Now is the time for peace with justice in Colombia

Ideas for Worship: Days of prayer and action 2013

Notes on using this packet

The materials in this packet include several worship resources for the 2013 Days of Prayer and Action for Colombia (DOPA), including suggested hymns and other music, prayers, litanies, and reflections. In your participation, please feel free to use any of the resources that best fit into your congregation’s worship patterns.

This year DOPA will be from April 28-29, 2013 and the theme is “Now is the Time for Peace with Justice in Colombia.” You can shape an entire service around this theme, or simply incorporate one or two resources into the service. If this year’s dates do not fit well with your congregation’s schedule, please feel free to use these resources another Sunday. Whenever you observe this day, it is important to prepare your congregation by including facts, figures, and stories from Colombia in your bulletins during the weeks prior to the day.

To aid these specific preparations, this packet also contains a brief introduction identifying several of the current major issues in Colombia and explaining why it is important to continue to keep our Colombian brothers and sisters in prayer.

Please let us know how or whether your congregation participated in DOPA and what resources your congregation used and found particularly helpful. Your feedback will help shape the content of subsequent packets. Please direct your feedback to Theo Sitther at the MCC Washington Office (theositther@mcc.org). We look forward to continuing this partnership in prayer!
Introduction / context

Prayers for Colombia: The Journey Continues

For seven years now, churches in Colombia, the United States, and Canada have prayed and acted together for peace in Colombia during Days of Prayer and Action each spring. We continue to invite churches to focus two days each year on our brothers and sisters in Colombia as they journey down a long road to peace.

Unresolved Armed Conflict

In October of 2012, the Colombian government and the FARC initiated peace negotiations for the first time in 10 years. The FARC have been the largest and most active guerilla group in Colombia since the 1960s, and continue to be significant players in Colombia’s 50-year armed conflict. This conflict has changed significantly in the past half century, in terms of location, tactics, and social issues involved. Though many have tried, a sustainable and comprehensive peace agreement has yet to be achieved.

There is cautious optimism that these talks may lead to the legal cessation of armed conflict. At the same time, there is concern about increasing violence from gangs and organized crime. Areas such as Chocó are experiencing significant social upheaval as illegal armed groups are enforcing control over large tracts of land for the drug trade. New government agreements with multi-national mining companies have disrupted the traditional family mining practices of most of the Chocó households which are heavily dependent on these small mining practices for their livelihoods.

Despite the overall decrease in armed confrontations, neither a negotiated settlement nor a military victory has occurred. Colombia is still categorized as the only country in the Americas where there is currently a war in progress (Project Ploughshares, 2012).

The underlying issues of inequality and poverty that caused this war in the first place have still not been resolved. Colombia continues to have one of the highest levels of income inequality in Latin America and the world (World Bank 2010). In fact, the gap between the haves and have-nots is increasing. In 1984, 4 per cent of landowners possessed 31 per cent of the land, and now these same 4 per cent of landowners possess 70 per cent of the land (World Bank 2010).
The strictly military approach to the conflict pursued by the previous Colombian government with US support and financial aid in Plan Colombia, for 8 years, has been modified in the last couple of years. The new approach includes a plan called “Integrated Action,” or Consolidation, which attempts to integrate state-building, government services and community economic development with military strategies against illegal armed groups. Thus far, the results of this approach have had mixed results for Colombians (CIP, 2009 and 2012).

Land Restitution and Reparations

A major topic on the national agenda is the issue of reparations and land restitution. President Santos, elected in June 2010, promised to address the problems of displacement and land. The Colombian Congress passed a land restitution law in 2011 to help some of the millions of people who have been displaced during the decades of armed conflict. This has potential to be a restorative step, however there are many challenges as this process tentatively begins. As implementation began in 2012, there have been threats and killings of people who attempt to reclaim their land, and often the conditions are not there for people to take up farming again, such as infrastructure, credit, and technical support. Moreover, the amount of land offered back is only a small percentage of the 6 million hectares of land that has been taken away from small-scale farmers. Another concern is that land titles are being offered to individuals, thus fragmenting communities that formerly lived collectively on the land, such as Afro-Colombian and Indigenous communities.

