

World Conference Full Report: Human Rights Team 2019-2023

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Human Rights Team Summary Report

The Human Rights Team (formerly Human Rights Committee) was established by World Conference action WCR (World Conference Resolution) 1197 in 1986. In one voice, the Team invites all Community of Christ members to embrace the struggle for human rights as their response to Jesus Christ and renew their commitment to confront human-rights violations everywhere.

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Objectives for 2019-2023

- Articulate the prophetic (or theological and Christological) relationship between nonviolence, human rights, and how human rights are affected

A theology sub-committee drafted a document on Community of Christ foundations for the global struggle for human rights. The statement clarifies how this struggle is grounded in scripture, theology, and values of Community of Christ. Scripture affirms God is on the side of liberation and human dignity by hearing the suffering of the oppressed and responding in human history. The document identifies four theological foundations for human rights and nonviolence: a) The Imago Dei or Imago Trinitatis, b) Unity of Body and Spirit, c) Jesus Christ, and d) Shalom, God's Yearning for Creation, Zion, or the Peaceable Kingdom of God. The Enduring Principles specifically serve as a guide to disciples toward life in solidarity with the struggle for fundamental human rights. The theological foundations document is available [HERE](#) <hyperlink>. An abridged form of this formal document was published in the July/August 2022 Herald.

- Articulate the relationship between the principles of nonviolence and global struggle for fundamental human rights

Defining nonviolence as a tactic or strategy for political activism excludes consideration of nonviolence, human rights, and democracy. The principles of nonviolence and human rights shape democratic self-governance, its institutions, and political processes as alternative to oppression and rule through violence. The team drafted an essay titled "Human Rights and Nonviolence: The Praxis of Theocratic Democracy" <insert hyperlink> with the following assertions.

1. The discernment of God's justice (Matthew 6:10, 33) is the discernment of human rights.
 2. The discernment and promotion of human rights requires the practice of democracy.
 3. The promotion of democracy requires the best practices of nonviolent resistance.
 4. Democratization, the discernment of God's justice, and nonviolent resistance are human rights.
- Work with the First Presidency on issues related to Universal Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Article 12: 1

An indigenous persons' subgroup met throughout the triennium to discuss:

1. Indigenous identities
2. Justice and reconciliations for injustice against indigenous persons in Community of Christ
3. Formation of a forum or dialogue for and by indigenous persons in the church

The subgroup produced a report entitled, "The role of UNDRIP within the mission of Community of Christ, incorporating Article 12:1." The report names eleven (11) recommendations for the inclusion of indigenous peoples to manifest, practice, develop and teach their spiritual and religious traditions, customs, and ceremonies. The report also acknowledges the role of the Reorganized Church in the military occupation that toppled the government of indigenous Queen Lili'uokalani of Hawaii in January 1893. The report includes a proposal for reconciliation.

- Website and Social Media

A social media subcommittee established a Facebook page for Human Rights in Community of Christ. It authored a short series of Human Rights Highlights covering select issues of human rights. The subcommittee worked with the Communications Team on the Human Rights pages of the new cofchrist.org site launched in March of 2022. This includes a redesigned Human Rights page, a new page dedicated to the Human Rights Award, a video introducing the Human Rights Award, and online submission form for nominations.

- Recipients for the 2023 Human Rights Award will be announced at World Conference

Theological Foundations for Human Rights

Introduction: The first presidency tasked the HRT to Articulate the prophetic (or theological and Christological) relationship between nonviolence, human rights, and how human rights are affected.

The term "human rights" is multivalent and has many definitions. "Human Rights" can refer to a list of legal or political obligations, be a moral assertion, or a declaration of inalienable human worth. Any declarative statement on the theological foundations of human rights in Community of Christ must begin by defining Human Rights within the context of the statement.

Human rights herein are defined to mean the fundamental rights and freedoms that belong to every human being by virtue of being human from birth until death. Our definition of human rights is logically universal. By universal, we mean the historical struggle for human rights encompasses past, present and future struggles for justice. Such human rights have their origin in God's justice; they are not granted, nor are they the property of any state.

Universal human rights are based on the inalienable human worth inherent to all persons regardless of nationality, gender, or sex, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, language, ability, or any other status.

Fundamental human rights are those most basic entitlements that sustain and fulfill the conditions of life worth living, which is lived in life-reverent relationships to other human beings and creation (the earth and its ecology). These fundamental human rights include the struggle to maintain, assist and enhance life such as adequate nourishment (food), safe and nurturing relationships, access to education and possibilities of human development, meaningful work (economic opportunity), health, and liberty (freedom and responsibility).

The history of literature and struggle for human rights is long and rich. There has been a great deal written on human rights in categorical terms: claim rights, civil liberty rights, individual versus group rights, natural rights and legal rights, and negative and positive rights. *This theological foundation statement assumes no list of human rights or categories of human rights is exhaustive or possible.* Fundamental human rights are universal in that the struggle is shared across categories, cultures, and time. All other rights are contingent on fundamental rights and best understood in the historical and social context in which they arise.

In the Restoration, Community of Christ asserts the inalienable human worth and dignity of persons as human beings amidst creation. Inalienable human worth and dignity is inherent and intrinsic to human being and sharing God's divine image. Whether nation states recognize human rights or not, all human beings have

inalienable human worth and dignity, and therefore have human rights. Our statement is intentionally constrained to the fundamental rights that sustain and fulfill the conditions of meaningful life worth living as said above.

Theological Tradition

Historically, the relationship of human rights to the world's religions is varied. Nevertheless, religious foundations for human rights and inalienable human worth remain important to recognizing and sustaining the struggle for fundamental human rights of all throughout the modern world.

Scripture

For Christians, scripture is an essential source for understanding human being and human rights. The foundation for human rights, which also serves as the basis for modern ethics and the concept of social justice, is historically rooted in the biblical tradition and writings. In Hebrew and Christian scripture, justice, and righteousness (tzedeq, צֶדֶק) find their source in God and the relationship of God to creation through covenant. God is the source and being of what is just and what is right. Restoring of persons to healthy or righteous relationships with God, others, themselves, and the earth is at the heart of God's call to Shalom and God's will for the fulfillment of creation.

The concept of inalienable human worth and dignity of persons is embedded in scripture. In the stories of creation, human beings bear God's Spirit in receiving the breath of God.¹ God creates human beings in God's image and declares creation, along with and human beings, good.²

Our witness to inalienable human worth and dignity of persons is also found within the prophetic tradition shared by Christians and Jews. Throughout Torah and the prophets, God reminds and instructs Israel to recognize the value and identity of the poor, alien, and vulnerable as related to their own.³ The basis of fundamental rights as fundamentally shared arises from God's covenant with Israel. God's command to recognize the inalienable human worth and dignity of persons as neighbours and strangers beyond religious or national boundaries rises from the witness of scripture.

