

Council for World Mission

Mission Development Programme



Hearing God's Cry

HEARING GOD'S CRY

The Bible opens with the cry of God bringing life into being
A story which tells of how God speaks to us simultaneously from the text and from the world
God's cry creates the world and sends us into the world
Mission is announced when God cries
Where God is in mission, there God's cry can be heard.

God's cries and our cries are joined,
as we know from Abel in Genesis, (Gen 4:10)
as we know from Moses in Exodus, (Exod 3:7)
as we know from Jesus in the Gospel of Mark (Mark 7:34)
And as we know from the Spirit in Romans (Romans 8: 26)
God's cries and our cries are joined.
And God's Spirit says to the churches, "Listen then if you have ears" (Rev 2:7)

Listen to God's cry of pain in places like Aleppo, in Gaza, in West Papua and in Kashmir
And hear how God urges us to work for a just peace.

Listen to God's cry of joy in the breaking of chains of oppression.
And be swept up in movements that bring freedom.

Listen to God's cry of outrage at our refusal to see the intrinsic worth of each and all...
And be challenged to dismantle systems that exploit.

Listen to God's cry giving birth to new possibilities in the midst of our resistance to change
And open up to all that God can do.

Listen to God's cry in Creation's woundedness
And be inspired to live more gently upon the earth.

In all these things, listen to God's cry of invitation
And join our voices in a song of hope
and travel the road in the wilderness that is holy with God's coming amongst us.

"Hearing God's Cry" is a programme and process of The Council for World Mission which
invites churches to listen to voices they perhaps ignore; voices that may be drowned out by the
internal noise we make. A process which asks us to find our location in the stories of those who
have responded to God's call.

As we listen, reflect and discern
God's cry will reveal our calling and our direction in response
And as partners we will try to find the companionship and courage to respond
together.



HEARING GOD'S CRY PROCESS AND PROGRAMME

In June 2016 CWM Council made a decision to develop a programme which could bring together Team Visits and Face the Facts so that member churches can be assisted in reading the signs of their times and identifying a mission response. Hearing God's Cry (HGC) offers a biblical and theological process for member churches which invites new mission thinking and practice that is rooted in reflection on the contexts the churches serve and the presence of God amongst and beyond us.

Through this process churches will explore and discern a reading of their own life and the life and context around them. It will explore what Empire looks like in their setting and identify who is speaking out for God's vision of life in fullness. This will then identify what God is crying out for and amongst whom. This will help set a further mission agenda for the member church and the action needed to respond to God's cry. It will be led in partnership between the member church leadership and CWM Mission Secretaries for Mission Development and the relevant Region.

CWM thinks of mission in life-affirming ways, summed up in the idea of Life in fullness through Christ. From Abel onwards God has heard the cry of those who suffer and hurt, (Gen 4: 10, see also God hearing cries in Gen. 21:17, Ps. 18:6, Isa. 38:5, Matt. 20:30, Mark 2:17, Luke 8:50, John 11: 33 -35, Hebrews 5:7). It has prompted God to act in mission.

God also cries out. The voice of God invites creation to be, (Gen. 1: 3 etc), blesses migrants (Gen 15: 5), challenges kings, (1 Sam 12:7ff), sets out challenge and choice, (Deut. 30: 15ff) demands justice, (Amos 5:24) heals (Matt. 8:2) forgives, (Luke 23:34) makes new (Rev. 21: 3ff). God cries from communities and persons affected by poverty, violence, discrimination, and death. The cry of God then summons us to work for transformation of structures and systems; persons and relationships; hearts, minds and souls. It is not enough to try to help people carry on in the same way. Instead, it is to bring change, salvation, deliverance.



PHASE 1: THE STORY OF OUR STORY

In brief:

We start the process by trying to locate our life and mission as a church within the biblical story. It will help us get a measure of ourselves and where we feel we are.



“... the woman left her water-jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, ‘Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done!’”
(John 4:28 – 29, NRSV)

“They said to each other, ‘Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us’” (Luke 24: 32, NRSV)

Christians look to the Bible to illuminate and understand our calling, context and time. Its stories and teachings speak to the realities of our lives and times. Its stories accompany us through the year in worship as a way to remind us of God’s mission to the world. The texts speak best when they address our context and begin an ‘interpretive conversation’ which gives us fresh eyes and ears for what God is doing.

The HGC process begins with identifying a biblical story which speaks to the life and situation of the member church and tells something of what it is facing and feeling in these days. The aim is to get a faith perspective on the life of the member church rather than an organisational perspective. The story might illuminate a key struggle the church has, or a particular campaign it is focusing on. Through this the church can express its sense of the mission God is calling them to today.

