

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. *Jeremiah 29:7*

Small Acts of Reconciliation

With the start of October, I feel like I'm in the home stretch towards retirement. But there are many things that I need to do, and things that I'm being offered. One starts this week, when I leave on Thursday morning for Korea. I will be out October 9-21, though I expect to stay in contact by email primarily. I am going with about ten people from the Synod of Southern California and Hawai'i to Jeonju Presbytery, a southwest region with whom the Synod has a sister relationship. In the summer a delegation from Jeonju comes to Los Angeles, and in October (now every other October) a group goes to Jeonju. I had expected to go back in 2020, and in fact several of us in San Gabriel Presbytery were planning a group trip to Korea to coincide with the Jeonju meeting, but COVID did what COVID does . . . and coincidentally, the planning group has dispersed—Karen Sapio to Sacramento, Dongwoo Lee to Kerrville, Texas, and James and Charlene Jin Lee to Dallas! As to the Jeonju exchange, even after COVID subsided there were other bumps in the road that have delayed this trip, so folks impressed upon me that this would be the best time for me to go, before I retire.

I will get to see a couple of folks in Korea, including our own minister member Heidi Park, professor at Ewha Woman's University. And as a person of Japanese heritage, I have always thought that if I had the opportunity to preach in Korea, I would express my remorse for the oppression practiced by the land of my ancestors against the people of Korea. I hope the folks who hear me will sense my intention, even if my comments are clumsy.

We all have different ways that we can contribute to the cause of reconciliation, on a local and global level. I was invited to attend High Holy Days services of the Pasadena Jewish Temple, and a friend and I attended the service on the second day of Rosh Hashanah, which was held at Temple Beth David right near our Presbytery Center in Temple City, and Kol Nidre, which was held at Beckman Auditorium at Caltech. I think they usually hold the big services at Beckman, but I'm sure they had to make adjustments since the Temple burned down (I was told the only items preserved were the Torah scrolls). They now regularly worship at the Methodist Church on Colorado in downtown Pasadena, who also house First Congregational (UCC) Pasadena, so they did not have available space for the many services during High Holy Days. The services were long (we left after three hours in each), but what a wonderful way to begin the new year! And the leaders expressed how happy they were that we came to their worship services. This was also my first experience of the security that all Jewish congregations have put in place over the last several years due to the increase in anti-Semitic violence; it is indeed sad that we Christians have to consult with our Jewish neighbors about safeguarding our sanctuaries, because they have had to do this for much longer.

Then, yesterday the music director of the church I attended, who also plays organ for the Wilshire Boulevard Temple, very earnestly asked for prayers that the cessation of violence in Gaza holds, and that both sides honor the ceasefire. Because my family has always had such admiration for the Jewish people, this time of violence and concerted oppression in Gaza has been extremely troubling to me, and so I was most appreciative that the new rabbi in Pasadena made the invitation to High Holy Days, and that we all can pray for peace together, and maintain relationships in these extremely complicated times.

People continue to look for ways to protect the most vulnerable in our world. Concerned with the assistance programs for children that are being impacted by the federal government shutdown, the Children's Defense Fund is holding [A National Call to Prayer](#) on Zoom today at 4 pm Pacific Time. And NDLO (National Day Laborer Organizing Network, who has done great work through the Pasadena Community Job Center) is providing training and support for people who are stepping forward to be present with immigrants who are still subjected to ICE raids and detention; they have a new "Adopt a Day Labor Corner" movement, and they have received such strong positive response that they are having another webinar training today at noon Pacific Time—like the National Call to Prayer, this event also requires registration—you can go to <https://ndlon.org/adopt-a-day-labor-corner> to learn more about the program, and NDLO in general.

The [Eaton Fire Collaborative](#) continues to develop as a hub for services for Eaton Fire survivors, and is forming as the main Long-Term Recovery Group for Altadena. Thanks to Patrick Perry for continuing to represent us at their weekly meetings. And we in San Gabriel Presbytery are working with Church World Service, the Clergy Community Coalition, Southern California/Nevada Conference UCC, and others, in hopes we can offer disaster case managers in churches that have strong relationships with the communities hit hardest by the Eaton Fire, especially the Black community in West Altadena.

And students of Pasadena schools have committed to plant 5,000 trees in burned areas in Altadena and the Palisades. Their kickoff event was to be blessed by Jane Goodall, who had already come to Pasadena High School in March to offer her voice of support and hope especially to our young people. Sadly, Ms. Goodall passed away right before she was to speak in Pasadena, but they started the movement anyway, dedicating the first tree planted to Jane Goodall. Jane Goodall left her native England to live in Africa when she was just in her 20s almost 70 years ago, not yet having formal education, and yet by her dedication and her love for fellow animals, she helped to change the way we humans look at the rest of God's Creation, including the other animals who live with us, or often in subjugation to our demands for meat and other animal products. Like St. Francis of Assisi, whose Feast Day was just this last Saturday, Jane advocated for fellow creatures of our Great Creator, promoting the path of peace for us humans and all of Creation.

As you can see, even in the midst of many conflicts and crises—actually, in response to them—people of faith are stepping forward in many ways to be a channel for God's love and saving power for this world. We can stand with immigrants, collaborate with people of different faith traditions, seek understanding without demanding agreement, plant a tree, offer funds and time and expertise, and pray. We have the power of prayer in each of us, so we all have the ability to contribute!

Thanks be to God! May we be bearers of hope and grace and advocacy and God's love for this hurting world. There is no one way to "do it," but as you dwell on the Lord and keep your hearts and minds and eyes open for the opportunities God offers us, may we have the trust to obey as we discern God's will for each of us, and for our churches. We can seek the welfare of the city, no matter where we reside. Amen.

Blessings,

Wendy