The exemplar life and non-parochial ministry of Jesus of Nazareth additionally reveals the inalienable human worth and dignity of persons universal to human beings and inherent in human life. By sharing the blessings of God's reign inclusively to both sinner and righteous, as well as beyond God's covenant with Israel (Jew and Gentile), Jesus opens the eyes of his disciples and generations that follow. Jesus' mission and ministry reveals the inestimable value of all created human beings is endemic within the purposes of God.

Christendom

As Community of Christ, we acknowledge our history shared with all Christians. As Christians and Restoration Christians, we have not always and consistently upheld the inalienable human worth and dignity of persons and fundamental human rights of others. For this, we humbly confess and repent.

¹ Genesis 2:7 NRSV

² Genesis 1:26-7 and Genesis 1:31.

³ Consider Deuteronomy 10:19; Leviticus 19:34 and 27:19; Isaiah 58; Jeremiah 7:5-7; Zechariah 7:9-10 NRSV

Christian history shows that the Roman Empire's adoption of early Christianity resulted in an orthodoxy that enabled the church to abuse, conquer, and colonize peoples and cultures outside Christianity in the name of Jesus Christ. Christendom's interpretation of Christ's post-Easter reign was consistently in conflict with the selfless humanity and nonviolent inclusive teachings of the pre-Easter Jesus. Throughout the expansion of Christendom, prophetic figures rose to resist colonization and challenge abuse driven by religious and political convictions.⁴

Through the Reformation, Protestant theological voices defied official dogma and belief carrying forward the optimism of the Renaissance, Protestantism and secular liberalism captured and popularized positive understandings of human being in Christian theology, particularly the human being's inalienable worth and dignity, and monotheism's universalism. But both religious and scientific racism and sexism curtailed universal recognition of the inalienable human worth and equal rights shared by humanity.

The French and American Revolutions spread and established modern concepts of inalienable human worth, human rights, and equal freedoms.⁵ Revolutionaries were driven by both secular and religious visions of freedom and human rights. Still, their establishment of new freedoms and rights unfolded at the expense and exclusion of non-Europeans, non-Christian, women, and the colonized.

The struggle for fundamental human rights for all persons remains to be realized.

Restorationism

Community of Christ is one of several American Restoration movements. Historically, Community of Christ has not qualified as either a pacifist or abolitionist church. We embrace our complicity in cultural norms of racism, sexism, and colonialism. These norms shape our scriptures, interpretation of scripture, theology, understanding of prophetic witness and the church. The revelation of God in Jesus Christ and ongoing revelation are essential to Restoration tradition. On these foundations, we seek repentance, hope for the future, to understand and discern God's vision for the church and creation today.

Community of Christ tradition possesses a prophetic witnesses and theological foundations for God's call to community, inalienable human worth and dignity, and therefore human rights. We choose these witnesses and foundations as essential to Community of Christ identity and practice.

Today, many Christians across the world do not embrace the inclusive and universal vision of God's shalom in Christian theology, tradition, and scripture. Community of Christ seeks to stand in solidarity with the struggle for fundamental human rights. While an emphasis on doctrinal belief, heavenly salvation, and the afterlife preoccupies many Christians today, Community of Christ upholds a prophetic voice for inalienable human worth and dignity of all persons. We recognize the prophetic witness of figures such as Harriet Tubman, Saint Teresa of Calcutta, Mahatma Gandhi, and Martin Luther King Jr., each who were inspired uniquely by the nonviolent life, humility, and liberating ministry of Jesus.

⁴ Consider the lives of Saint Peter Claver, Bartolomé de las Casas, and Antonio de Montesinos

⁵ An example of such a statement is, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." ***U.S. Declaration of Independence***

The Struggle for Fundamental Human Rights: Christian Foundations

Community of Christ embraces four essential theological foundations for inalienable human worth and fundamental human rights:

- The *Imago Dei* or *Imago Trinitatis*
- Unity of Body and Spirit
- Jesus Christ
- Shalom, God's Yearning for Creation, Zion, or the Peaceable Kingdom of God

The Imago Dei & Imago Trinitatis

As stated above, the theological foundation of inalienable human worth and dignity of persons is embedded in scripture. In the stories of creation, God declares making human beings in God's divine image.⁶ God also declares creation and human beings good.⁷ These proclamations of scripture ground Community of Christ understanding of inalienable human worth and dignity of persons together beginning in the *Imago Dei*.

Being created in God's divine image refers to more than human being's physical likeness, which is diverse in variety. It embraces the essence of human being in its capacity for relationship with God, others, and creation. *The Imago Dei* shared universally with human beings as conveyed in scripture affirms human agency alongside divine potential to love as God loves; extravagantly, and unconditionally.⁸ As humans are created in the *Imago Dei*, humans are called to dignify others in solidarity by generously incarnating God's love and grace.

Community of Christ further understands the *Imago Dei* in the image of Trinity: *Imago Trinitatis*.

"We affirm the Trinity—God who is a community of three persons."⁹

Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer model the divine image of relationship in dignity, mutuality, and reciprocity. The *Imago Trinitas* is the divine image of God indwelling in the blessing of community, which is "life where people become vulnerable to God's grace and each other."¹⁰ The vulnerability and mutual indwelling God in Trinity through the incarnated Christ reveal God's shared suffering with humanity. The fulfillment of human community, therefore, is revealed when disciples discern life together with neighbours in dignity, mutuality, and solidarity.

This divine image of sacred community is possible among humanity in "nurture and growth opportunities for all people, especially those who cannot fully care for themselves."¹¹ The struggle for fundamental human rights lives out this call to sacred community.

Unity of Spirit and Body

⁶ Genesis 1:26-7, 31.

⁷ Genesis 1:31

⁸ "God is Love; she who dwells in love is dwelling in God, and God lives in her." (1 John 4:16)

⁹ See Community of Christ Basic Beliefs: <https://www.cofchrist.org/basic-beliefs>

¹⁰ See Blessings of Community, <https://www.cofchrist.org/enduring-principles>.

¹¹ See Blessings of Community, <https://www.cofchrist.org/enduring-principles>.

In addition to the *Imago Dei*, Community of Christ affirms that essence of human being as body and spirit.

Community of Christ embraces human being as a unity of body and spirit in harmony with the Judeo-Christian tradition. The human being, both as individual as species, is the unity of spirit and flesh as depicted in the creation stories.¹² This vision of human beings is also found through the writings of Paul.

This unity of the spiritual and temporal reality shapes Community of Christ theology on humanity amid creation. Community of Christ theology declares the nature of reality as both "spiritual" and "temporal."¹³ Moreover, Community of Christ scripture states the spirit, and the body is the soul of the human being and our shared humanity.¹⁴ The unity of body and spirit as a spiritual and temporal reality of human being within creation provides theological foundations the universal struggle for fundamental human rights.

The body and spirit, like the spiritual and temporal or profane and sacred, are not separate and dualistic. One is not good, the other bad. Rather, our concept of humanity amid creation is holistic as in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Body and spirit are united in each individual human being and collectively in our shared humanity as the sacredness of human being within the sacredness of creation.