Psalm 34:14
Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.
**Competing Economic Development Approaches**

Claiming that the country is now stable, the Colombian government is actively encouraging foreign investment and large-scale economic projects such as mining and African palm oil production, which often benefit a small group of national and international businesses, at the expense of the environment and meeting basic human needs (PBI Colombia, 2011). Many Colombians believe that government economic policy should rather focus on restoring family farming for food production and other forms of local, sustainable economic development.

**The Most Internally Displaced People in the World**

Colombia is one of the countries in the world with the most internally displaced persons, according to the UN (UNHCR 2012). There are an estimated 4.9 million displaced persons, or about 10 per cent of the total population of Colombia (CODHES 2010). Each year, 250,000 to 350,000 people are displaced from their homes, mostly in rural communities threatened by guerrilla or paramilitary groups (CODHES 2010). The process of either returning to their former communities or establishing themselves in new places will require time, resources, and international and national support.

**Now is the Time for Peace with Justice in Colombia**

There are countless signs of hope. Colombians, among them MCC’s partners and the Anabaptist churches, are praying and working for peace and justice in numerous ways, with community projects, children’s education, alternative economic development and psycho-social healing.

Many countries and situations around the world need our prayers and action, but on this day we ask you to join with our sisters and brothers in Colombia to dedicate your prayers, thoughts, and actions to this situation, so that soon, all Colombians may experience God’s shalom.

**References**


May Peace Reign
Richar Castillo

Time has passed, years have passed
But these memories remain in my life
This strong torment has been so hard
This storm has beaten my life
My loved ones are gone
I don’t see the reason that this has happened to me
They were murdered, what sadness it gives me!
This bitter suffering has touched my soul

Where is my son, where is my brother
Where is my son that they took from this town
Where is my farm, where is my livestock
I don’t see my crops, I feel so alone

// May peace reign, may love reign
And in our country may pain cease //

Jesus is the source of my salvation
He’s my hope and my peace
He is my protector

I’m from the country and yet I’ve been denied
The right to cultivate this land, something I’ve longed for
One day they took my land from me and they didn’t value
the hard work that I did with my own hands
This whole situation has been so hard
Lord, give me strength to continue
And for those who have caused this great pain
Jesus, give me the strength to forgive

Where is my son
Where is my son that they took from this town
Where is my farm, where is my livestock
I don’t see my crops, I feel so alone

// May peace reign, may love reign
And in our country may pain cease //

Jesus is the source of my salvation
He’s my hope and my peace
He is my protector

Listen!
Music and lyrics by Philip Hart,
January 2010

To listen to an audio recording of this song,
go to: http://washington.mcc.org/days/worship/oiga

Listen! We will not accept this injustice that’s presented to us.
Listen! We move forward.
We will always fight for peace.

1) We are here for the people of Las Pavas.
We demand that their lands are returned to them.
Now!

2) We are here for the people of Garzal.
We demand that their property is returned to them.
Now!

3) We are here for the people of Colombia.
We demand that their rights are returned to them.
Now!

Songs for peace in Colombia
Prayers / Poems

1. “Lord, Give me Your Breath/Strength”

Today I want a new world
A world of love
Where all people
Really love each other
Lord, give me your breath
So I can sing
to all the nations
that they would live as one family
I also give you thanks
For all of humanity
and pray that your will would always be done.

Gissel (9) y Zuleima (10) Sampayo, Marta Ortiz

2. Lord. I ask you in the name
of your son Jesus Christ,
for all of the displaced in Colombia
and in the whole world.

That you, Lord, would give them strength
so that they can move forward with their families and that in spite of all the darkness,
that they would never forget you.

I pray that they would realize that you are always with them and will never abandon them, that you are the light, that always guides and protects.

Lord, I pray that people who are displaced would one day forget their worries and be strengthened in you.

Lord, I pray that your Holy Will be done.

Zuleima Sampayo, 10

3. Psalm 151

Lord, I was lonely, a victim of my adversaries, feeling the absence of fraternal warmth that had been my blanket,

I was alone and desperate, yet in the midst of my sadness and desolation I found you. You have been my support, the staff of my steps.

You have taken my heart in your hands because if seventy times I fall, seventy times you lift me up.

