It is important that within this process we voice the Afro-Asian concerns, by identifying injustices and the need to support the struggle of disempowered, vulnerable and marginalized through active participation.

- In particular we address the organizers of this meeting the regional ecumenical organizations and our local churches:
- The Afro-Asian Consultation on Healing, Reconciliation and Power recommends to the organizers and their responsible constitutional bodies, a five-year Afro-Asian Ecumenical Solidarity Process on Healing and Reconciliation as a follow up to the World Conference on Mission and Evangelism in Athens 2005.
- We recommend to our local and regional ecumenical organizations to involve in a procedure of the ECUMENICAL PROCESS ON HEALING, RECONCILIATION AND POWER through situational analysis and planning; Local centred implementation and monitoring; reflection and evaluation
- We recommend to our local and regional ecumenical organizations to strengthen existing and create new forms and opportunities for ecumenical formation for member churches, councils, other ecumenical organizations, Christian NGOs and individuals
- We recommend to enter in to a process of cooperation on issues of healing and reconciliation with evangelical fellowships, independent churches, charismatic movements, Catholics and other faith groups
- We recommend to AACC-CCA to create an inter-regional working group in cooperation with WCC for the Afro-Asian Ecumenical Solidarity Process on Healing and Reconciliation

Our Bible Studies during this meeting have shown us, how Healing, Reconciliation, Empowerment can be handled in Christ way, as we face our work back home, we aim at not forgetting, what we have learned with and from each other.

The participants of the Afro-Asian Mission Consultation on Healing, Reconciliation and Power – Bangalore 2004 |

Action examples for congregations and Christian educational institutions

In both, congregations and Christian educational institutions including theological seminaries, the concerns on healing, reconciliation and power, in the context of brokenness and vulnerability, need to have a place in discussions and curricula. The following are a few ideas, how that could happen.

Healing – Of/In the congregation

Description of situation: Very often we see healing as a medical process. Many healing crusades build on this. More often however, the healing needed is healing related to psychological and social wounds and afflicted vulnerabilities. We do not

often identify those in need of psychological and social healing. Suicides are one of the effects, which are a late indication to the fact that people can no longer cope with the “psychological” wounds. In the Pacific we find youth, who, due to the transfer from one cultural setting to another, can no longer cope with that situation of “bi-identity” and seemingly look for a way out through suicide. Other cultures find people turning to drugs. Families, where relationships are in urgent need of healing, due to the difficulties they encounter in modern life, break up.

What can we do: As a congregation, we can offer a space, where the process of healing can be focussed. Once we have acknowledged that we are called to be healing communities. The congregation needs to be aware of this role, to be a caring community. It needs to be recognised that in all this, it is God's power which finally heals and thus prayer and action are needed to have God's healing power to intervene in situations of brokenness and suffering.

Description of ways out: Identify the vulnerabilities and needs for healing in your environment and in the congregation in particular. Create safe spaces in which those who are vulnerable can share. The congregation can learn about its own vulnerability in the process. It is essential, that we acknowledge the fact, that as human beings we are all vulnerable and in need of healing. Therefore we all are in need of each others prayer and support. Christian educational institutions need to train their ministers and church workers in particular, to deal with situations such as the need for healing, through empathy, compassion and understanding. This will help the congregation and the members of the Christian community to understand those who suffer. |

Reconciliation – Of/In the congregation

Description of situation: Reconciliation is more than forgiving. It is the re-establishment of broken relationships through action, which destroyed the same. It involves the recognition of the act involved as such – breaking relationships - In a broken relationship “I am” no longer. Reconciliation thus is pro-active. Re-conciliare includes the recognition that we need to reinstall this relationship. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa attempted this, by analyzing the situation in which such relationships were destroyed. Desmond Tutu described the task:

“I hope that the work of the Commission, by opening wounds to cleanse them, will thereby stop them from festering. We cannot be facile and say bygones will be bygones, because they will not be bygones and will return to haunt us. True reconciliation is never cheap, for it is based on forgiveness which is costly. Forgiveness in turn depends on repentance, which has to be based on an acknowledgement of what was done wrong and therefore on disclosure of the truth. You cannot forgive what you do not know” (Response by Archbishop Tutu on his appointment as Chairperson of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, November 30 1995).