Therefore, the universal struggle for fundamental human rights concerns the fulfillment of life as it concerns human being's spiritual and physical needs, fulfillment, and development both individually and collectively. The struggle for fundamental human rights concerns humanity's temporal and spiritual wellbeing.

Jesus Christ

In Christian faith, Jesus Christ is our revelation of what it means to be human. We affirm Jesus Christ as fully human and fully divine.¹⁵ Jesus is the unity of divine and human nature, the image of God in human form. He is the one who breaks down the walls of injustice and unjust relationships.

As the divine incarnation, Jesus reveals the divine unity of body and spirit in human form. His birth, life, teachings, and ministry, as well as death and resurrection reveal to Christians the fulfillment of human life together. Fundamental human rights to life and the fulfillment of meaningful life are revealed in the life, teachings, grace, struggles and ministry of Jesus Christ. Each aim at the possibility of life abundant for each human being and collective humanity in relationship to creation.¹⁶

Through covenant relationship with Jesus Christ, we learn to see the fulfillment of God's image in and through one another. In discipleship, we share in God's will for sacred community (*Imago Trinitatis*). In Jesus Christ, God reveals God's will for human beings to embrace one another and the Other in divine love. Doctrine and

¹² See Genesis 1:26 to 31; 2: 4b to 25.

¹³ See Doctrine & Covenants 28:8d, "yea, all things both spiritual and temporal: firstly spiritual, secondly temporal, which is the beginning of my work; and again, firstly temporal, and secondly spiritual, which is the last of my work."

¹⁴ See Doctrine & Covenants 85:4a, "And the spirit and the body is the soul of man."

¹⁵ See Community of Christ Basic Beliefs: <https://www.cofchrist.org/basic-beliefs>

¹⁶ Scripture is rich with expressions of God's yearning for God's people to experience abundant life together. God leads the covenant people to a promised land "flowing with milk and honey." (See Exodus 3:17) John the Evangelist proclaims Jesus came to give abundant life (See John 10:10). In the Book of Mormon, Lehi teaches that "... [human beings] are that they might have joy." (See II Nephi 1:119) Doctrine and Covenants 163:4a proclaims "God, the Eternal Creator, weeps for the poor, displaced, mistreated and diseased of the world because of their unnecessary suffering. Such conditions are not God's will. Open our ears to hear the pleading of mothers and fathers in all nations who desperately seek a future of hope for their children. Do not turn away from them. For in their welfare resides your welfare."

Covenants 164:c states that "[t]his covenant entails sacramental living that respects and reveals God's presence and reconciling activity in creation. It requires whole-life stewardship dedicated to expanding the church's restoring ministries, especially those devoted to asserting the worth of person, protecting the sacredness of creation, and relieving physical and spiritual suffering." Through our covenant relationship with Jesus Christ, Community of Christ enjoins itself to the God's image imminent within the world and for the world.

The struggle for fundamental human rights reflects God image in and for humanity and creation.

The Peaceable Reign of God; Shalom, the fulfillment of Creation; or Zion

The peaceable reign of God on earth, or Zion, is a theological foundation for Community of Christ understanding of inalienable human worth and dignity of persons.

The cause of Zion refers to Christ's inauguration of the peaceable reign of God reflected in Matthew 6:9. The church's prayer, "Your Kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is done in heaven," expresses this mission for the church. Our mission is Christ's mission.¹⁷

Likewise, Luke 4:16-20 reflects the pre-Easter Jesus' declaration of his mission and purpose.

¹⁶ When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

¹⁸ "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,

¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

²⁰ And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. (Luke 4:16-20)

The peaceable reign of God, cause of Zion, or God's yearning for the fulfillment of creation (God's shalom) are each interrelated theological terms for the purpose of the church in the world revealed in Jesus Christ. As a theological foundation for fundamental human rights, the cause of Zion or God's peace on earth summons us to closer relationship to God and others through acts of service and reconciliation in recognition of each person's inalienable human worth and dignity. Since all have inestimable and equal worth, our lives reflect this value in whole-life stewardship in right relationship with creation, ourselves, God, and others.¹⁸

We seek solidarity with those at "the forefront of those organizations and movements which are recognizing the worth of persons and are committed to bringing the ministry of my Son to bear on their lives."¹⁹

Community of Christ Foundations for the Struggle for Fundamental Human Rights

¹⁷ Judd, Peter. *Christ's Mission Is Our Mission: An Exploration of Luke 4:16-30* Independence: Herald House, 2012.

¹⁸ See the Enduring Principle, the Worth of Persons (<https://www.cofchrist.org/enduring-principles>)

¹⁹ D&C 151:9

The Enduring Principles

In Community of Christ, the *Enduring Principles* provide specific theological foundations for understanding the universal struggle for fundamental human rights throughout the world. Taken together, the Enduring Principles shape a holistic understanding of human possibility through God's will and purpose for creation. They center our understanding of inalienable human worth and dignity of persons, including human giftedness and capacity to live in responsible relationships with others, the environment or creation, and the possibilities of this world. The Enduring Principles express Community of Christ's hope for human community in lived relationships.

Doctrine and Covenants 163:4c instructs Community of Christ to:

“Let the educational and community development endeavours of the church equip people of all ages to carry the ethics of Christ's peace into all areas of life. Prepare new generations of disciples to bring fresh vision to bear on the perplexing problems of poverty, disease, war, and environmental deterioration. These contributions will be multiplied if their hearts are focused on God's will for creation.”

To this end, the Enduring Principles guide disciples to a life of stewardship in solidarity with the struggle for fundamental human rights throughout history and the present world. The Enduring Principles guide us toward the ethics of Christ's peace and God's vision for Shalom.

ENDURING PRINCIPLES

Our Enduring Principles define the essence, heart, and soul of our faith community. They describe the personality of our church as expressed throughout the world.

The Foundation: God, Christ, Holy Spirit

God's revelation in Jesus Christ and continuing presence through the Holy Spirit, as proclaimed by scripture, is the foundation of our faith, identity, mission, message, and beliefs. We do our best to uphold these principles (values, concepts, themes) as a faithful response to our heritage and our continuing experience with God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit.

Each principle includes statements that help explain its meaning. These statements are not meant to be limiting or comprehensive.

- Grace and Generosity
- Sacredness of Creation
- Continuing Revelation
- Worth of All Persons
- All Are Called
- Responsible Choices
- Pursuit of Peace (Shalom)
- Unity in Diversity
- Blessings of Community

Consider each Enduring Principle below.

- How does each relate to our hope for a sustainable human community amid creation?
- In what ways does it invite us to the universal struggle for fundamental human rights where we live and worship?

GRACE AND GENEROSITY

- God's grace, especially as revealed in Jesus Christ, is generous and unconditional.
- Having received God's generous grace, we respond generously and graciously receive the generosity of others.
- We offer all we are and have to God's purposes as revealed in Jesus Christ.
- We generously share our witness, resources, ministries, and sacraments according to our true capacity.

SACREDNESS OF CREATION

- In the beginning, God created and called it all good.
- Spirit and material, seen and unseen, are related.
- Creation's power to create or destroy reminds us of our vulnerability in this life.
- God is still creating to fulfill divine purpose.
- We join with God as stewards of care and hope for all creation.

