

Globalization and catholic transformative witness : migration and the challenges to the churches

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15. Globalization and Catholic Transformative Witness: Migration and the Challenges to the Churches

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Migrants contribute to the economies of both their sending and their receiving countries. But more often than not they are subjected to all sorts of violence. As they cross national boundaries they become the responsibility not only of the governments from which they come but also of those that receive them. As Christianity recognizes all human beings to be created in the image of God, migrants become the responsibility of the churches in the countries that receive them, while their families, left behind in their own countries, are the responsibility of the churches in the countries that send them out.

Hong Kong benefits tremendously from the more than 245,531 foreign domestic helpers working within the territory.¹ Of these, 123,545 are Filipinos (120,496 female, 3,049 male), 114,411 are Indonesians (114,335 female, 76 male), and the rest are from Thailand, India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Pakistan, Burma, Malaysia, Bangladesh, Singapore, and other countries. Foreign domestic helpers perform simple household chores as well as the crucial activities of child rearing and educating, thus liberating their employers from the household to pursue economically productive endeavors and other social activities.

More often than not, these contributions remain unrecognized by both their employers and the Hong Kong society at large, as is shown by Hong Kong's anti-migrant policies. Among such policies are the 1987 policy instituted by the Hong Kong Secretary for Security that rules that when a foreign domestic helper's contract is terminated, he or she will be allowed to stay in Hong Kong for no more than two weeks, the denial of permanent residency status for foreign domestic helpers, and the 2003 decision by the Director of Immigration that requires such helpers to work and live at the address listed on the contract. This ruling makes workers more vulnerable to abuses such as being expected to work sixteen hours a day, being on call twenty-four hours a day, and lacking proper sleeping quarters, so that many such workers sleep on folding beds in the kitchen, on the sofa, or under the dining room table.

¹ Hong Kong Immigration Department, December 2007.

According to the Annual Stock Estimate of Overseas Filipinos released by the Commission of Filipinos Overseas (CFO), as of December 2007, there were 4.13 million temporary and 900,023 overseas Filipinos who were not properly documented, who lacked valid residence or work permits, or who were staying in a foreign country longer than their visa allowed; the CFO refers to these people as irregular migrants. The overseas Filipino workers (referred to by the Commission as temporary overseas workers) include people whose overseas stay is employment-related and who are expected to return home at the end of their work contracts. The third category of overseas Filipinos in the study includes those known as permanent overseas Filipinos, including immigrants or legally permanent residents abroad whose residence does not depend on work contracts. In 2004 they numbered 3.2 million. Currently 12,171 Filipinos have permanent residency status in Hong Kong.

The October 2005 report of The Global Commission on International Migration (GCIM) says that if all international migrants were to live in a single area, their numbers would be equivalent to the population of the world's fifth largest country, Brazil. The total number of international migrants constitutes 3% of the world's population.²

According to the Hong Kong Immigration Department, the 245,531 foreign domestic helpers in Hong Kong in 2007 were a small portion of the approximately 8.7 million Filipinos overseas.³ The total Hong Kong population of foreign domestic helpers is a miniscule portion of the more than 205 million international migrants.

Areas of Deployment and Origin

The 2005 GCIM report states that in 2000 there were 56.1 million international migrants in Europe (including the European part of the former USSR), accounting for 7.7% of Europe's population; there are also 49.9 million in Asia, 1.4% of Asia's population; 40.8 million in North America, 12.9% of North America's population; 16.3 million in Africa, 2% of Africa's population; 5.9 million in Latin America, 1.1% of Latin America's population, and 5.8 million in Australia, 18.7% of Australia's population.

² "Report of the Global Commission on International Migration," Oct. 2005, un-ngls.org/orf/international_migration.htm, acc. 1 April 2010.

³ CFO's annual Stock Estimate of Overseas Filipinos, 2007; cfo.gov.ph/pdf/statistics/Stock%202007.pdf, acc. 2 March 2010.