What can we do? Reconciliation needs a conciliar process, through which either side of the process can bring forward its grievances and describe the destruction which has been done. A good example has been the process on the “Participation of the Orthodox Churches in the World Council of Churches”. There were many grievances, which they felt in not being given a chance for active participation in the ecumenical movement. This led to misunderstandings and disengagement. A Special Commission, which was set up, created this “safe space” in which the grievances could be spelled out without an apologetic feeling. All members, when they presented their report to the Central Committee of the WCC acknowledged, that this “safe space” had lead them into a true learning situation.

Description of ways out: In the story from Sierra Leone, the victim had forgiven the

perpetrator, the victim may even have been reconciled with the situation he found himself in after the cutting off of his arm. But are the victim and the perpetrator reconciled? Reconciling needs reinstalling the brokenness of both the parties involved and therefore needs counselling. The West African tradition of “Palaver”, where the elders lead the palaver of the parties, is one of the models, which might be used, though it is deeply embedded in that particular culture and its acknowledgement of such a process.

What are the difficulties faced when one moves from forgiveness to reconciliation? Is it right what James Cone says, that reconciliation can only happen between equals? What prevents us from seeing the other person as equal? |

Power – In/Of the congregation

Description of situation: In many human relationships power plays an important role. In professional life for instance, people are subject to power relations from their superiors (bullying). Consequently they feel disempowered, and their capacities and expertise are not taken seriously.

The church and congregation are part of human society. Therefore it is not surprising, that what happens in society, can also be found inside the church, although we claim to live a life according to different values.

Power and its abuse are often found in congregations, where there is a clash between expertise of the ministers versus the role of the laity. Consequently this has disempowering instead of empowering functions. In this world of power, what are the notions and models of power that the churches cherish? With the combination of institutional and sacred power, churches have often been accused of abuse and misuse of power against their own members, besides ignoring the clamour for justice and fairness within and outside. Many dominant church traditions, because of their close proximity to and patronage of temporal powers, have either glorified and condoned institutionalised violence, or have shied away from confronting the same (Deenabandu Manchala).

Even forms of violent behaviours are not unknown in the church and congregational life, as has recently become more and more publicized. “We cause so much grief and pain to each other because of ambition, greed and pride. We want the applause, the credits, the awards ourselves. There comes a time, when we realize that all that matters is not power or fame, but the love one has given and received. We need to ask ourselves, “Why are our messages on 'Love' so hollow and ineffective?” (Gideon Byamugisha)

What can we do? The first thing to always do is to look and listen. Are there situations in your congregation, where participation is denied? How are conflicts of interests dealt with in your congregation? Do all parties have an equal say? How about gender equality in conflict solving? How about gender equality in decision making processes? Are there groups, which have lesser say than others?

Description of ways out: Do we follow a strategic plan? Are our policies clear as to why we support 'this' and denounce 'that' for the sake of 'healing' and 'reconciliation' and 'positive power'? Do our choices for involvement, action or inaction reflect wise and prayerful prioritization to accelerate healing and reconciliation? Do we have strategies for tackling the 'powerlessness', the vulnerability of both the 'powerful' and the 'powerless'? |

Becoming a healing, reconciling and empowering community

Becoming a healing, reconciling and empowering community demands an inward

and an outward perspective of our congregations. We have to acknowledge that as community we are ourselves in need of healing and reconciliation. Only when we acknowledge this, can we become agents of wholeness. Are we willing to create a space in our Christian communities, where the brokenness of our social environment, of relationships with other Faith, of Gender inequality, Racism and Xenophobia, find their place and can be addressed? The Christian community encompasses both, the powerful and the powerless, the victims and the perpetrators, the ones in need of healing and those who are healthy. With this, we have the chance of creating platforms of encounter and dialogue, platforms of awareness building for one side and platforms for empowerment for the other.

Christ called people into a discipleship of service and healing. It was often the inclusion of the victims into their own community and their faith which healed them.

To call people into community, we need to include those who have been dismembered, physically, socially and psychologically. It is by this process of inclusion that we become a healing community.

The Christian response to brokenness is to reach out and touch, or walk with those who are broken and bring healing in any way we can. A healing community becomes powerful when people in the group live together in harmony with one another, caring for each other with love and compassion, thus drawing others to them to be healed by their care and love. The early church became a healing community as they ministered to each other and to others who came to them for healing and counsel. Thus our response to a world broken and in pain is a continuation of the healing ministry from these early days.