CONTINUING REVELATION

- Scripture is an inspired and indispensable witness of human response to God's revelation of divine nature.
- God graciously reveals divine will today as in the past.
- The Holy Spirit inspires and provides witness to divine truth.
- In humility, individually and in community, we prayerfully listen to understand God's will for our lives, the church, and creation more completely.

WORTH OF ALL PERSONS

- God views all people as having inestimable and equal worth.
- God wants all people to experience wholeness of body, mind, spirit, and relationships.
- We seek to uphold and restore the worth of all people individually and in community, challenging unjust systems that diminish human worth.
- We join with Jesus Christ in bringing good news to the poor, sick, captive, and oppressed.

ALL ARE CALLED

- God graciously gives people gifts and opportunities to do good and to share in God's purposes.
- Jesus Christ invites people to follow him by becoming disciples who share his life and ministry.
- Some disciples are called and ordained to particular priesthood responsibilities and ministries for the sake of the community, the congregation, and the world.
- We respond faithfully, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to our best understanding of God's call.

RESPONSIBLE CHOICES

- God gives humans the ability to make choices about whom or what they will serve. Some people experience conditions that diminish their ability to make choices.
- Human choices contribute to good or evil in our lives and in the world.
- Many aspects of creation need redemption because of irresponsible and sinful human choices.
- We are called to make responsible choices within the circumstances of our lives that contribute to the purposes of God.

PURSUIT OF PEACE (SHALOM)

- God wants shalom (justice, reconciliation, well-being, wholeness, and peace) for all of creation.
- Jesus Christ, the embodiment of God's shalom (peace), reveals the meaning of God's peace in all aspects of life.
- The vision of Zion is to promote God's reign on earth, as proclaimed by Jesus Christ, through the leavening influence of just and peaceful communities.
- We courageously and generously share the peace of Jesus Christ with others.
- Led by the Holy Spirit, we work with God and others to restore peace (shalom) to creation.
- We celebrate God's peace wherever it appears or is being pursued by people of good will.

UNITY IN DIVERSITY

- Community of Christ is a diverse, international family of disciples, seekers, and congregations.
- Local and worldwide ministries are interdependent and important to the church's mission.
- The church embraces diversity and unity through the power of the Holy Spirit.
- We seek agreement or common consent in important matters. If we cannot achieve agreement, we commit to ongoing dialogue and lovingly uphold our common faith in Jesus Christ and the mission of the church.
- We confess that our lack of agreement on certain matters is hurtful to some of God's beloved children and creation.

BLESSINGS OF COMMUNITY

- The gospel of Jesus Christ is expressed best in community life where people become vulnerable to God's grace and each other.
- True community includes compassion for and solidarity with the poor, marginalized, and oppressed.
- True community upholds the worth of persons while providing a healthy alternative to self-centeredness, isolation, and conformity.
- Sacred community provides nurture and growth opportunities for all people, especially those who cannot fully care for themselves.
- We value our connections and share a strong sense of trust in and belonging with one another—even if we never have met.
- Some disciples are called and ordained to particular priesthood responsibilities and ministries for the sake of the community, the congregation, and the world.
- We are called to create communities of Christ's peace in our families and congregations and across villages, tribes, nations, and throughout creation.

Community of Christ Foundations for the Struggle for Fundamental Human Rights

Doctrine & Covenants

Doctrine and Covenants sections 162 through 165 interpret and clarify for Community of Christ the biblical vision of God's will for creation and our call toward Shalom. These passages, therefore, help us understand the struggle for fundamental human rights as we live together in the midst of creation.

Consider the passages of the Doctrine and Covenants below. Read each passage at least two times. Then, respond to the questions below in personal reflection, a small group, or class together.

- Does this passage speak to the struggle for fundamental human rights, temporal and spiritual wellbeing of all, or sustainable human community? If so, how? If not, why not?
- How does this passage speak to the call of disciples to join the struggle for fundamental human rights where they live and worship?

Doctrine & Covenants 162:6a-c

From the earliest days you have been given a sacred principle that declares the inestimable worth of all persons. Do not forget. The One who created all humankind grieves at the shameful divisions within the human family. A prophetic people must work tirelessly to tear down walls of separation and to build bridges of understanding. You hold precious lives in your hands. Be gentle and gracious with one another. A community is no stronger than the weakest within it. Even as the One you follow reached out to those who were rejected and marginalized, so must the community that bears his name.

Doctrine & Covenants 163:3b to 4a

Above all else, strive to be faithful to Christ's vision of the peaceable Kingdom of God on earth. Courageously challenge cultural, political, and religious trends that are contrary to the reconciling and

restoring purposes of God. Pursue peace. There are subtle, yet powerful, influences in the world, some even claiming to represent Christ, that seek to divide people and nations to accomplish their destructive aims. That which seeks to harden one human heart against another by constructing walls of fear and prejudice is not of God. Be especially alert to these influences, lest they divide you or divert you from the mission to which you are called. God, the Eternal Creator, weeps for the poor, displaced, mistreated, and diseased of the world because of their unnecessary suffering. Such conditions are not God's will. Open your ears to hear the pleading of mothers and fathers in all nations who desperately seek a future of hope for their children. Do not turn away from them. For in their welfare resides your welfare.

Doctrine & Covenants 163:7c

It is not pleasing to God when any passage of scripture is used to diminish or oppress races, genders, or classes of human beings. Much physical and emotional violence has been done to some of God's beloved children through the misuse of scripture. The church is called to confess and repent of such attitudes and practices.

Doctrine & Covenants 165:1a – 1e

Community of Christ, a divine vision is set before you. Presented over the years through various inspired phrases and symbols, it is expressed now through initiatives in harmony with Jesus Christ's mission. As a spiritual venture, boldly follow the initiatives into the heart of God's vision for the church and creation. Then, in response to growing insight about God's nature and will, continue to shape communities that live Christ's love and mission. Lovingly invite others to experience the good news of new life in community with Christ. Opportunities abound in your daily lives if you choose to see them. Undertake compassionate and just actions to abolish poverty and end needless suffering. Pursue peace on and for the Earth. Let nothing separate you from this mission. It reveals divine intent for personal, societal, and environmental salvation; a fullness of gospel witness for creation's restoration.

Doctrine & Covenants 165:3c – 3e

You do not fully understand many interrelated processes of human creation. Through its wonderful complexity, creation produces diversity and order. Be not consumed with concern about variety in human types and characteristics as you see them. Be passionately concerned about forming inclusive communities of love, oneness, and equality that reveal divine nature. Oneness and equality in Christ do not mean uniformity. They mean Unity in Diversity and relating in Christ-like love to the circumstances of others as if they were one's own. They also mean full opportunity for people to experience human worth and related rights, including expressing God-given giftedness in the church and society.