In order to discover the story, the member church might address questions like:

- If your church was one of the disciples of Jesus, which one would it be and why?
- If you put your church as a character in a parable of Jesus, which one would it be and why?
- Is there a biblical teaching that either sums up life in your church or spells out a challenge your church faces? Is there one which speaks to a challenge your church is avoiding but needs to face?
- If the prophets of the Old Testament were to visit your office, which one would it be and what words might he or she share?
- If Paul or one of the writers of the Epistles was to include your church in the letters they sent out to the others Churches, which particular text might be sent especially to you?
- If you were to look at the letters to the churches in Revelation, would your church be Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia or Laodicea?



Once this story is identified and the church's own interpretation given, we will then share this with others as a way to invite insight into the text from a range of directions. These commentators might also suggest other text, partner texts or counter texts which speak to a similar context. This will give us some biblical grounding for developing shared reflections. It will also provide the CWM member churches some fresh and engaging bible study materials that will assist in developing missional congregations.

PHASE 2: RECOGNISING EMPIRE IN OUR MIDST

In brief:

This stage asks us to identify what is God trying to change and transform in our context and who is resisting that, and who is profiting from a world which is not as God intends it to be. To ask where there is brokenness of life rather than fullness of life, and who is causing the brokenness.

A summary of CWM's use of the idea of 'Empire'

"For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places". (Ephesians 6:12, NRSV)

"As for yourselves, beware; for they will hand you over to councils; and you will be beaten in synagogues; and you will stand before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them. And the good news must first be proclaimed to all nations". (Mark 13: 9 – 11, NRSV)

Mission is not a neutral activity. Jesus' mission, like those of the prophets, met with resistance and rejection. The forces of Empire wanted Jesus stopped and so they put him to death. Jesus warned his disciples that they too would experience similar persecution and rejection. As CWM has looked at the world, it has discerned forces and interests that are connected in their desire to control, profit and exploit peoples, planet, minds and allegiances. In a world of national differences, global movements nevertheless exert power and influence which destroys the earth, divides peoples and damages the most vulnerable. This is not accidental or unexpected. It is deliberate and planned. These forces and interests are not only political, economic, financial, military and cultural, they are also religious. The consequences of these forces and interests are portrayed as inevitable for progress. These are amongst the key consequences we name:

- Climate Change,
- Economic Injustice,
- Human Trafficking,
- Militarisation,
- Religious Intolerance and the rise of exclusivist nationalisms
- Forced Migration.



CWM does not believe that these factors are accidental. They are the product of powers and policies, actions and attitudes, which might be disconnected by geography. They have a connection in both intention and interest. This is what we have named as Empire. It brings death and destruction to the many and wealth and security to the few. Empire is always most evident in how power is used and profit made. Empire is not the world as God wants it. It not the fullness of life for all that Christ promised, nor the vision of shalom inspired by the Spirit.

In his address to CWM Assembly in Jeju, Korea, Rev. Dr. Collin Cowan committed us again to this understanding of Mission in the context of Empire.



“Over this Assembly period we intend to continue our focus on mission in the context of empire, embracing our conviction that there are alternatives to this life-denying regime and engage in actions aimed at healing, peace and reconciliation”. (Rev. Dr. Collin Cowan, CWM General Secretary 2016)

This vision of mission comes from a theological understanding. We are children of God, the Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer of all that is and is to come, who is calling all creation into new relationship with each other and with God, (Romans 8: 14ff). To this God we owe love and honor above all other, (Deut. 6:4, Mark 12:28ff, Acts 10:36).

We are disciples of One who was condemned by Empire because he confronted injustice, hatred and hurt. In opposition to Empire, he counter-created justice, love and liberation, (Mark 10: 32 – 34). This counter-creation is at work amongst and beyond us through God’s liberating Spirit, (2 Cor 4: 11-12).

We are citizens of a land that exists as a counter reality in the many contexts we inhabit, (Ephesians 2:19, Philippians 3:20). We seek to live as signs of this counter-reality through all we do in mission and witness, (Matt. 5:13 – 16, 21:43). We are a people whose chains have been broken by Christ, and live under a call to liberating life. We are a people empowered by the Spirit, sharing in a mission that proclaims Christ in the face of all powers, forces and systems, (Mark 5: 1-20, Philippians 2: 1 - 10).

Yet, we are often willingly or unwittingly put back in chains, and made to work to the profit of lesser goals and gods. We participate in oppressing structures, perpetuate hateful attitudes and actions that do not befit followers of one who has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; and filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty, (Luke 1: 52-53)

Given this theological and missiological understanding, we must discern the power of Empire in our various contexts so that we can discern where God is seeking to resist and overcome it and with whom. Central to this is a vision of the counter-community of fullness Jesus created amongst those others despised and rejected. A community that was the first fruit of the liberation, salvation and deliverance Jesus brings through his death, resurrection and through the mission his Spirit continues amongst us.

The task is to identify the impact Empire is having as we look at our environment, our economies, our politics, our relationships and our culture's values. This phase will revolve around conversations and, if possible, visits exploring where Empire is most manifest in our places and an articulation of this by the member church.