The GCIM also categorizes international migrant populations by nation. The USA hosts some 35 million international migrants, 20% of the world's migrants. The Russian Federation has some 13.3 million, 7.6% of the world's migrants. The 7.3 million in Germany are 4.2% of the world's migrants. The Ukraine hosts 6.9 million, 4.0% of the world's migrants, and India has 6.3 million, 3.6% of the world's migrants. Migrants comprise more than 60% of the total population in Andorra, the Macao Special Administrative Region of China, Guam, the Holy See, Monaco, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates. The USA, Canada, and Australia have 3.1 million permanent overseas Filipinos, while temporary and migrant Filipinos are concentrated in West Asia/the Middle East and East and Southeast Asian countries or are based at sea. The 2005 GCIM report says that in 2000 the most international migrants – 35 million – came from China. India was second, with 20 million, and the Philippines third, with 8.1 million. In 2000, Filipino migrants were found in 197 countries.

Migrants' Contribution to Their own Local Economies

Migrant workers contribute economically to their home countries. According to World Bank estimates, formal transfers of remittances from migrant workers peaked at US\$206 billion in 2006, with probably an additional \$300 billion transferred informally. The total amount of these remittances from migrants was almost twice the amount given in 2006 by developed countries to underdeveloped countries in the form of Overseas Development Aid (US\$104 billion). The migrants' remittances are also the second largest source of external funding for developing countries after foreign direct investment (US\$325 billion in 2006).

The GCIM 2005 final report also states that in 2001 the top remittance-sending country was the USA (\$28 billion), the second was Saudi Arabia (\$15 billion), and tied for third were Belgium, Germany, and Switzerland (\$8 billion). In 2004 the top three remittance-receiving countries were Mexico (\$16 billion), India (\$9.9 billion), and the Philippines (\$8.5 billion).

A May 2008 special report of the Ibon Foundation puts these data in their proper context. The Ibon Foundation reports:

The Philippines is one of only five countries worldwide that receive more than US\$10 billion in remittances annually. With its estimated US\$17 billion in remittance inflows, the country was the fourth ranking remittance-receiving country

in 2007 and exceeded only by India, China, and Mexico. These three economies are much bigger however – India’s economy is seven times larger than the Philippines, China’s twenty-one times larger, and Mexico’s over six times larger – so their inward remittances are a much less significant share of their respective economies.

Measured as a share of GDP, the Philippines was the 19th-ranking remittance-receiving country in 2006. However the other countries in the Top 20 are much smaller and, excluding Nepal, their average population is just a little over four million. The Philippines’ population of 85 million in 2006 is even larger than of these 18 small countries combined (summing to just 78.9 million). Nepal is the only other relatively large country in these upper ranks but its population of 28 million is not even a third of the Philippines’.⁴

Therefore, when factored in with demographics and other variables, the Philippines is the most migrant- and remittance-dependent country in the world.

This fact is not something to be proud of. Concomitant with the volume of remittances is the fact of development failure, as the Philippine government has not sufficiently developed or improved the industrial sector to be able to generate enough jobs to provide economic employment for the millions of Filipinos working overseas. Growing remittance receipts make cheap Filipino labor the country’s largest export.

In Search of Greener Pastures: An Inaccurate Cliché

Too often people say that migrant workers are seeking greener pastures. In reality, the search for greener pastures is untrue of the millions of Filipino migrant workers and may also not be true of other migrant workers around the world. It is true only for those who already enjoy decent living standards, those who are already enjoying a green pasture and who choose to move on to even greener ones. Greener pastures are not the goal of those who have nothing at all, for whom the only survival option is to brave the uncertainties of migration.

People migrate for many reasons, including economic scarcity, political instability, and displacement due to internal conflicts, wars between countries, family reunion, studies, or medical necessity. Antonio Tujan, Jr., in his November 2006 article “Labor Migration, Flexibilization and Globalization,” points to the intensifying of migration because of a “con-

⁴ *Ibon Special Release: OFW’S Remittances and Philippine Underdevelopment*, IMA 35–63.

dition of permanent crisis in the neocolonies” under globalization. He explains that migration from developing countries is usually due to economic depression in those developing countries, intensified further by the debt crises these countries face:

Financial liberalization and increase in investments to the neocolonies and former colonies does not promote employment as a net gain but greater unemployment as a result of non-productive speculative investment. . . .