[Human Rights and Nonviolence: The Praxis of Theocratic Democracy](#)

During this interconference period (2019-2023), the members of Community of Christ are urged to study non-violence and the social change it offers through peaceful resistance and action. At the beginning of this period, the First Presidency tasked the Human Rights Team to articulate the relationship between nonviolence and human rights. In this task we affirmed Christ's message of nonviolence and its transformative enculturation of all nations. In response, the team approached this matter through our

unique tradition and established experience in our bylaws of theocratic democracy.²⁰ Theocratic democracy is the way by which we come to understand God's will and the relationship between human rights and nonviolent action. It is a new understanding of discipleship in the current metamorphosis of the church.

From earliest times the Christian countered an autocratic empire by proclaiming a communion with the God of solidarity and dignity of the vulnerable. The way of Jesus did not promote an imperial savior of redemptive violence, but instead a savior of divine justice who was born within the vulnerable ranks of the poor, oppressed, and marginalized. The followers of the way confessed Christ as pilgrims and strangers sojourning within, and not of this world.

The Christians countered Pax Romana's gods of retributive justice with the message a savior who practiced non-violent resistance. They promoted the distributive justice taught by Christ by sharing the Lord's open table. In promoting Christ's message of restorative justice, the earliest Christians demonstrated a new way of living in "right," non-violent and reconciliatory relationships. Even in its election of leaders in a pluralistic and diverse society, the apostles promoted procedural justice in the local election of leadership through discernment, prayer, and common consent (Acts 6:1-7).

The earliest Christian communities did not conform themselves to live under an authoritarian system of empire, but instead by the rule (Greek: *kratos*) of the people (*demos*) who sought the will of God (*Theos*) on earth.

The primitive church resisted empire by enculturating the sanctuary of Christ's peace. Christ's teaching of God's reign offered an alternative to the legal and violent reality of empire. Christian communities attracted the "other" living within Roman society and who were often excluded from claims to wealth, liberty, and legal remedies. When we compare the prophetic voice of the primitive church and the voice of our contemporary theocratic democracy, the following four axioms of the relationship between nonviolence and human rights emerge:

- 1st: The discernment of God's justice (Mat 6:10,33) is the discernment of human rights.
- 2nd: The discernment and promotion of human rights requires the advancement of democracy.
- 3rd: The advancement of democracy requires the discernment of appropriate nonviolent actions.
- 4th: The discernment of God's justice, democratization, and nonviolent action are human rights.

The following discussion serves as a starting point for the explorations and elucidation of these axioms and is concluded with a peroration for the praxis of Community of Christ's inheritance of theocratic democracy.

First Axiom: The discernment of God's justice is the discernment of human rights

²⁰ Bylaws of Community of Christ, Article III - Theocratic Democracy, Section 1. Definition. "The church, as defined by President Joseph Smith III, is a theocratic democracy. It was brought into being by divine initiative, is guided and administered by divine authority, is sustained by the light of the Holy Spirit, and exists for divine purposes. In response to divine initiative, members share responsibility for governing the church. ' . . . all things must be done in order and by common consent in the church, by the prayer of faith' (Doctrine and Covenants 27:4)."

What does *genuine enculturation* of the gospel look like? How does God's justice compare with that of contemporary secular, other religious societies, and our own movement of cooperative congregations? Can we recognize God's justice when we see it?

We have been counseled to discern the will of God for those times and places in which we live (D&C 162:2c). As a prophetic people, we discern the will of God *with* our neighbors who toil, and struggle within the communities in which we also reside. God encourages us to jointly search for God's justice in solidarity with our neighbors. We in turn invite them in our shared discernment of nonviolent action. We do so by advancing the practice of democracy towards the fulfillment of human rights and thereby transforming our reality together *with* them and God.

We are a trinitarian people and we rejoice in the countenance of God, an image theologically understood as the *imago trinitatis*. We joyfully experience God as the divine community in three persons. In embracing our earthly community, we look towards the *imago trinitatis* where community is fully realized in relationships of dignity, solidarity, mutuality, and compassion. Each person of the *imago trinitatis* shares each other's vulnerabilities in their collective struggle and mutual accountability. We feel the vulnerability of Jesus on the cross, and God's vulnerability in Jesus. In Jesus, we see God in solidarity with us, fully human and fully vulnerable. Jesus Christ on the cross, reveals our vulnerability to the empire.

The cross offers us a portal to discern the vulnerabilities of God and humanity in history's ongoing struggle for human rights (W. Hohfeld as adapted²¹) when, in relation to imperial predominance:

- The empire does not honor its *duty* to protect the vulnerable and their *claims* to safety, wellbeing, and property
- The vulnerable are unprotected, lacking any *claims* against the *liberties* exercised by empire and its agents to spew hateful language of social division and ostracism
- The vulnerable suffer legal *disabilities* in the dismissal of their judicial claims, meanwhile the favored of empire enjoy the protections of their *immunity*
- The vulnerable are *liable* to the empire's *power* to degrade their rights in its selfish imperial efforts to promote its own self-preservation and self-idolatry

The most vulnerable are those who are denied the right to enjoy basic human rights by the empire. Human rights must, to the best of our collective discernment, reflect and honor the *imago trinitatis* by resisting this violence and instead find solidarity *with* the vulnerable through compassionate actions.

Second Axiom: The discernment and promotion of human rights requires the advancement of democracy

In our modern world, human rights are not simply granted to everyone and enforced universally. They are defined and protected by governments that place discriminatory limits on their enforcement. Thus, not everyone enjoys equal protection in enjoyment of human rights. In addition, governments also reserve the sole and exclusive right to use violence and lethal force. At times they grant its license to its

²¹. Wesley Newcomb Hohfeld. "Some fundamental legal conceptions as applied in judicial reasoning" Yale Law Journal, 23(1):16–59, Nov. 1913. A succinct explanation of the Hofeldian concepts of rights can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tlslPhzl3uc>

commissioned agents and law enforcement agencies in part to protect the rights of citizens. In certain controversial cases, they grant the use of violence to private citizens in the application of deadly force in the “castle doctrine” and “stand your ground” laws and their variants. Invariably however, discrimination is fomented and exacerbated when the state exercises its monopoly of violence, and commissions the use of violence in ways that favor a population’s majority or a privileged segment and conversely disable the rights of minorities and vulnerable populations. The monopolization and commissioning of violence by the state is a complex topic which demands that Christ’s disciples join in the deliberative fray in how a democracy may best affirm and protect human rights. Proper law enforcement requires the creation of public policy by elected officials with the consent and accountability of the citizenry. Citizens are ultimately responsible for the moral and ethical exercise of legally sanctioned violence in ways that are ethically life reverential.²²

However, when autocracies, not democracies, exercise their monopoly of violence, they abrogate and reject efforts to be held accountable by its citizenry or subjects. This is the growing reality for populations in many parts of this world who must endure the corruption, racism, misogyny, patriarchy, and homophobia, as well as other types of violence perpetrated by non-elected, non-accountable autocrats. In autocracies, human rights are not respected, nor given proper attention, and are not democratically discerned nor enforced. Instead, human rights are dispensed at the discretion of a dictator, oligarchy or by political factions competing for power.