You fill my soul with strength in the midst of my suffering. You have always been there showing your love and unconditional support.

Today I thank you because wonderful and marvelous are your works. Amén.

(Mennonite Church of Rincón del Lago, Soacha, Colombia).
4

Dear God,
In these times of searching for peace and resolution to conflicts
Establish your peace O Lord!

In the midst of corruption, impunity and violence,
Establish your peace O Lord!

In the midst of the journey of your Colombian people,
Establish your peace O Lord!

In this searching for justice and peace for Colombia,
Establish your peace O Lord!

In the midst of the pain of children, women and men,
Establish your peace O Lord!

Establish your peace O Lord according to your will
Amen

Adaía Bernal

5

Help us O Lord,
So that our words, our actions, and our lives might reflect your love.
That your Holy Spirit might accompany us to find the path of peace.

That we might love one another as sisters and brothers,
That we might fully trust in your constant accompaniment and presence.

Help us O Lord,
So that we might see your mercy and hear your voice,
Heal the wounded hearts and restore affected lives.

With your help O Lord, we will walk in your peace and love!
Amen

Adaía Bernal

6

Father and Mother God of this hurting humanity,
Hear our crying and have mercy on us.

Your creation cries to you every day for your justice and your great Love.

Heal our wounded hearts, restore our lives that have been affected by so much hate and pain.

In your presence we let go of our burdens and pains, hoping to be renewed in your love.

Adaía Bernal

Rocio Neme
The Mennonite Brethren have been present in the Chocó department of Colombia for more than 65 years, preaching a holistic message of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Chocó has been been seriously affected by the armed conflict, drug trafficking, mining and by characteristically bad government, causing serious social problems for Cho- coano communities: massive displacement of whole communities, an increase in prostitution and rapes of young people, an alarming rise in HIV/AIDS rates, decreasing agricultural production within the region, irreparable ecological damage, human rights violations, targeted assassinations within a context of legal impunity, and loss of community identity and empathy for others. We are also witnessing rising truancy in schools as minors join illegal armed groups and become engaged in other related illicit activities.

This is our prayer for Chocó, one we hope you will join us in praying with your own communities during these Days of Prayer and Action.

The following can be read as a reader’s theater by four readers, or can be read before the congregation by one reader.

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1: As the church in this context
2: we feel a great responsibility
All: to make peace possible in the Chocó,
3: peace emerging out of the lived experience
1: of the transforming gospel of Jesus Christ.

3: Jesus said to his disciples,
All: You are the salt of the earth,
4: but if the salt loses its saltiness,
3: how can it be made salty again?

4: It is no longer good for anything,
3: except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

All: You are the light of the world,
1: A city on a hill cannot be hidden. (Matt. 5:13-14)

2: Jesus said to his disciples,
3: to be a prophetic voice,
All: to denounce evil
2: and to undertake actions
3: of spiritual and social transformation,
1: actions grounded in God’s restorative justice.

2: From this framework
1: we invite the whole Christian community
All: to join together
3 and 1: in prayer
4 and 2: and fasting
1: on behalf of all Chocoano men and women
2: of the Mennonite Brethren Church in the Chocó.

1: It is our wish
All: our dream
3: to see the Chocó become a territory of peace
2: understanding peace not as merely the absence of conflict
4: but that all would be able to enjoy their human rights
1: in fullness
All: and in freedom
2: and that the church in this context
1 and 4: would give glory to God.

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Pastor José Rutilio Rivas Domingues / Elizabeth Miller
Readings

2.

The mountainous rural zone of El Carmen de Bolivar is almost completely populated by campesinos who have historically struggled to transform their land into what today is known as the breadbasket of the Montes de Maria. This transformation was accomplished by the planting and commerce of agricultural products, including ñame, yuca, plantain, rice, corn and avocado. In particular, the avocado has become the emblematic fruit of the entire region.

However, during the late 1990s and early 2000, a lack of institutional presence in the region, along with other factors, resulted in the presence of illegal armed groups, such as the guerilla groups EPL, FARC-EP, and the paramilitary group AUC. This created an internal armed conflict, generating enormous human rights violations. These include the forced displacement of the majority of the population to the outskirts of cities such as Cartagena, Sincelejo, and Barranquilla, threats, massacres, forced disappearances, illegal captures, the planting of anti-personal mines, selective killings in different regional communities, and the torching of houses. Along with the current decline of over 80 percent of the avocado crop, dying of an unknown disease, and continued overall state abandonment, the campesino population has been left without the tools to recover their crops, their economy or their social networks.

