

Welcome and Land Acknowledgement

We recognize that the land where we gather for worship belongs to God, as does all of creation. We also acknowledge that the Lkwungen people – the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ – have lived on this land since before settlers of European descent claimed ownership and displaced those for whom it was home. As we pursue our goals to dismantle racism and attend to growing diversity, we lament this injustice in our history and commit ourselves to just and respectful relationships within our congregation and our neighborhood.

May we live with respect on this land and live in peace and friendship with its people.

➤ ***Dance with the Spirit***

MV 156 (repeat)

Call to Worship

Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; Come, buy wine and milk without price.

**Why would we spend money for that which is not bread,
or work for that which does not satisfy?**

Incline your ear, and come to me, says our God; listen, so that you may live.

We come to worship the living God, who satisfies us with good things.

You, O Lord, deserve all our praise, now and always.

Let us worship God as we join our hearts in prayer...

† Prayer

Creator, Christ, and Spirit, when our souls hunger for fulfilment, you give us the Bread of Life. You touch our deepest hungers and fill us with good things. Creator, Christ and Spirit, when our souls thirst for communion with you, you offer us the fullness of life itself. You refresh us with living water. Creator, Christ and Spirit, when we long for what is authentic and for what endures, you show us the Way, the Truth and the Life. And so we come to worship you – receive all our praise and gratitude, O God.

God of all that matters, forgive our forgetfulness of what matters to you. Forgive the sins we know and those we have forgotten – the sins we have tried to hide and those we were once proud to commit. Forgive the sins we have done to please ourselves and the sins we have done to please others. Heal our lives and our relationships with your mercy, and bless what we can become through your faithfulness to us. We pray together in Jesus' name... ***Our Father, who art in heaven – hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come – thy will be done – on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen***

Words of Hope

In Christ, all things are made new. Know that you are forgiven by with great mercy. Trust and have the courage to forgive each other in Jesus' name.

➤ *What does the Lord require of you*

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A PCC Story of Mission ***Veronica's Return***

PWS&D and ***Presbyterians Sharing*** support a number of mission programs within the Livingstonia Synod in Northern Malawi. With the support of ***PWS&D***, Ekwendeni Hospital AIDS Program supports village education committees that encourage students who have dropped out of school to complete their education.

Veronica, a bright 15-year-old girl who lives in Mangwani Village in Malawi, has always loved going to school. But when she learned she was pregnant, Veronica was scared of what it meant for her future. Worried about becoming a mother and being forced to drop out of school, her hopes of continuing her education were disappearing before her eyes.

Enala, Veronica's mom, was also worried. She felt the eyes of the community on her because of the stigma attached to teen pregnancy and considered throwing her daughter out of the family home. The whole family felt helpless and overwhelmed.

Many young girls around the world are forced to drop out of school if they become pregnant. Due to social and cultural customs, they might be encouraged to marry at an early age or just have to remain home to care for their babies. Without an education, their ability to earn a living, provide for their families, make healthy decisions and contribute to the overall development of their communities is taken away from them.

Things started to feel more hopeful when Veronica's parents were approached by the local village education committee (VEC). The VEC is central to communicating the importance of education to parents and guardians.

Access to education is already harder for girls than boys. Globally, over 130 million girls are not attending primary or secondary schools. In rural areas, only 39% of girls attend secondary school.

The COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated the inequality already faced by many girls in the developing world. Due to loss of income, lack of access to schooling, bearing the highest costs of domestic labour, and facing increased domestic violence, many girls are being forced into early marriages. These marriages in turn limit both their and their children's future opportunities.

The single biggest factor in reducing mortality rates for children under five is more education for women—a literate woman has a 50% higher chance of her child surviving past the age of five. More education helps women make better decisions about prenatal care, basic hygiene, nutrition and immunizations, contributing to better health for the family.

PWS&D's local partner, the Ekwendeni Hospital AIDS Program, supports village education committees that check on students who have dropped out of school and encourage them to return, with the support of their parents and guardians.

With encouragement from the VEC, Veronica was able to continue attending school after giving birth to her daughter. Her mother was relieved to find support from the community and assisted Veronica's return by looking after her granddaughter.

Veronica knows that her education is opening the door to a better life for her and her daughter. According to the UN, for every additional year of school, girls' eventual wages rise by 10-20%. Veronica's education is helping her gain tools to help break cycles of poverty and contribute to the development of her family and community. While she is still figuring out how to adapt to her new role as a mother and a student, Veronica is excited about the future.

Scripture Jeremiah 29: 1-14

These are the words of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the remaining elders among the exiles, and to the priests, the prophets, and all the people, whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. This was after King Jeconiah, and the queen mother, the court officials, the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the artisans, and the smiths had departed from Jerusalem. The letter was sent by the hand of Elasah son of Shaphan and Gemariah son of Hilkiah, whom King Zedekiah of Judah sent to Babylon to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. It said: *Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Do not let the prophets and the diviners who are among you deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams that they dream, for it is a lie that they are prophesying to you in my name; I did not send them, says the Lord.*

For thus says the Lord: Only when Babylon's seventy years are completed will I visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me, says the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, says the Lord, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.