Democracies too must be careful in not engaging in the tyranny of the majority when they do not honor the sacredness of creation and do not uphold the worth of all persons. The church has provided a prophetic voice from the margins that reminds national democracies that the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.²³ Indeed, Christians must not be seduced and be drawn into church sanctioned autocracy. We too are aware of Christian autocrats who justify violence on interpretations of Romans 13.²⁴ These interpretations obligate the citizenry to go beyond the respect for authorities and obey what they will claim divinely sanctioned violence in their enforcement of even the vilest of

²² Albert Schweitzer states, “Good is: preserving and furthering life, bad is impending and destroying life.” quoted in “What Is Rhetorical Theology?: Textual Practice and Public Discourse,” Don Compier, 1999. P. 53. Compier describes the ethic of the reverence of life as a philosophical warrant in the exercise of critical hamartiology, which is the theological study of sin.

²³ Martin Luther King, “Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution.” Speech given at the National Cathedral, March 31, 1968, and attributed to Theodore Parker who stated, “I do not pretend to understand the moral universe; the arc is a long one, my eye reaches but little ways; I cannot calculate the curve and complete the figure by the experience of sight, I can divine it by conscience. And from what I see I am sure it bends towards justice.” In “The present aspect of slavery in America and the immediate duty of the North,” a speech delivered in the hall of the State house, before the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Convention, January 29, 1858

²⁴ Consider the words of Romans 13:1-4, “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. 2 Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. 3 For rulers are not a terror to good conduct but to bad. Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive its approval, 4 for it is God’s agent for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the agent of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer.” Stripped from context and used as a proof text, Romans 13 in part and whole has been used historically to justify Christian subjection to government authority and self-justification of authority to Christians. Put in context, however, Paul has a different message to convey regarding the submission of all authorities to God and the judgement of Christ.

dehumanizing laws.²⁵ The larger context of Pauline thought, Christians are on a sojourn with Caesar who is also accountable to a Christ that reconciles all things including the thrones and principalities of the world (Col. 1:15-20).

The discernment of human rights and their enforcement must include the *demos* who reside within their communities' social, cultural, economic, and historical circumstances of their lived struggles. Nonviolent action to place human rights within the proper frameworks of distributive, procedural, and restorative justice of democracy. Christian congregations that practice theocratic democracy are the ideal places to faithfully discern and promote human rights with a prophetic voice in their communities. Community of Christ congregations are especially suited in their practice of theocratic democracy as the foundational missional units of the church where participants live out their discipleship.²⁶

Third Axiom: The advancement of democracy requires the discernment of appropriate nonviolent action.

The authority of nonviolence is found in Jesus Christ, and it is Christ whom we must hear (Mark 9:7).²⁷ The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) is the clearest exposition of non-violent action. The antithesis of Christ to violence should be understood in the context of a society living under imperial occupation. It was a society with little recourse to justice under Roman law unless a person, such as the apostle Paul, was a citizen of Rome. Otherwise, the imperial forces could, for example, compel a citizen to assist in the execution of an individual (Mat 27:32, Mk 15:21, and Lk 23:26) which featured execution by crucifixion. To which Jesus would have encouraged such an individual to carry the heavy instruments of execution beyond what is demanded by the imperial forces (Mat 5:41). In doing so, the liberty of the imperial forces of appropriating labor without their consent nor assent. This nonviolent action then transforms an unquestionable imperial right of usurpation into the realm of the questionable and accountable. This transformation occurs as their subjects demonstrate their ability to control their sovereignty of labor amidst a cruel duty imposed through unjust subjugation. This raising of consciousness is the seed of social transformation. The authority of our non-violence must come from Christ who clarified peacemaking by providing the antithesis to the officially interpreted doctrine of religious violence of his contemporary world. The apostle Paul followed that prophetic voice and urged Christians to engage in those actions to "live peaceably with all men" (Romans 12:18). The New Testament encouraged disciples to abstain from violence in their pursue of peace with all people (Hebrews 12:14; 2 Corinthians 13:11; Galatians 5:22; James 3:17).

The growing threat of authoritarianism is always troubling in the epoch and place in which they propagate. Non-violent resistance to state violence and injustice should be driven by a sustainable purpose. In confronting authoritarian societies, our ultimate desire and sustainable goal is for its democratization. The process of advancing and engendering democratic practices will not succeed using

²⁵ Jeff Sessions the US Attorney General, "Let me take an aside to discuss concerns raised by our church friends about separating families. Many of the criticisms raised in recent days are not fair or logical and some are contrary to law. First- illegal entry into the United States is a crime—as it should be. Persons who violate the law of our nation are subject to prosecution. I would cite you to the Apostle Paul and his clear and wise command in Romans 13, to obey the laws of the government because God has ordained them for the purpose of order.," Fort Wayne, Indiana, June 14, 2018 <https://www.justice.gov/opa/speech/attorney-general-sessions-addresses-recent-criticisms-zero-tolerance-church-leaders>

²⁶ Bylaws of Community of Christ, Article V, Section 1

²⁷ Statement on Scripture, Community of Christ

violent means. Christianity can promote sustainable democratization when it promotes nonviolent actions (as adapted from E. Chenoweth²⁸) that include:

- Mobilizing large and diverse populations in a long-term commitment to non-violent resistance consistent with the prophetic tradition of Christ
- Persuading the larger community (e.g., civil society, public safety, military, and law enforcement entities, and business sectors) to reject autocracy and embrace non-violent civil resistance in promoting democracy (*metanoia*).
- Promoting faith-based creative, imaginative, diverse methods of non-violent resistance²⁹
- Encouraging Christians to practice the needed discipline to confront violent and intentional repression, and by resisting the temptation of responding through violence (Mat 5:38-39a)

The question of driving towards democracy then requires us to identify the type of democracy and democratic practices we aspire to realize. Democracy must demonstrate the types of justice exemplified by Jesus. It must be distributive in that every member and group must be able to share in that democratic exercise. For example, in Community of Christ congregations, children who are accountable can participate in their governance. Democratic practices should display procedural justice. For example, the experimentation in deliberative democratic processes at world conference allows fairness in the examination of an issue. Democratic practices must demonstrate restorative justice. Democracy has been long criticized for its tyranny of its majority towards the minority. The practices prescribed in the church's statement, "Faithful Disagreement Definition and Principles"³⁰ provides a way of finding unity in our diversity.

Fourth Axiom: The discernment of God's justice, democratization, and nonviolent action are human rights

The practices of discerning God's justice, advancing democratic processes, and non-violent actions are collectively a human right. Indeed, the United Nations Human Rights Commission has resolved that democracy itself is a fundamental human right.³¹ These fundamental democratic rights include to explore, recreate, and practices the freedom of speech, assembly, association, the rights of inclusiveness and equality, citizenship, consent of the governed, voting rights, right of petition, and the freedom from unwarranted governmental deprivation of the right to life. A prophetic people promoting democracy through non-violent actions is to act in solidarity *with*, and in compassion *with* fellow beings in bringing dignity to all humans.