As a consequence of this conflict, the resistant population who remained in the region, and the displaced who have returned, are living in communities deprived of social, economic, and material structures. This is manifested in the lack of dignified housing, the lack of education, health, sewage, water, and electric services, the lack of access roads, and a lack of productive projects, among others. As well, we cannot forget those families who did not have the ability to return that continue to live with necessity in urban centres.

This text can be used with the photo slideshow that is posted on the following link: http://washington.mcc.org/days/slideshow

Daniela Velásquez
Readings

Slide 1:
For many of the rural communities of the Maria Mountains on Colombia’s Caribbean Coast, peace with justice involves organizing to bring about positive and concrete changes in their communities. A coalition of leaders representing almost 30 communities have decided to join together in a nonviolent collective effort to draw together to rebuild their region. This requires multidimensional faith!

Slide 2:
The Montes de Maria are famous both for the fertility of the soil and the ferocity of the violence in the last fifteen years. Unorganized criminal groups, the guerrilla groups the FARC and ELN, and paramilitary groups fought for territory in the region, catching the farming communities in the middle. To stand up for their rights as victims, people must publically denounce the guilty groups which makes people targets of these still-active, still-powerful armed groups. Furthermore, community organizers work in a context where communities have been divided and made distrustful by false promises of protection from illegal armed groups and from the government. The march has helped the communities begin to break down some of the stigmas surrounding the region.

Slide 3:
The violence came to a peak in October 2000, with the well-known massacre of Macayepo leaving 35 victims.

Slide 4:
The communities say that the government’s policy on reparations is not enough to meet their needs. The Victims’ Law #1448 of 2011, establishes a ten year plan for reparations, starting in targeted communities like Macaye-po, where the violence is better known. The leaders argue that their needs are greater than mere targeted collective reparations. They seek integrated, transformative reparations in the whole region, not just select communities.

Slide 6:
One of the strengths of these communities is the natural wealth found in their environment—water, soil, clean air, wood, and others. Respecting and helping them stand up for their lifestyle is a way of acknowledging that wealth is not only found in money.
Slide 7:
Many members of the community have been displaced to the margins of urban centres. Many have already returned, but lack basic services.

Slide 10:
The campesinos of the region are used to farming its steep hills by hand, but have sustained themselves for the last 30 years from the avocado harvests. Not only were the communities devastated by massive sackings, burnings, murders, and displacement in the late 1990s and early 2000s, but since they have returned to recuperate their farms, their principal crop has fallen to disease. Almost all of the massive acreage of avocado farms has died in the last few years.

Slide 11:
Many of the health clinics in the region lie empty and public health employees have not been compensated for months.

Slide 12:
Schools often start months later than their scheduled date and teachers often do not receive their pay. People recognize that education is needed to move forward in a sustainable way.

Slide 15:
In October of 2012, several community leaders began voicing a common idea: a nonviolent collective action. Made up of practicing Evangelicals, Seventh-Day Adventists, Pentecostals, Catholics and secular community members, they are a diverse group in religious beliefs, ethnicities, and life experiences. In October, they began to plan a march from their municipal center, El Carmen de Bolivar, to the departmental capital, Cartagena. On April 6, 2013, over a thousand campesinos will gather to march for 5 days to a dialogue with local, departmental, and national members of the government and members of various non-governmental organizations.

Slide 16:
They invite the national and international community to participate, publicize, and support the communities of the mountain in their nonviolent, collective effort to reclaim their rights and dignity.

Jeremiah 33:6
Behold, I will bring to it health and healing, and I will heal them and reveal to them abundance of prosperity and security.