Trade liberalization has led to massive dumping of surplus agricultural and industrial commodities resulting in the bankruptcy of both peasant farms and traditional commercial farms and both weak national industries and small and medium enterprises. Such destruction of productive forces in developing countries has tremendous consequences in terms of massive unemployment and poverty hitting the core sectors of agriculture and manufacturing in developing countries.⁵

All these forces create a huge surplus of cheap labor, which cannot be absorbed by the local economy, so forcing people to migrate with or without documentation. As migrants, and especially as undocumented migrants, they are the most vulnerable people in the societies they enter.

Remittances and Philippine National Development: A Myth

The Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) met in Brussels on July 9–11, 2007. One of its central topics was “Remittances and other Diaspora Resources: Increasing their Volume and Development Value.” Among other things, the Brussels GFMD recognized that remittances cannot be appropriated by governments but that their positive impact on development can be increased through options, incentives, and tools designed and implemented by governments in partnership with other relevant actors – for example, corporations that transmit remittances from migrants abroad to their families (e.g., Western Union) and communication companies.

Remittances contribute significantly to a national economy by raising household incomes for subsequent spending. But in the Philippines, for example, the bulk of the billions of dollars of remittances is spent on imported consumer goods, durables (e.g., appliances, furnishings, toys), and raw materials, with no immediate welfare benefits for overseas Filipino

⁵ *Institute of Political Economy Journals*, politicaleconomy.info/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=17&Itemid=26, acc. 30 March 2010.

workers' households. The family members of overseas workers may own designer jeans, shirts, and shades or sunglasses and state-of-the-art mobile phones and receive a private-school education. Similarly many migrants own a low-cost house, frequently one under construction and commonly in newly opened lower middle-class subdivisions. Inside the house are the telltale signs of migration: a remote-controlled color TV, a video player, a DVD/VCD player with semi-detached components, a portable CD player, electric fans, a washing machine, a refrigerator, and a seldom-used microwave oven. None of these products contributes to national development.

Investment in the usual entrepreneurial activities of migrants' families such as tricycles, taxis, *sari-sari*/convenience stores, and roadside *kainans*/food stalls also do not support national development. On the whole, the Philippine economy is import-dependent; the *Ibon Special Release* says that the money sent home by overseas Filipino workers does not substantially contribute to building such solid economic foundations as would propel industrialization. The *Ibon Special Release* further says that by far the largest macroeconomic contribution of overseas Filipino remittances goes to the country's foreign exchange.

One may well ask, then, how the country's foreign exchange is used. Unfortunately, the *Ibon Special Release* notes that the foreign exchange is not mobilized in the service of the country's development:

The country's foreign exchange is most of all used to service the foreign debt, to pay for imports of foreign-dominated export-oriented industry, and to enable profit repatriation and capital flight by domestic elites. In this sense, the foreign exchange generated by overseas Filipinos' remittances is being exploited for counter-productive ends. (*Ibon Special Release*)

By propping up the Philippine peso, migrant remittances have contributed to the so-called strengthening of the peso and so, irony of all ironies, cut into the incomes of remittance-dependent households.

Women in Migration

Almost half the world's international migrants are women (48.6%). Some 51% of migrant women live in the developed world, compared with 49% in the developing world. There are more female than male international migrants in Latin America and the Caribbean, North America, Oceania, Europe, and the former USSR. In December 2006, Nancy V. Yinger, former director of International Programs at the Population Reference Bu-

reau, wrote of the variety of circumstances that can affect the lives of women migrants:

A recent surge of publications about women and migration is unable to answer the question of whether migration is good for women. Is it empowering, safe, and life-enhancing? The answer is always: It depends. It depends, for example, on whether the women are legal migrants, whether they are educated, whether they are caught in a poverty trap, whether they have support at home for their children or elderly parents, and whether employers operate in a legal environment designed to protect their human rights.⁶

Yinger's frame of reference is the ideal world of rule of law and the presumption of the basic goodness of humanity. The experience of the staff at the Hong Kong Mission For Migrant Workers (MFMW) reveals a different matter.