Reflection

Most of us can only imagine what it would be like to live under the domination of an enemy or be forced to go and live in a foreign land. That was the situation of Jeremiah's people. They were

in dire straits, and it is to a desperate situation which Jeremiah speaks. He utters a word of hope – proclaiming that God has a plan for God’s people, even when the present seems uncertain and dangerous. The best news of all is that God is present and will bring the people back from captivity. God intends good things.

Many of us in North America take our schooling for granted. School is where we met up with friends, excelled at our favourite subjects and learned new things. It’s where we gained life skills, developed our passions and built our confidence. For many students in developing countries, going to school and getting an education are key to breaking out of cycles of poverty.

When Veronica found out she was pregnant, she was heartbroken at the thought that she might not return to school. But God had other plans. With the encouragement of her village’s education committee, Veronica’s hopeless situation turned bright and now she is improving future prospects for herself and her daughter. God plans for abundant life for God’s people. No matter how bleak the current circumstances, God is working to bring good.

I wonder about the reasons students in Malawi might not attend school and how similar they may be to those who drop out in Canada.

I wonder how Veronica’s experience of teen pregnancy parallels the experience of a teen in Canada and how our support of Artemis Place – the school and daycare next door to Knox – has been helpful in keeping young women in school.

In the scripture passage, Jeremiah states that God has a plan for our future. I wonder how we discern what God is planning for our future. How can we as a community of faith begin to discern what God has planned for us?

➤ *With the Lord as my guide*

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† Prayer

Wonderful God, before we were formed, you knew us. You knew all the plans you had for us — plans to prosper and not to harm us. We pray that though obstacles may cross our paths, we will continue to put our faith and trust in you, and that your presence will bring us peace. We ask your special blessing on Veronica and other girls who struggle to get access to education. In Jesus’ name we pray, amen.

➤ *Precious Lord, take my hand*

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A PCC Story of Mission ***The Prison Experience***

The **Ecumenical Accompaniment Program in Palestine and Israel** (EAPPI) began in 2002 after local church leaders asked the World Council of Churches to create an international presence in the country. Ecumenical Accompaniers provide protective presence to Palestinians as they witness life under occupation. Upon returning home they share their experiences and advocate

for a just peace in Palestine and Israel. With support from *Presbyterians Sharing*, Shaun MacDonald served as an Ecumenical Accompanier in Hebron from late 2019 to early 2020. Listen to Shaun's experience...

"Empty everything out of your pockets," our host, Salwa, advised us. "No cell phones, keys, anything metal, even leave your wallets and money in the car, I will lock it while we're in there." Salwa is a member of a group called Military Court Watch, a small team of Palestinian, Israeli and international lawyers who monitor the court cases of detained Palestinian children. She escorted me and two colleagues to the notorious Ofer Prison, near the Palestinian capital of Ramallah. This is an Israeli military prison—with the military courts on the premises—and we were there to witness the judicial proceedings in action.

After a thorough screening at the entrance, we were allowed into an outdoor waiting area where family members of those on trial anxiously waited for word on the status of their loved ones. We chatted and tried to be supportive. Salwa pointed out the "court rooms" where we would view the proceedings: seven cramped shipping containers converted into expedited sentencing rooms. Salwa informed us that up to 40 cases per day are conducted in these rooms, with a conviction rate of over 95%. Palestinian detainees are generally advised to plead guilty. The judges are often military men from the settlements, the Israeli towns and villages established in Palestinian territory. (Settlements refer to Israeli towns and villages established in Palestinian territory after the 1967 War. To move one's own citizens onto occupied territory is illegal under international law as per the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949.)

We entered one of the containers and sat in the gallery. There were two people on trial, one adult and one teenager, no more than 14 years old. We were there specifically to see the children. The minimum age for criminal responsibility for Palestinians under Israeli military law is 12 years old (although the maximum sentence they can receive is six months) but over the age of 14 they can be sentenced as adults. What complicates this matter is that ID cards are only issued at age 16, so arresting soldiers often detain even younger children.

We sat with the family of the young boy on trial. His father was stoic, but his mother's body was wracked with convulsions as she wrung her hands and cried quietly. The boy stood, shackled, staring at the floor the entire time. I noticed the prosecuting attorneys scrolling through their phones, while the court reporter was literally sound asleep, head on his desk. The judge banged his gavel and as the prisoners were escorted out, the boy's father rushed up to him and grabbed him by the shoulders, speaking quickly in Arabic. I imagine he was telling him to be strong. The boy gave his father a look of resolution, but then turned to face his mother and we saw tears streaming down his face as he was led away.