Daniela Velasquez
I sat in the patio garden with the mother of the home where I was living. She gently caressed the leaves of her mint leaves and tomato plants. Gradually she let snippets of her story break the comfortable silence between us. At the end of the 1980’s, they became targets for the army because of their efforts to organize campesinos on the Caribbean Coast to reclaim their land from dominating political families where land equals power. Her eyes clouded as she spoke of threats, of confronting armed men with her babies on her hips, of fleeing to the city before the first glow of dawn. They ended up living in a rat-infested patio, scorched under the make-shift tin roof for six months. With the support of their church community in Bogotá, they were finally able to relocate to the cold and rainy capital city and begin to rebuild their home. Perhaps more than anything, the green shoots that she cared for so tenderly grounded her hope – hope that has helped her in the very long journey of healing deep scars.

Years later, I sat in a crowded truck with another displaced woman. The night before her eyes had sparkled as she told me how she had turned a garbage-ridden vacant lot into a church, a refuge for displaced families and a lush green garden teeming with vegetables and fruit. Yet when truck turned off of the main road towards her former community, her beaming smile hardened. I looked out at the abandoned crumbling cement skeletons of what used to be their homes. Guerrilla and paramilitary groups had forced them to flee in 2000. Now, only recently, have these streets begun to see signs of new life.

Displacement is not a short-lived disaster in Colombia, but rather a chronic, systematic strategy for concentrating economic and political power. Amidst the constant undertone of pain, I continue to be humbled by the honour of walking with women and men that pray with their very lives for justice, peace and dignity in this context. Now in 2013 there are signs of hope not only in the courage of these people found in small communities scattered across the country. We share a cautious hope that the government and the guerrilla groups might choose words over bullets and put an end to their war. In the end, peace will still be lived out in each community where people choose life over vengeance, hope over despair. Yet peace agreements, truth and reparations could create the conditions for tender shoots of hope to flourish. Now is the time for peace with justice.

Bonnie Klassen

1

If you do away with the yoke of oppression,
with the pointing finger and malicious talk,
and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the oppressed,
then your light will rise in the darkness,
and your night will become like the noonday.
The LORD will guide you always;
he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land
and will strengthen your frame.
You will be like a well-watered garden,
like a spring whose waters never fail.
Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins
and will raise up the age-old foundations;
you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls,
Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.

Isaiah 58:9-12
The Colombian community of Mampuján is waiting for justice. After being displaced from their original townsite twelve years ago by a right-wing paramilitary group, forced to flee and start a new life with nothing but each other, signs of long awaited hope are starting to appear. Mampuján has received the first sentence in Colombia’s history for individual and community reparations, and is waiting for the fulfillment of what is theirs by law and the right to live with dignity that belongs to every person. We have seen results of our *esperanza*, when half the community received individual reparations in August, and we have strength to continue. We share what we have with those who have not yet received and we comfort those without hope with the promise of what is yet to come, as we wait to hear a proposed date for the next round of reparations.

“Reparation requires messianic hope. To hope, then, is to hope for the reparation of the irreparable. It is to hope for the present. The hope is for *now*...It is not a question of hoping to escape time, but of hoping for new time, for a new day and a new birth.” (*Weakness of God*, John D. Caputo, 251)

We know that the community can never go back to the way things were before displacement but we hold out and work towards something even better with the promise of collective reparations, including a health clinic, a new school, potable water, productive agricultural projects, a museum and improved streets and housing. Mampuján is waiting to be lifted out of poverty, for its name to be cleared of associations with terror, for health, for education, for remembering moments of horror so horror does not return.

“For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.”

*1 Corinthians 13:12-13*
Reflections

“We are waiting, but we are not passive. We are waiting with hope and we are waiting with action. We have non-violently marched for our rights; we work to organize ourselves and act in unity. We are waiting for a promise, yet we live with promise. We are acting out the life we are waiting for, for what else can we do? The community is being dignified even if they are not yet living in dignity, forgiving those who have displaced Mampuján as they work to break the cycle of violence. We fall down, we fight, we are tired, but we walk forward with the promise of new life, as we celebrate the new life we are given at every moment. Baby turtles hatch in the backyard; we greet each other with a blessing.