²⁸ Drop Your Weapons: When and Why Civil Resistance Works, Erica Chenoweth & Maria J. Stephan, Foreign Affairs, Vol 93, number 4, July/August 2014

²⁹ For secular examples see the 198 methods of secular nonviolent actions found in, Methods of Nonviolent Action, Gene Sharp, Boston 1973

³⁰ <http://www.latter-dayseekers.org/uploads/7/9/3/8/79384866/faithful-disagreement-definition-and-principles.pdf>

³¹ "Study on common challenges facing States in their efforts to secure democracy and the rule of law from a human rights perspective," Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 22 December 2012, A/HRC/22/29.

In Community of Christ, *we proclaim Christ*³² through cooperative societies of disciples. As previously stated in the second axiom above, congregations in Community of Christ are especially suited to practices of discernment of human rights, democratization, and nonviolent social action. Congregations are foundational missional units of the church³³ where disciples *promote community*, living out our discipleship and promoting the mission of the church. It is where we live in the image of the triune God, and we relate with each other and our neighbors in:

- Dignity – We experience *joy* in sharing the Lord’s countenance
- Solidarity – We discover *hope* in our shared vulnerability
- Mutuality – We live a cooperative identity of Christ’s *love*
- Accountability – We pursue *peace* in the joint compassionate stewardship of our identity

In essence, the missional practice of theocratic democracy within our congregations and among our neighbors is not only our discipleship but our right.

Peroration: Call for the shared praxis of theocratic democracy in congregational discipleship

Many people in contemporary society equate theocracy with authoritarianism and there are many historic examples in which this is true. Theocratic regimes have justified their repressive autocratic actions based on their authoritative claims upon the inerrant will of God. Community of Christ holds that a theocratic democracy³⁴ is a “just” democracy in which humanity discerns and struggles with its imperfect understanding of God’s will. The people of a theocratic democracy are on an unending journey seeking solidarity, compassionate action *with* their neighbors, the blessings of community and the worth of all peoples. The church envisions, “a time when the promise of God’s kingdom shall be fulfilled. We have a vision of that kingdom where the name of Jesus Christ is truly honored, where God’s will be done on earth, where the hungry are fed, poverty is alleviated, sinners are repentant, and sin is forgiven.”³⁵ This vision will require congregations to carry out the mission of the church.

Since Community of Christ congregation are responsible for the ministry and operations³⁶, they are in essence autonomous in nature. Their cohesion to the larger world church is a covenantal relationship and is created after the exercise their right of assembly and association, they subsequently vote to become a congregation of Community of Christ.³⁷ The intersection of human rights and nonviolence at the local congregational level in Community of Christ raises questions:

- Given an emphasis of decentralization of church resources, can congregations be recognized as autonomous entities in their empowerment?

³² Community of Christ Bylaws, Article 1, “The purpose and mission of the church is to proclaim Jesus Christ and promote communities of joy, hope, love, and peace”

³³ Community of Christ Bylaws, Article V, Section 1, “Congregations are the foundational missional units of the church where participants live out their discipleship.”

³⁴ Not to be confused with a *democratic theocracy* in which the noun “theocracy” is an exercise in the assent of people to legitimize autocratic inerrancy.

³⁵ Community of Christ Bylaws, Article II

³⁶ Community of Christ Bylaws, Article V, Section 1

³⁷ Community of Christ Bylaws Article V Section 8

- What training and spiritual development can the general officers of the church provide to promote the practice of theocratic democracy at the local level?
- Are there limits on the practice of theocratic democracy in congregations? If so, what are they?
- Will principles of cooperative self-government³⁸ be established by which congregations can claim and celebrate their common identity under the banner of Community of Christ?
- Will the enculturation of democratic practices be stymied by those who favor and protect autocratic Christian governance?

The preceding cursory description of the four axioms is a starting point for ongoing inquiry and discussion. The church's transformation and survival will occur through its congregations in the places and times in which they are found. The previous, current, and ongoing metamorphosis of Community of Christ continues its call for an imperfect people to discern the struggle for human rights *with*, and emphatically not *for*, those who reside in those places in which they commit to living as a prophetic people.

³⁸ Community of Christ Bylaws Article III, Section, "In response to divine initiative, members share responsibility for governing the church"

Response to UNDRIP and Work with the Indigenous Group (with Recommendations)

The role of UNDRIP within the mission of Community of Christ, incorporating Article 12:1

Background

The Community of Christ declares and affirms that "**we proclaim Jesus Christ and promote communities of joy, hope, love and peace.**" Peace is for all people. As human rights of all human beings are asserted, we look to the indigenous peoples of the world and find this group marginalized and distanced both economically and socially. We uphold the rights of indigenous peoples and find it essential to support specific measures to improve their situation, particularly in areas of discrimination and inequality. The Community of Christ is dedicated to the pursuit of peace, reconciliation, and healing for all peoples.

Indigenous peoples are descendants of the original people or occupants of lands before these lands were taken over or dominated by colonizers, non-indigenous persons and other non-indigenous entities. Many indigenous peoples have maintained their traditional cultures and identities and have a strong and deep relationship with their ancestral territories, cultures and identities. Indigenous land and cultures have been used for economic gain and profit with little regard for the indigenous peoples' contributions to the environment. Many indigenous practices are now being taught to be environmentally responsible and sustainable.

Indigenous peoples' rights are the same human rights for all peoples and (the) United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) promotes a way of providing opportunities to succeed and eliminate difficulties widespread in prior times. The UNDRIP human rights policy was drafted, argued and presented by the world's indigenous peoples. It is their proposal that was adopted by the United Nations and is now supported by the Community of Christ and many others.

While there are forty-six articles, the main themes include:

1. The right of self-determination. Self-determination generally means that indigenous peoples have the right to decide what is best for them and their communities.
2. The right to be recognized as distinct peoples. Having the right to be free and independent enables them to be citizens of the country they live in and at the same time to be members of their indigenous communities.
3. The right to free, prior and informed consent. With free, prior and informed consent, indigenous peoples have the right to be consulted and make decisions regarding any matter that may affect their rights freely, without pressure, and having all the information in advance of any forced changes by others, in order to evaluate the impact of those proposed changes.
4. The right to be free of discrimination. Governments must ensure that indigenous peoples are treated the same way as other people, regardless of sex, disability or religion.

Indigenous spiritual and religious traditions, customs and ceremonies are included in these rights. For many, if not all, indigenous peoples' spiritual practices are deeply embedded in the land and all of creation.

Role of Religion within the Community of Christ and the UNDRIP

The First Presidency tasks the Human Rights Team to specifically address Article 12 (1) which reads:

“Indigenous peoples have the right to manifest, practice, develop and teach their spiritual and religious traditions, customs and ceremonies; the right to maintain, protect, and have access in privacy to their religious and cultural sites; the right to the use and control of their ceremonial objects; the right to the repatriation of their human remains.”

