

A Resolute Fast and Fervent Prayer: A Resolution Responding to Violence in Nigeria

“Christ is just like the human body—a body is a unit and has many parts; and all the parts of the body are one body. . . . If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part gets the glory, all the parts celebrate with it. You are the body of Christ and parts of each other”

(1 Corinthians 12:12a, 26-27, CEB).

I. Biblical vision of the church

The Apostle Paul wrote frequently of the bonds between communities of faith that bridge the miles between them. Our shared confession of Jesus Christ as Lord unites us, through the Holy Spirit, in a way unparalleled even by family or national ties (1 Corinthians 12; Romans 12). This same Spirit, Paul reminds us, intercedes on our behalf when our own prayers become sighs too deep for words (Romans 8).

For the Brethren, the church as community is central to our life and faith. In testaments to mutuality, we have walked alongside one another in joy and loss, taking to heart the words of the letter to the Hebrews: “Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured” (13:3).

II. The struggle of our sisters and brothers

The circumstances in Nigeria have come to the attention of the world, and to our attention as Brethren. Sisters and brothers of Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria (EYN, the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria) suffer kidnappings, bombings, mass killings, and burning of churches and homes. Despite the global awareness, the violence has continued at an alarming rate.

EYN leaders have asked for fasting and prayer for the plight of the church and the people of Nigeria.

Aware that sisters and brothers in Nigeria are not the only ones facing violence on a daily basis, we include in our prayers those in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan, Syria, and other places where people face threats that few in the United States have known in their lifetime.

III. The resolve of the church

Grieving with each new word from Nigeria, we as the Annual Conference of the Church of the Brethren resolve to walk with our sisters and brothers in Christ by entering a season of fasting and prayer. We commit ourselves to the practices of lament, prayer, fasting, and bearing witness.

In lament we turn to the rich tradition of our faith witnessed to by the Psalms. We bring to God the realities of evil and violence, knowing that they bear no resemblance to the ways of God.

In prayer we intercede for our sisters and brothers, asking God for protection, justice, and peace. We give thanks for their profound witness as they strive for the well-being of their families and communities, seeking to embody the peace so graciously given through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the one who calls us to “love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:44). Thus, we pray also for the perpetrators of violence, for the softening of hearts and for right relationships among neighbors.

In fasting we let go of a little in order to accompany those who are losing so much, and stand before God with them. We name our longing for the day when life overcomes death, justice and peace meet, and love drives out fear.

In bearing witness we share the stories of our sisters and brothers, bringing atrocities to light, confident in our faith that the Good News of Jesus Christ is indeed light in a world covered in darkness.

We commit a week of the summer to spend significant amounts of time in fasting and prayer, beginning Sunday, August 17, through Sunday, August 24. We invite the worldwide community of the Church of the Brethren and our sister churches in Nigeria, India, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Brazil, and Spain, as well as Brethren groups with which we are in conversation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and other friends and believers, to join in this commitment. May we be the body of Christ together as we pray and fast for peace and reconciliation.

We further resolve to partner with EYN and ecumenical international relief and development agencies to offer support as requested and directed by the leadership of the Nigerian Brethren.

“The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective” (James 5:16b, NRSV).

References and resources

A history and timeline of the Church of the Brethren Mission in Nigeria, out of which EYN has grown, are posted online at www.brethren.org/nigeriahistory .

The EYN website www.eynchurchonline.org offers information about the ministries of the Nigerian Brethren.

Current Church of the Brethren news from Nigeria is updated regularly at www.brethren.org/partners/nigeria/news.html .

Just peace and just policing: An Annual Conference resolution of 2003, “Call for a Living Peace Church,” calls the whole church to be a peace church that serves Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace; www.brethren.org/ac/statements/2003livingpeace.html . An Annual Conference statement of 1996, “Nonviolence and Humanitarian Intervention,” offers a Brethren point of view on international intervention in situations of violence; www.brethren.org/ac/statements/1996nonviolence.html . Documents on just peace from the World Council of Churches include “Statement on the Way of Just Peace” at www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/assembly/2013-busan/adopted-documents-statements/the-way-of-just-peace and “An Ecumenical Call to Just Peace” at www.overcomingviolence.org/fileadmin/dov/files/iepc/resources/ECJustPeace_English.pdf .

Sex trafficking and slavery: An Annual Conference “Resolution on Slavery in the 21st Century” was adopted in 2008; www.brethren.org/ac/statements/2008-resolution-on-slavery.html . A related Study and Action Guide is at www.brethren.org/advocacy/moderndayslavery.html .

Nigeria and peacemaking in Africa: *Are There Limits to Pacifism?* by Musa Mambula outlines challenges for peacemaking in Nigeria. *Seeking Peace in Africa* (ed. Donald Miller et al) collects presentations from a peace church meeting in Africa in 2004. The DVD of that meeting, *Watu Wa Amani*, is available from Brethren Press. *Life Among the Chibok of Nigeria* by former Brethren mission teachers Gerald and Lois Neher, is a detailed history and anthropological study of the Chibok people, also available from Brethren Press.

Action of the Mission and Ministry Board: At its meeting on July 2, 2014, the Mission and Ministry Board approved this resolution and recommended it for adoption by the 2014 Annual Conference.

Action of the 2014 Annual Conference: Annual Conference approved the recommendation of Standing Committee to adopt the resolution “A Resolute Fast and Fervent Prayer: A Resolution Responding to Violence in Nigeria.”