“The kingdom of God is not a far-off place but the rhythm of God in time, the way God gives us each day, from day to day, the way God rules in each day, like a melody that God is playing. Let us listen to the beat.” (Weakness of God, John D. Caputo, pg 163)

Mampuján echoes of the hope for peace with justice- all of us are also waiting, waiting for the coming of promises, waiting for the coming of our hope, yet we already have hope, for without hope, we would not be waiting. We have seen glimpses of what it is like to live in the kingdom come, so we work to live in the kingdom today. Our job is to wait for what is to come, but to live as if it is here. Justice is so far away, yet it is as close as our next breath. We are waiting.

Prayer:
Oh God, we like Mampuján are sometimes tired of waiting. It has been a long time and it has not been easy. Give us hope. Give us comfort. Give us eyes to see your kingdom, ears to hear it singing, and hands to help shape it into being as we wait for its coming.

James 3:18
Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.
Thinking about Colombia I believe Colombia needs a covenant of peace, as Barrett (1989) suggested: a covenant of “living in right relationship” or “being right with” someone (p. 15). The purpose of the covenant is to bring people into relationship with each other. It means to be faithful, to trust in someone else. To have faith in God means to be faithful to God and his covenant to become family where persons show mercy toward each other (Barrett, 1989, p. 15).

Yoder (2003) suggested that this covenant implies the prohibition to take human life (p. 14). By taking the life of our neighbor, we diminish God’s image. We are called to bring special help for those with special needs; we are called to set things right among people; we are called to have special concern for the poor and oppressed and for those who are displaced. We are called to exert justice as God does. “Part of the righteousness (justice) of God is that God as judge declares as innocent the one who has been oppressed. God raises up the righteous who live according to God’s covenant but also by putting down the wicked, those who are oppressing others” (Barrett, 1989, p. 23). Matthew 25: 42 NIV says: “For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invited me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.” And verse 45 says: “I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.” Reconciliation is then “a constant pursuit of holiness, reconciliation is a way of thinking, acting and being that forms us in the church as it changes our collective character, habits and practices”(Yperen, 2002, p. 54).
Reflections

_Shalom_ is an Hebrew word related to justice. Matthew 5:9 points out that the peacemakers are those who are working to bring shalom; those who are working to bring justice. Isaiah 32:16-17 shows that the outcome of justice is peace expressed in right relationships, and security. “Justice will dwell in the desert and righteousness will be peace; the effect of righteousness will be quietness and confidence forever.” (NIV)

One of the _Shalom_ dimensions is related to social relationships. It means to live in right relationship with one another and with God. Christ’s life, teachings, death, and resurrection transform divine-human relationships, but they also transform relationships between people. Shalom also transforms the situation of oppression to one of freedom and liberation for both the oppressed and the oppressor. So, to be a shalom-maker is to act from love through justice to liberate both those who are oppressed and their oppressors (Yoder, 1987, p. 45).

In 2 Corinthians 5:16-6:2, Paul encourages his readers to be ambassadors of reconciliation. In fact Paul is writing from a context of suffering (imprisonment, death threats, humiliation, and church divisions); “his suffering enhances his appreciation for how Christ works through suffering” (Boers, 1992, p. 49), which is so relevant for a context of suffering and oppression, such as in Colombia.

Yoder (2002) suggested that the church is herself a society. “Her very existence, the fraternal relations of her members, their ways of dealing with their differences should be a demonstration of what love means in social relations” (p. 17). In order to achieve that goal the church must be a witness to shalom, not only in her teachings or lecturing but also, above of all, in her practice.

In the same way Volf, (2010) highlighted that “being the church means being for others, with others, especially the neediest. The ministries of justice and reconciliation are not additions that flow out of the church, but are constitutive of ecclesial life in union with Christ” (p 106).

In the New Testament, the story of the Good Samaritan challenged the church to assist every person in need by providing physical, emotional, and spiritual recovery. The church must be willing to walk alongside victims and offenders and provide spaces where they can deal with their crisis, anger, hurt, and disorientation. The church as community also must be prepared to become a community of reintegration. “When victims and offenders feel stigmatized and isolated faith community can be a source of positive contact and support in a context of trust and concern” (Van Ness & Strong 2002, p. 117).