In order to recognise Empire, the member church might address questions like:

- In what ways is our society and our economy unequal? Who benefits from that?
- How are our lands, waters and natural resources being used? Who benefits from that?
- Where is there intolerance and violence in our society and why?
- Who does our society and culture, our church push to the margins?
- How are we using money and status as a church?



PHASE 3: WHO ARE THE PROPHETS AND WHAT ARE THEY SAYING?

In brief:

Having identified the areas where God's life, love and world is being resisted we try to identify who is addressing such issues and what they are saying. They will be people inside and outside the church.

“Then the Lord came down in a pillar of cloud, and stood at the entrance of the tent, and called Aaron and Miriam; and they both came forward.

And he said, ‘Hear my words:

*When there are prophets among you,
I the Lord make myself known to them in visions;
I speak to them in dreams”.*

(Numbers 12:5-6, NRSV)



*“In the last days it will be, God declares,
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams.
Even upon my slaves, both men and women,
in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy”.*

(Acts 2: 17 – 18, NRSV)

Despite our radical theology and agenda, we know that member churches and CWM itself struggles with being true to our justice calling and quickly church matters dominate decision making. However, there are individuals and movements in all our contexts that speak and act prophetically. The prophets saw themselves as visionaries and agitators for God's alternative way of living. They spoke out against injustice, (Isaiah 1), confronted power, (2 Sam 12), called God's people to have hope even in the midst of injustice (Jer. 29), offered a vision of an alternative world, (Amos 9, Habakkuk 3), and reminded the people that God was served through doing justice (Isa. 58, Micah 6). They called God's people to fresh faithfulness in God and God's promises, (Ezek. 37). Some of the prophets were priests, like Jeremiah and Ezekiel, some came

from outside the religious life like Moses and Amos, who were shepherds. Some were slaves like Joseph or Daniel, some were Judges like Deborah or scholars like Huldah. They took up positions on the edge of the religious and political power of their day. And they spoke truthfully to them, (Jer. 7).

God's cry will be raised in part by the victims of Empire but also by the opponents of Empire. These are the prophetic voices we need to hear, understand and interpret. This phase will then try to identify the prophets of our day, some who are speaking within our traditions and some speaking from outside. 'Who are the Prophets?' aims to identify such prophets and invite them and their thinking into the lives of our churches/regions. In some cases, these might be familiar voices and names, but in many cases, they might be activist movements engaging with common issues in mission in the context of Empire. Their voices are needed both for context reading but also for mission visioning. Work will be needed to ensure the Prophets we choose are not just our friends, bringing familiar messages. Their critique and alternative vision can inform and empower our mission vision, practice and partnership.

In order to discern the Prophets, the member church might address questions like:

- Who is speaking with and from the communities our society or church marginalises or ignores?
- Who is speaking from the issues and actions we identified as Empire
- Who is part of movements we can partner with and learn from?
- Who reads the Bible in ways which address these issues?



PHASE 4: HEARING GOD’S CRY GATHERING

In brief:

A bringing together of insights and ideas for wider discussion.

“Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches”.
(Rev. 2:7, NRSV)

“By people of strange tongues and by the lips of foreigners I will speak to this people; yet even then they will not listen to me,’ says the Lord”. (1 Cor. 14: 17, NRSV)



A significant amount of the process could be contained just within the leadership of the member church. The reflections and findings need to be shared with others to test them further. A gathering is held to bring together our insights with others within the member church, ecumenical and also partners within the CWM region. It should include hearing from some of the prophets and commentators on our texts and analysis of Empire. And then offer space to bring directions for mission planning for the member church.

It would include features like:

- Worship which brings a healing, prayerful and loving spirit to our meeting and our contexts. This would be a deep and devoted moment reflecting with love on our world and blessing it and our neighbours.
- Hearing from the Prophets & Recognising Empire in our midst. Context reading led by social movements and activists whose concern is justice not the church. This will enable churches to be challenged to go beyond their pet topics and hopefully build fresh partnerships with activists on justice issues.
- Biblical and theological reflections on the movement of the Spirit in our context.
- Story sharing and idea creating from participants, exploring individual church capacity and mission program matters
- Recommendations for action aimed at the Region, the Denomination, the local church and CWM programme

Phase 5: 'MISSION MATTERS WORKSHOPS'

In brief:

An event to give training or develop responses in practice to the key issue that has been chosen from the Hearing process

The process should throw up new directions of work which need deeper thought and engagement. This is to make us move beyond further analysis to discerning how missional congregations engage practically with these issues, and move us to mission projects in the context of Empire. This can also flow into Mission Support Programme (MSP) and Capacity Development Programme (CDP) processes. The Mission Matters workshops can begin to focus on devising new methods for mission given the theological and missiological discernment.

For more information, please contact CWM's Mission Development Team at

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