

LENTEN REFLECTIONS FROM OUR MISSIONARIES

Journeying Toward Wholeness - Micah 6:8

Migrants, refugees and asylum seekers are proof that our world is broken. The home they left and their temporary life in Istanbul are fragmented, incomplete and often desperate. But they have a vision of wholeness. Disciples' support of the Istanbul Interparish Migrant Program (IIMP) offers them welcome, hope, understanding, warmth, a cup of tea, plus good advice, food coupons, medical referral, language study and even the possibility to go home again.

Meet a Pakistani family of 10. They are asylum seekers because they belong to an Islamic sect that is unpopular in their country. They were persecuted so much that they came to Turkey and requested refugee status. IIMP not only helped with basic necessities but worked to get the younger children into school, arranged English tutoring for the older children and gave the father a scholarship to study Turkish.

When their seven year old son was diagnosed with TB, IIMP helped to arrange treatment, TB testing for the rest of the family, and, when the mother and father became ill, IIMP stood by them.

God, thank you for the privilege of standing by your children and helping the vulnerable as they continue their journey toward wholeness.

(The authors, Betty and Ken Frank, members of Claremont United Church of Christ, Claremont, California, serve the Health and Education Foundation (SEV) in Istanbul, Turkey. They work as the Co-General Secretaries of the American Board in Istanbul.)

The Cost of Wholeness - 2 Corinthians 8:9

In our shanty town mission health clinic, whose objectives are disease prevention and education, we have a children's program. The objectives of this program are to keep children whose parents are absent from the home, off the streets, away from drugs, prostitution and bad company since they are in school only half of the day.

A few years ago, Paulinho, one of the boys in the group, shy and quiet, was found crying. When the leader asked why, he said that his mother was in the hospital, very sick and needed an operation but before this could happen, there was a special medicine she had to take which the hospital did not have, a very expensive medicine. Without this surgery his mother's life was in jeopardy.

And thus began a campaign by the other children. One of the leaders who knew how to make chocolate suggested that they make chocolate Easter bunnies to sell. And this they did! For 40 days they made them and on Easter presented the money to Paulinho's family to buy the medication needed. In a sense, the gesture of all of these children was surely a movement towards wholeness in an unjust world.

God of health and wholeness, teach us simple gests of solidarity during this Lenten season so that we might see healing this Easter. Amen

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Connecting the Dots Toward Wholeness - Isaiah 40:3-5

In South Africa, the press reports daily upon the greed and corruption of the country's leaders. Their conspicuous consumption prevents the delivery of basic services such as water, housing, electricity, education and health care to the poor.

In response, the government is legislating restrictions on the press to prevent it from exposing problems, missed targets, corruption and incompetence. An attack on press freedom is an attack on the poor as leaders can't be held to account. South Africa's income disparity is arguably the world's widest.

Your Disciples' 2011 Easter Offering affirms our partner in faith, Rev. Dr. Prince Dibeela, General Secretary of the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa, as he decries South Africa's inequality to be "incredible and unethical".

Gracious God, as people of faith, help us to intellectually and spiritually 'connect the dots'. Inspire us to make a fragmented world whole. Remind us that materialism leads to corruption. Remind us that corruption leads to oppression. As we humble ourselves during Lent, denying ourselves a privilege or luxury, we do so mindful that the powerful deny many millions basic needs: clean water, heath care, food and education. We cry with Isaiah (40:4): Lower the mountains! Raise the valleys! Amen.

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