At its 2008 mid-year evaluation, the MFMW reported that from January to August 15, 2008, the MFMW had served 338 Filipino and Indonesian migrants in distress. The gross claimable amount from their employers and placement agencies was HK\$2,494,908.40. These claims ranged from illegal deductions from workers' salaries to non-payment of wages, long-service payments, or severance payments to placement agencies that underpay and/or overcharge their clients, despite Hong Kong's pride in claiming to adhere to the rule of law and to maintain a level economic playing field. Through the assistance of the MFMW, 230 of these 338 claimants won their cases, receiving a total of HK\$1,039,582.70 in settlements. I do not know how many others approached other migrant-serving institutions for assistance, nor do I know the exact number of those who, for various reasons, left Hong Kong without asking assistance to recover what rightfully belonged to them.

Bread-earning was the traditional role of the Filipino husband, and the money earned was almost always turned over to the wife for proper management. Women were therefore dependent on their husbands in so many ways. In this arrangement, major decision making was the husband's role, and running the day-to-day affairs of the family was the wife's.

However, the exodus of Filipino women for the survival of their families has created a changing social pattern in Philippine society. Working

⁶ Nancy V. Yinger, "Feminization of Migration," December 2006. See also prb.org/Articles/2006/TheFeminizationofMigration.aspx, acc. 2 March 2010.

women, employed either at home or overseas, now have a greater say in making major decisions than when only the man was gainfully employed. Thus in constructing a house, buying a piece of land, or buying a refrigerator, the decision may be made by the economically productive wife. This development may be hailed as the emerging empowerment of women, but such an interpretation would be superficial and illusionary. Aside from economic pursuits, the migrant-Filipina wife is still expected to observe and perform her traditional social and domestic roles. In cases of dysfunction or disintegration of the family, the migrant woman gets the blame: “Kasi wala ang nanay, Eh” (“Because the mother was not there”).

Dr. Irene Fernandez, Director of *Tenaganita*, a Kuala Lumpur-based women’s welfare assistance service provider that combats the trafficking of women, has given a cogent explanation for the feminization of migration. In her keynote address at the founding congress of the International Migrants’ Assembly in Hong Kong on June 15, 2008, she said:

Many governments that hold a labor export policy, have realized that it is more profitable to invest in women migrants and ensure increased migration by women because women diligently and regularly send back their remittances to their loved ones back home.⁷

Irregular Migrants, Refugees, and Asylum Seekers

But other migrants are also of concern, the so-called irregular or undocumented migrants, the international refugees and asylum seekers. Each year an estimated 2.5 to 4 million migrants cross international borders without authorization. Some 500,000 undocumented migrants are estimated to arrive in Europe annually, and in 2000 an estimated 5 million of Europe’s 56.1 million migrants (10%) had irregular status. An estimated 10 million migrants with irregular status live in the United States, and in 2000 an estimated 50% (4.8 million) of the Mexican-born population in the United States had irregular status. Some 20 million migrants with irregular status live in India. An estimated 600,000 to 800,000 people are trafficked each year. There is huge money in human smuggling and trafficking. Migrant smugglers make an estimated \$10 billion profit each year.

⁷ Irene Fernandez, “Resistance to Imperialist Globalization and Politics of Migration to Gain Rights and Dignity,” IMA 13.