In the 45 minutes I spent at Ofer Prison, I witnessed seven convictions, three of them children. The details of the cases aren't important. What is important is that they were children on trial, as adults, in military courts, which lack fundamental fair trial rights and protections. Israel is the only country in the world that automatically and systematically prosecutes children in military courts.

Currently there are 185 Palestinian children in detention, but the number has been as high as 400 recently. Nearly half of these children are transferred to prisons outside of Palestinian territory—a war crime. They may not see their family members for months. Upon release they are often branded as collaborators, rejected by their home communities and traumatized from the experience of incarceration.

On the drive back to Jerusalem, I asked Salwa, “How do you do it? How do you keep coming here, fighting day after day and often seeing the situation get worse?” She paused, pensively, for a moment before replying: “No one predicted the Berlin wall would come down. No one predicted the Arab Spring uprisings. Often these large shifts in the tide of history are at work without us even realizing it. You just have to keep putting your little cracks in the wall. You have to have faith.”

In 2019, The Presbyterian Church in Canada voted to endorse the [No Way to Treat a Child](#) campaign, which is committed to securing a just and viable future for Palestinian children living in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and envisions a world where all children attain rights in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Since 1967, Israel has operated two separate legal systems in the same territory. In the occupied West Bank, Israeli settlers are subject to the civilian and criminal legal system whereas Palestinians live under military law. Israel applies civilian criminal law to Palestinian children in East Jerusalem. No Israeli child comes into contact with the military courts.

According to affidavits collected from 739 West Bank children detained between 2013 and 2018, 73% of Palestinian children experienced physical violence following arrest. Many also faced verbal abuse. In 96% of the cases, children had no parent present during the interrogation. Israeli police also did not properly inform them of their rights in 74% of the cases.

Despite sustained engagement by UNICEF, Israeli authorities have persistently failed to implement practical changes to stop violence against child detainees. The [No Way to Treat a Child](#) campaign draws attention to these human rights abuses. Find out more at www.nwttac.canada.dci-palestine.org.

Scripture Matthew 18: 1-10

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “*Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?*” He called a child, whom he put among them, and said, “*Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.*”

“If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world because of stumbling blocks! Occasions for stumbling are bound to come, but woe to the one by whom the stumbling block comes!”

“If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to enter life maimed or lame than to have two hands or two feet and to be thrown into the eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into the hell of fire.

“Take care that you do not despise one of these little ones; for, I tell you, in heaven their angels continually see the face of my Father in heaven.

Reflection

Being an Ecumenical Accompanier has two main objectives: witnessing life under occupation and providing protective presence. Shaun’s team provided protective presence for vulnerable school children in the heart of Hebron daily and they felt good about this; the children responded well to them. But then they would hear about the night raids, and even witness the detention of youths. Seeing young boys being led away in shackles made Shaun feel furious and helpless.

Even so, he was reminded of Christ’s words to the disciples: there is but one ultimate authority. Christ is clear: “Unless you become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” We need to stop jockeying for wealth, power and status, and serve God by serving the most vulnerable of God’s children. The Lord’s warning is also stark: to be the vehicle that causes an innocent child to have their faith corrupted is a sin of the highest magnitude.

Do you think it is important for us, as members of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, to work to oppose injustice and protect children wherever in the world they are threatened?

I wonder where we may have seen children hurting in our own country and what can we do as a faith community to help alleviate that suffering.

I wonder also about what drives the actions of an oppressor. How can we work to find understanding and forgiveness?

➤ *Blest are they*

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† Prayer Focus

Let’s remember to pray for the peacemakers: internationals, Palestinians and Israelis who share a common thread of love, compassion and hope. And pray for the youth who are led astray and must suffer challenges to their faith and to their very identities. Let us also pray for their persecutors, that they will find the light of a just peace in their hearts.

† Offering and Prayer

Through Presbyterians Sharing and Presbyterian World Service & Development, The Presbyterian Church in Canada is sharing Christ’s love in 25 countries. Gifts to Presbyterians Sharing – which Knox includes as part of our yearly budget – provide grants and mission staff to encourage, equip and accompany our mission partners in areas such as Bible translation, leadership development,

evangelism, outreach and Christian service. PWS&D supports development work and provides relief in times of emergency. Inspired by God's promise of abundant life, PWS&D envisions a sustainable, compassionate and just world. Thank you for your generosity to Knox and the work of our church.

Lord Jesus, we bring our gifts to you, knowing that you have given yourself for us, so that we have life in abundance. Bless these gifts. May they become the source of such abundance in lives we touch through mission and ministry for your sake. Amen

Blessing

God sends each of us out into the world to serve and be served, remembering that together we are the body of Christ. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, which daily renews us – the love of God, that enables us to love all others – and the community of the Holy Spirit, that binds us together in one body be with you: today, tomorrow and forever. Amen

➤ *Go now in peace, never be afraid*