Indigenous peoples throughout the world have the right to live and worship as they choose. These are rights they share with all humanity. The dominant cultures in many nations have abused and continue to abuse these rights. This issue is now receiving international recognition, leading to calls for protection of indigenous peoples' rights and freedoms. Community of Christ members are concerned because such abuse violates the worth of all persons and our long history of concern for indigenous peoples.

Many churches historically have experienced a conflict between proselyting all people to Christianity and supporting peoples in their traditional practices of religion. The Community of Christ has emphasized the significance of agency in the decision of converting to Christianity. However, within Christianity, there have been many instances of collusion, forced or semi-forced conversions, and incentives promoted for applicants to join in Christian baptism. The UNDRIP emphasis is for indigenous individuals and groups to have full self-determination in this critical decision and commitment.

Community of Christ people are called to be “Pathways for Peace.” We don't make a difference by being passive and supportive by word only. Action is required. We need to do something. Some recommended steps for Community of Christ include:

1. Spirituality informs and guides all aspects of indigenous life. Providing indigenous peoples within Community of Christ the opportunity to give voice to their life, culture, and circumstances edifies and advances the life and mission of the church.
2. Become better educated on the lives of indigenous peoples. Hear and interact with them directly. Listen, hear, and understand what is being shared. Participate when invited to indigenous cultural activities and educational programs. Understand their spiritual values and customs. Understand the rationale when indigenous people protest their treatment from the dominate culture. Understand how colonization changed their livelihoods, customs, feelings of self-worth, and other issues.
3. Speak out for the indigenous experiencing poverty, sexual violence from non-indigenous peoples, any violence perpetrated against them in any way, or their removal to the least desirable lands.
4. Acknowledge by statement of historical fact the original inhabitants who resided on lands where church activities and presence occur. Support churches, universities, city councils and all other governments in acknowledging the land previously controlled by indigenous peoples.

5. Utilize indigenous perspective when the Community of Christ is planning its worship services and resources. For example, incorporate a prayer for peace from the Pueblo, Navajo, Lakota, etc. and other indigenous communities throughout the world.
6. Be active personally. Do not leave it only to indigenous peoples to find solutions for the non-indigenous to help with their plight. Work together. Support indigenous peoples in museums, schoolbooks, celebrations, scholarships for indigenous peoples, and other opportunities. Be active with ecumenical and interfaith advocacy groups.
7. Realize all indigenous nations, tribes, groups are not the same. Not all agree on the same significant issues. Different peoples have different reactions, customs, beliefs and actions.
8. Consider “fact finding” of prior acts of injustice to understand the ongoing pain in local areas. Listen and document the issues learned. Develop a strategy to find reconciling justice. This could include a cultural audit to determine the church’s complicity with colonization. Seek reconciliation and restoration.
9. Within the Community of Christ, provide support for indigenous expressions of the Restoration around the world.
10. Support indigenous peoples throughout the world to help frame the challenge to build communities of peace and justice.
11. Explore what “the worth of all persons” means in light of the aspirations of indigenous peoples.

A Moment in Our History

While it may be more comfortable looking at other organizations in their complicity in bringing harm to indigenous people, one should also look within one’s own organization to determine if wrong has been committed with unintended consequences.

The Community of Christ needs to review circumstances of the Reorganized Church’s role in the military occupation that toppled the government of indigenous Queen Lili’uokalani of Hawaii in January 1893. The Reorganized Church provided lodging and a base for military operations for a show of force accompanied with the *U.S.S. Boston* in the harbor. The Honolulu Pastor, while highly effective in church leadership and membership growth, was complicit in participation with the U.S. military. The Pastor’s business was in production and sales of cattle. The Pastor apparently received significant business income for sales of beef to the U.S. military. The indigenous government of Hawaii collapsed with the support of English-speaking business owners and other influential people. The Community of Christ may review this situation and consider the following actions:

1. Conduct a fact-finding commission, reviewing the Church’s role in the overthrow of the indigenous government by the United States. The results of the commission may lead to justice-making components.
1. Consider a religious repentance ceremony, acknowledging complicity in the act of overthrowing Hawaii, making it a territory of the United States. Repentance may only be a beginning in the process of reconciliation and justice. If nothing other than apologies and repentance occurs, it tends to give some satisfaction to the offenders, while leaving issues of justice unattended.
2. List action items which will aid in bringing peace and justice to the indigenous people of Hawaii.

There are many opportunities for everyone to support UNDRIP worldwide.

Recommendations for Consideration into the Future:

1. Consider an indigenous peoples' roundtable or forum in Community of Christ
2. A Truth and Reconciliation Commission with harm done to indigenous persons
3. An online event on the theme of the rights of indigenous persons or indigenous experiences in Community of Christ
4. Collect audio testimonies of indigenous voices of indigenous persons' experience
5. A text of what CofC (Community of Christ) IMMBp (identity, message, mission, beliefs, and practices) means among people across the church

Website and Social Media

The Human Rights Team was interested in creating a platform to voice perspectives on Human Rights issues across the church. The team created a Social Media Subcommittee to explore ways to share with the church. The following was accomplished:

- The team created a Facebook page for Human Rights in Community of Christ: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100067866052338>
- Team members authored five Human Rights Highlights in 2021 covering select issues of human rights. Issues included Living with a Disability; Human Trafficking and Anti-Trafficking (2); The Rights of Indigenous People; and the Rohingya
- The subcommittee worked with the Communications Team on recreating the Human Rights pages of the new cofchrist.org site launched in March of 2022. This included
 - o Redesigned Human Rights page (<https://cofchrist.org/human-rights/>)
 - o New page dedicated to the Human Rights Award (<https://cofchrist.org/human-rights-award/>)
 - o Video introducing the Human Rights Award (<https://youtu.be/JU2qupJHzBs>)
 - o Online submission form for nominations for the Human Rights Award (<https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=yAz9iiz54Eqn4ubUuDgrTnCzWH1CiQVlpyJEf5riE6VUQkc1N1BKM0czSDM2QVpJWE4wTEJGQ1NTRS4u>)

The team found that the amount of required content to grow an online audience for human rights education and advocacy in Community of Christ was an obstacle. The team recommends further exploration of how to allocate resources to coordinating creative content. We believe there are untapped resources for human rights advocacy and activity in the church.

Human Rights Award and 2023 Recipients

The Human Rights Team is grateful for the many nominations we received through our new online nomination process. After announcing a new online nomination process and new media (see references

below) in the July/August 2022 Herald, we received a high number of nominations from multiple countries.

- New page dedicated to the Human Rights Award (<https://cofchrist.org/human-rights-award/>)
- Video introducing the Human Rights Award (<https://youtu.be/JU2qupJHzBs>)
- Online submission form for nominations for the Human Rights Award (<https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=yAz9iiz54Eqn4ubUuDgrTnCzwH1CjQVlpYJEf5riE6VUQkc1N1BKM0czSDM2QVpJWE4wTEJGQ1NTRS4u>)

Thank you to the many people who nominated people for the Human Rights Award. The recipients for the 2023 Human Rights Award will be announced at the World Conference.