Of the world's 9.2 million refugees, 6.5 million live in developing countries. Refugees represent 23% of international migrants in Asia, 22% in Africa, and 5% in Europe. Pakistan hosts the largest number of refugees, just over 1 million (11% of the global total). From 1994 to 2003 some 5 million people applied for asylum in the industrialized countries; 1.4 million of them (28%) received refugee status or the equivalent. In 2004, 676,000 applications for asylum were submitted in 143 countries, a 19% decrease from 830,300 in 2003. In 2004, 83,000 refugees were resettled, mainly in the United States (53,000), Australia (16,000), and Canada (10,000).⁸

The European Union in its 1999 summit in Tampere, Finland, agreed to create a Europe that would be an area of "freedom, security and justice." Towards these ends, the summit approved among other things a common EU asylum and immigration policy, a Union-wide fight against crime, and stronger external action. The objectives of the Tampere policies are not only that freedom and justice should be guaranteed across the EU, but that people and businesses should be able to enjoy them in safety and security.⁹

However, EU countries are only paying lip service to the rhetoric of Tampere. As Fernandez said in her 2008 address:

When it comes to immigration, the EU reflects a very aggressive approach, which does not hesitate to interfere with domestic affairs of other states, even using some blackmailing over development aid or threat of military intervention. The EU tries to force compliance with its migration policy that spreads like shockwaves onto wide parts of the world.

A random search at *Statewatch News Online* supports Fernandez's claims:

- Sometime in July 2008, the French Presidency put on the table an EU proposal that overseas development aid be linked up with immigration and asylum policies of countries receiving overseas development aid (ODA). This draft pact suggests that migration should become an important element in all external relations of the EU member states. In

⁸ "Migration in an Interconnected World: New Directions for Action", 2005 Report of the Global Commission on International Migration, gcim.org/attachements/gcim-complete-report-2005.pdf, acc. 8 February 2010.

⁹ Statewatch Briefing, September 2003, Tampere European Council, 15–16 October 1999, "The Story of Tampere," statewatch.org/news/2003/sep/04tampere.htm, acc. 2 March 2010.

the past, putting ODA and immigration policy under one umbrella has served the French well in pressuring developing countries to negotiate difficult readmissions agreements.¹⁰

- On July 23, 2008, Italy passed a controversial law that criminalized undocumented migrants. The legislation introduces a new criminal offense – “illegal immigration” – punishable by six months to four years in prison. The law also states that property rented to an undocumented immigrant can be confiscated. The maximum period an immigrant can be kept in detention after illegally setting foot on Italian territory will be extended to eighteen months, which is in line with EU-wide rules on returning non-EU nationals who do not fulfill or no longer fulfill the conditions for entry, stay, or residence in a member state.¹¹
- Every day the Croatian Government is removing tourists, including migrants, mostly Asians and Africans, from the train between Budapest and Venice – people with visas for their destination, who receive no advance warning that they will be passing through Croatia. These people are then left on the border, wherever and at whatever time of day or night it may be, while travelers from Western countries are allowed to continue their journey unhindered.¹²
- The EU’s “return directive,” which was passed by the European Parliament in June 2008, allows the detention of irregular immigrants for up to eighteen months and bans re-entry to scofflaws for five years. The European Parliament has also given a green light to EU member states to return people to countries of transit, despite the potentially devastating consequences. This new policy would impose penalties of detention, expulsion, and blacklisting on overstaying migrants and affect around twelve million undocumented migrants, including approximately 100,000 Filipinos (Olea).

Other websites report similar attacks on migrant workers. In 2007 the United Kingdom was rocked with the exposé that private security guards hired to watch immigration detention centers had assaulted asylum seekers from Uganda, Rwanda, Cameroon, Jamaica, and the Congolese Re-

¹⁰ statewatch.org/news/archive2008.htm, acc. 2 March 2010.

¹¹ euobserver.com, acc. 2 March 2010.

¹² shameoncroatiangov.org/contents.htm; site no longer available.

public.¹³ And *Reuters Alternet.org* reports that as of July 28, 2008, Greece had locked up eight hundred migrants on the island of Lesbos in an overcrowded immigration detention center under unsanitary conditions.

Even as the Arroyo government gleefully announced that 516,466 documented overseas Filipino workers had been deployed from January to May 2008 – a twelve-percent increase from the same period in 2007 – the government had not yet instituted bilateral agreements with European Union countries for the protection of overseas Filipino workers. Ronalyn V. Olea comments that the Arroyo administration seems deaf to the calls by overseas Filipino workers' organizations to work for the legalization of undocumented workers, especially in the light of the Return Directive.