_Psalm 85:10_  
Truth and mercy have met together; justice and peace have kissed.
Psalm 82: 3-4a says, “Defend the cause of the weak and fatherless; maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed. Rescue the weak and needy” (NIV). We must help victims in our community to rebuild a sense of safety and security by speaking up for them and acting on their behalf. A victim’s future can be redeemed or preserved. A significant intervention from the community to the crime victim is to care about them. Likewise, families in our congregations need someone to offer help when the going gets rough. We must offer help in ways that preserves dignity and empower them to positive action. For offenders, the church must provide a place to learn, grow, and gain strength in an atmosphere of both accountability and support. Both victims and offenders may need assistance in moving toward emotional, physical and spiritual health.

Colombia finds itself at a Kairos moment for peace that goes beyond negotiations for an end to the conflict but involves the task of construction of shalom, of peace with justice. As the church, the Colombian church, we are called to be faithful shalom-makers in this context. May God guide us in strength and wisdom.
We walked the 73 kilometres to from Mampuján to Cartagena in December of 2011 together to demand the rights of compensation for forced displacement. Then, on August 27 and 28 of 2012, I watched my friends and community members walk forward to receive their cheques of individual reparations. It was a wonderful, indescribable moment to see the tangible results of some of our hard work! We are celebrating a clear example of justice being done in a context where there is all too often no precise evidence. The reparations provide hope not just for Mampuján’s process, but for the justice process as a whole in Colombia.

Mampuján is the first community in Colombia to receive a court order under the Justice and Peace Law. The controversial law, by which the paramilitary commanders who ordered the displacement of Mampuján and the massacre in neighbouring Las Brisas in the year 2000 are sentenced, plays an important part in attempting to establish transitional justice here in Colombia. The law’s main role is to aid the demobilization of illegal armed group, through a process of justice and truth. In exchange for confessing to crimes, giving information, and providing access to their resources gained through illegal activities, those responsible for the crimes are promised significant reduction in penalties.

The victims receive justice in this process through the state seizure of estates and goods of the accused, which should be used to reparate the victims for damages suffered during their victimization. In the case of Mampuján, the Supreme Court of Colombia has ordered a payment totaling more than $32 billion Colombian pesos (around $15 million Canadian dollars) for the 1,444 victims included in the court order. And, in August, around 420 people from the community of Mampuján received part of these reparations, after almost four years of legal processes.
Reflections

The process of receiving this payment has not been easy and there have been many times when we all felt that it was doomed to fail. Besides walking to Cartagena, community leaders have been attending meetings, travelling to Bogota, speaking to Congress, writing letters, talking on the phone, starting petitions, explaining the process, planning events and a myriad of other activities. The community itself has been emotionally exhausted, first being told one date, then another, each time having their hopes dashed. They have gone to meetings, opened bank accounts, been visited by multiple different government bureaucrats, and have often lost faith in the entire process. No one dared to believe that they would be receiving payments until they actually saw the cheques in their hands.

However, as exciting and gratifying as this event has been, it is not the end of the story. First of all, only half of the people have received their reparations and so far there has been no date set for the rest. Secondly, there is still much work to be done. The court order not only ordains individual payments, but also collective reparations, including a new school, a health centre, public services, and a return to Old Mampuján, among others. There are also concerns about how people will spend their money and how to manage the evitable changes that will and are taking place within the community. But, with these payments, we have increased hope that the rest will eventually come to fruition and that the community can continue to work together to achieve their desired results.

Therefore, we are celebrating and have much to be thankful for; seeing justice take place in a tangible manner after hard work and struggle is an incredible reward that deserves reflection and commemoration. After all, if justice can take place here, where else is it possible?

Isaiah 32:16-17

Justice will dwell in the desert and righteousness live in the fertile field. The fruit of righteousness will be peace; the effect of righteousness will be quietness and confidence forever.
Multimedia

Click here  
http://washington.mcc.org/days/worship/oiga

to listen to an original song “Oiga” by Phillip Hart about peacebuilding in Colombia.

Click here  
http://washington.mcc.org/slideshow

to access the photo slideshow from the Montes de Maria community 
by Larisa Zehr and Anna Vogt (to be used with the reading).

Click here  

to read an article about advocacy for peace by Bonnie Klassen

Click here  
http://washington.mcc.org/days/action

for ideas about taking action for peace with justice in Colombia

Isaiah 58:6

Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and 
unite the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?

For more information write to: washington.mcc.org/days

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