

Task Force on Theology of Social Justice Advocacy Meeting
Minutes
September 13, 2019

Present: Sarah Lawton, , Dora Mbuwayesango, Reuben Varghese, Lallie Lloyd, Susanne Watson Epting, Anne Hodges-Copple, Prince Singh, Guy Leemhuis, Ruth Frey

Absent: Brant Lee, Andrew Dietsche, Jose Rodriguez

Lallie opened us with a mediation upon Luke 4: 4-16.

Housekeeping: Sarah notes we have received funding from GCO to meet face to face as an interim body on April 20-22 2020, likely be in Maryland.

Sarah and Prince have talked about what to get done in person and the group will talk about is more as we move closer to the dates. Please mark these dates now as this is a tremendous opportunity.

Dora submitted a written summary of her remarks:

Family Story: Born as a second set of identical twins to elementary teachers. Unlike my older brothers, my sister and I were sickly babies and so she died when we were a little over a year. I think my parents were overwhelmed because at the point they had almost all in diapers with my younger brother being just a few months old. I am told that I clung to my paternal grandmother at my twin sister's funeral and she brought me back to her village. I was raised by a village of women and they took care of me I until I got better and thrived.

My father decided to leave teaching and go into the priesthood. He went to seminary in Zambia and returned to serve at churches in Harare. On my mother's side I am a third generation Christian and on my father's side I am second generation Christian. I was educated in Mission schools and attended boarding schools from the age of 10.

Grew up during the war of liberation that was characterized by atrocities on both sides and witnessed by father put his life in danger to advocate for those who were being treated unjustly. He spent time in detention center one year in a way that changed my view of Christmas. Because of the era I grew in I always have had a sense of the need to fight for justice, in high school on I belonged to groups that advocated for justice.

Zimbabwe became independent when I was in the middle of high school and euphoria of freedom and justice quickly faded because it became clear that our so-called liberators were not interested in our political freedom and economic striving. The government took measures to suppress dissident in brutal measures. The spirit of ubuntu became distorted. Missioners introduced idea of nuclear family, civilization. People were individuals distinct from community.

[Anne's addition: Dora shared meaningful points about how the idea of being an orphan and being abandoned in the wake of the HIV-AIDS trauma created great challenges to theology of ubuntu; a

very, very difficult, heartbreaking time. Notions of the nuclear family and individuality were also disruptive up umbuntu.]

Left Zimbabwe in 1988 when the political, social, and economic conditions in Zimbabwe were still reasonably conducive to the promotion of a decent life for the majority of the people. By 2000 it was now an unrecognizable Zimbabwe and the HIV and AIDS Epidemic did not help.

I am based in Salisbury NC at Hood Theological Seminary and as a member of St. Luke's where I have been active since 2000. I am also active in my community in different justice advocacy groups:

Women's Community Justice, where I am serving as chair

Poor People's Campaign NC

Poor People's campaign, Salisbury Circle

Beloved Community, St. Luke's Episcopal

What informs my theology of Advocacy: The philosophy of umbuntu

The Bible from a Postcolonial Perspective: challenge the surface view of justice that we advocate using the bible—a critical view that seeks not to make the troubling aspects of the bible acceptable.

[Anne's additions: Dora asks "How might one notion of justice actually be used/misused to create a different injustice?"]

Responses:

Guy: What is social justice at its core? What happens when one group claims they are the victims, without noticing how they are perpetuating injustice toward others.

Social justice should not be a way to create other injustices.

Sarah L – struck by the necessity of wrestling with the parts of Scripture we don't like. And how that is rooted and told through Dora's personal journey. It means its messy work. Need to identify and pursue values and principles while working in community and acknowledging the tensions created. Work of community being "real" work.

Reuben: How do we create the space for wrestling with tension. There is a direction we are moving in. "We may be have to deal with Kendee's question raised in the book *How to be an Anti-Racist*: "The question is whether discrimination is creating equity or inequity?"

Lallie – Struck by Dora's words/ description: "We survived." Grateful for Dora's vulnerability. Notes how loss of sister and the wreckage of political, social violence has shaped Dora's faithful journey.

Dora responds: (paraphrase)

“Community gives me life. I am reading scripture for a reason. I am not sustained by being an individual. Belonging that is rooted in striving to hear God speak, in spite of the distortions. .This is why I like the Anglican liturgy. Guides me where I might give up and give in.

I see my being alive, surviving is a miracle and gift from God and through community that raised me.”

Susanne - “Are there other theological concepts where you, Dora, find that distortion, say in the theology of reconciliation.”

Dora - Yes, in reconciling communities = we can see distortion. How we bring distortion into racial reconciliation is in failing recognize degree of harm done and the work needed to bring about restoration as part of reconciliation.

We are put here to keep struggling to welcome the Kingdom of God.

Who would like to go next for a reflection: Prince volunteers to go next.

Reuben will prepare the opening prayer next time.