America's War on Terrorism and its Global Repercussions

America's war on terrorism has led to the devastating bombing of Afghanistan and the destruction of Iraq. In the United States, the Bush administration passed the US Patriot Act of 2003 and hailed it as crucial in the war against terrorism, but critics condemned it as a draconian measure eroding the people's constitutional rights. This measure had a particularly direct impact on immigrants, seekers of asylum, and refugees. Following its enactment, the numbers of US immigrants, asylum seekers, and refugees dipped to its lowest level in twenty-five years.

The Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the largest and primary investigative arm of the US Department of Homeland Security, has been relentless in raids, arrests, and detention of illegal immigrants in the US. Yet in March 2005 the *Ray O. Light Newsletter*, quoting the Pew Hispanic Center Report of March 7, 2006, said that unauthorized migrants in the US numbered about

7.2M in March 2005, "accounting for about 4.9% of the civilian labor force. They made up a large share of all workers . . . including 24% of all workers employed in farming occupations, 17% in cleaning, 14% in construction and 12% in food preparation." These immigrants with no legal status in the USA thus make up a significant section of the working class producers that keep this society afloat.¹⁴

¹³ "Outsourcing Abuse: The Use and Misuse of State-sanctioned Force during the Detention and Removal of Asylum Seekers," a report by Birnberg Peirce and Partners, Medical Justice, and the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns, 14 July 2008, medicaljustice.org.uk/content/view/411/88/, acc. 8 February 2010.

¹⁴ *Ray O. Light Newsletter*, May 2006, No. 42.

America's war on terrorism threatens migrants' movements worldwide. The European Union has created policies not only to control migration, illegal or otherwise, but also to facilitate participation in the global war on terrorism. In the so-called fight against terrorism, migrants, especially people of color, have become vulnerable targets.

What Are the Migrants Saying?

All migrant workers, both documented and undocumented, have a stake in fighting for immigrant rights against criminalization and for more rights and benefits as workers. The struggle for equal rights is part of the struggle for a better life.

In 1992, The Supreme Council of Bishops of the Iglesia Filipina Independiente issued a Pastoral Letter, which resonates with the issue at hand:

14. Men and women are not commodities whose worth are measured only in terms of how much they can contribute to the total cost of production. The human person is, as our Judeo-Christian Faith clearly proclaims . . . "created in the image of God" (Gen. 1:26–27). . . . Therefore, the human person must be treated with respect and dignity. The Laborers' wages must therefore be set with the standards of justice, decency of living, self respect (OM's 1991 Labor Day Statement).

15. We therefore call on [the Philippine] government to fully exercise its political will to protect the laborers' rights, both in domestic and overseas employment.

Finally, in the June 2008 Founding Congress of the International Migrants' Assembly, held at the YMCA Wu Kai Sha Camp in Hong Kong, attended by more than three hundred participants from Australia, Austria, Cameroon, Canada, Japan, the Netherlands, the Philippines, South Korea, Switzerland, Taiwan, Turkey, and the United States, Eni Lestari, an Indonesian domestic worker in Hong Kong, said: "We speak different languages but we have one common language, the language of struggle. In the past, people spoke for us. Now let us speak for ourselves."¹⁵

The migrants have clearly set their agenda. What is the churches' transformative witness? What is the churches' catholic transformative witness?

¹⁵ For a revised version of Lestari's words, see IMA 165.

Globalization and Catholic Transformative Witness: Migration and the Challenges to the Churches

Globalization, with its free movement of capital and commodities across borders, also results in movements of peoples across international borders. However, globalization through liberalization, deregularization, and privatization has not benefited the vast majority of people. Only the major players and stakeholders – the multinational corporations and capitalist nations – reap superprofits through it. For its victims, including the migrants, who are now being criminalized, it is never a blessing: it is only a curse.

Thus to accept globalization as the reality of modern living and not to do anything about it is to accept it as normal. To accept the normality of globalization means merely to go home, get on with our lives, and hope to live to a ripe old age while enjoying our retirement benefits – if they have not yet been wiped out by inflation or other factors. But, as the SCB declared in 1997, to accept the normality of globalization is also to accept the normality of imperialism, because globalization is imperialist globalization. As imperialism then and now was and is maintained by force and violence, to accept the normality of globalization is to be silent to its attendant and resultant injustices.

The inverse is also true: to reject the normality of globalization is to reject the normality of imperialism, its use of force, violence, and injustice. Our transformative witness is what we do after we face the harsh realities of globalization.

We search the Scriptures, as the word of God is the “lamp to our feet and a light to our path” (Ps 119:105). At the heart of the Bible, we find the person of Jesus Christ. At the heart of the life and ministry of Jesus is his message – given in parables and aphorisms, in healings and exorcisms, in feeding the hungry and raising the dead – of the proximity of the Kingdom of God (Mk 1:14–15; Lk 11:20) (Abesamis 48). At the heart of God’s reign is the blessing of justice (Lk 4:16–21), and the effects of globalization are the perfect antithesis of justice.

When the disciples approached Jesus to teach them to pray, he taught them to pray for God to reign and for his will to be obeyed on earth as it is in heaven (Mt 6:10–11). So as we continue to pray the Lord’s Prayer, we are continually being reminded to engage the world: to be concerned with the world, for the wounds that cause pain to the earth and the peoples of the earth. Thus we pray for the reign of justice and affirm the sovereignty of God.

Jesus' promise recorded in John 10:10 – “I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” – must be seen within the context and challenge of Jesus' message of the Kingdom of God. Likewise the early Christians' attempt “to hold all things in common . . . as every man had need” (Acts 2:44–45) was the early church's rejection of the then-prevailing eco-political and socio-cultural system. It was their attempt at living the blessing of justice of the Kingdom of God in the then and there.

Our catholic witness must first of all begin on a theological level, with our unequivocal understanding and readiness to expose and oppose globalization for what it really is: economic imperialism that has destroyed, by use of force or by the slow process of economic strangulation, millions and millions of people – in the *katha' holos* – all created in the image of God.

Our transformative witness continues when we put our resources firmly behind that resolve in programs and projects. I know that some of the churches in Europe and the United States provide support, sanctuaries, venues for mass meetings, and direct assistance to victims, or initiate integration projects that will generate economic or financial support for returning migrants. We at St. John's Cathedral in Hong Kong are also doing some of these things. But migrants in Europe and the United States have also expressed the need for the establishment of chaplaincies, for the continuing education, equipping, and training of migrant pastors and lay leaders as community leaders, for setting up crisis centers for migrants in distress, for devising Bible study and liturgical materials expressive of and responsive to the situation and aspirations of migrants and their families, and for visitation to those in detention centers.

Migrants have also expressed the need to create education and information drives for migrants to inform them of their rights and welfare, popularize pro-migrant laws and practices, conduct and support educational and cultural activities for migrants, act as bridges between migrants and the wider society, facilitate linkages and cooperative work between churches in labor-sending and labor-receiving countries, educate churches about migrant issues, and practice ethical investment not only in the environment but also in human rights and migrants' rights.

The exercise of our transformative witness demands that the church exercise its prophetic ministry by being involved in lobbying or direct action against anti-migrant laws and policies and by making justice and

human rights issues central concerns for the church. In 2005 the WCC Central Committee adopted a statement on “uprooted people,” which incorporated the following recommendations:

To encourage and support churches and Christians who are engaged in defence of lives and protection of all uprooted people: refugees, internally displaced persons and migrants;

To affirm a culture of encounter, hospitality and cordial welcome for migrants, and to identify positive examples where churches have worked together effectively to offer alternatives to restrictionist policies;

To raise awareness within church constituencies of the resources and assets which migrants and refugees bring to their communities including arranging encounters between host and uprooted people to break down prejudices, fears and stereotypes;

To organize prayer meetings and awareness raising campaigns around International Migrants Day (18 December) or World Refugee Day (20 June) or other special days on such themes in individual countries;

To work with churches and related organizations in regional and global ecumenical networks for uprooted people to respond to the needs of people forced to cross national borders, to advocate for the respect of their fundamental human rights, and to build capacity to implement programmes by churches in different regions;

To promote multicultural ministry, both in training for local church staff and through exchange between churches in host countries and countries of origin and to deepen theological reflection on the theme of hospitality and uprootedness;

To include the concerns of uprooted people, particularly racist violence against migrants, where appropriate, in events organized around the Decade to Overcome Violence;

To combat the trafficking of human beings, particularly women and children for sexual exploitation; to work with governments, churches and concerned non-governmental organizations to ensure that the victims of traffickers receive the necessary treatment and respect; and to oppose efforts by governments to use the existence of trafficking as an excuse to restrict further immigration;

To ensure that both advocacy and assistance programmes are based on a recognition of the particular ways that gender, race, ethnicity and class interact to intensify the marginalization of uprooted people;

To take a proactive role in inter-religious dialogue on issues of society and religious communities to overcome conflicts within society;

To analyze and study the political, economic, social and environmental reasons for uprooting of people and in this context examine the role of governments in creating conditions that uproot people or place migrants in difficult situations, and develop educational material for the whole life of the church on causes which uproot people;

To challenge governments who seek to introduce ever more restrictionist entry policies and to challenge the trend toward using security concerns to justify detention of all undocumented migrants and/or asylum-seekers;

To press governments not to pursue actions to criminalize migrants or those who seek to protect them and to encourage governments to do more to create and facilitate welcoming societies and to foster the integration of refugees and migrants into their communities;

To insist, as a matter of principle, that undocumented migrants and asylum-seekers are detained only in exceptional circumstances and ensure that in those exceptional circumstances people are detained for a limited time only and can avail themselves of judicial review. Under no circumstances should conditions of detention for migrants and asylum-seekers be lower than those for convicted criminals.

To seek ways of increasing collaboration between churches and related organizations to uphold international law and international institutions established to provide protection and assistance to those who are uprooted;

To promote ratification and implementation of the International Convention and Protocol relating to Refugees (1951/1967) and the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (1990); and

To recognize that humanitarian laws relating to migrants, refugees and internally displaced people are under constant review and revision, because of changing international environment [*sic*]. Churches are called to monitor and undertake research to equip themselves to participate in these intricate issues that are likely to resolve in change of laws and legislation, on both international and national levels.¹⁶

I do not know how far these have seeped down to the local churches.

Our catholic transformative witness occurs when the church, in concert with people of all races, colors, and creeds, opposes globalization, because as Marcus J. Borg and John Dominick Crossan write, deep in our hearts we believe there can never be a substitute for justice (Borg and Crossan 44).¹⁷

I wish to conclude with a prayer, one that I use during religious services requested by migrants' organizations at the Square or in one of the roads in Hong Kong that are blocked off to vehicular traffic during public holidays.

¹⁶ WCC, "Practicing Hospitality in an Era of New Forms of Migration," oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-commissions/international-affairs/human-rights-and-impunity/practising-hospitality-in-an-era-of-new-forms-of-migration.html, acc. 8 February 2010.

¹⁷ They also write, "Since God is just and the world belongs to God, worship cannot be separated from justice because worship or union with a god of justice empowers the worshipper for a life of justice" (46).

Loving God,
you speak in the voice of the vulnerable
and demand protection for the strangers in every land.
Embrace in your tender arms migrant workers all over the world;
keep watch over the families they have left behind;
move their governments to vigorously protect their rights,
work for their welfare
and genuinely seek an end to forced migration.
Enlighten the peoples of the receiving countries
that they may deal with them not as commodities
but as persons with dignity and rights.
Empower all those who work with and for them
in their quest for justice and integrity.
And grant us your grace, that when we are called to solidarity,
we may freely obey,
and when faced with injustice, courageously resist.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.¹⁸

¹⁸ Adapted from and inspired by the prayers of Janet Morley in *All Desires Known* (Wilton, CN: Morehouse-Barlow, 1988).