



Peace & Justice Journal

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In the parable of the mustard seed, Jesus encouraged his followers to consider how even the tiniest seed can make an enormous impact (Matthew 13:31–32, Mark 4:30–32, Luke 13:18–19).

Sometimes trying to create positive change in the world feels like scattering seeds that blow away in the wind. As we plant tiny seeds of radical love, critical thinking, and audacious courage, we may never see what sprouts up.

Peace and justice work is both a short game and a long game. We must be committed to the marathon, but also the urgent sprints. We need to respond to the present crisis, but also tend growing plants that will take a generation to bear fruit.

In this issue of the Peace & Justice Journal, Daniela Lazaro-Manalo encourages us to consider how tangled systems of injustice have deep and interconnected roots. Abby Endashaw reflects on how culture-reinforced stereotypes contribute to internalized oppression.

We hope you find nourishment in these pages to keep planting seeds of peace and justice! —*Tammy Alexander*

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Mexican Cypress tree in the sacred and protected Kuruvungna Village Springs site, located at University High School in Los Angeles. Photo taken during the Hidden LA learning tour in November 2024. MCC photo/Daniela Lázaro-Manalo

Understanding interconnected systems of oppression

by Daniela Lázaro-Manalo, racial equity education and advocacy coordinator

The seeds of injustice planted centuries ago have grown into towering systems that cast long shadows across our communities today. This past year has brought unprecedented challenges in the form of policies, state violence and constitutional violations that reveal just how deeply these roots have spread. What we witness in the U.S. today is not sudden upheaval but the bitter fruit of seeds planted long ago – systems that have been building momentum perhaps faster than our own peace and justice efforts can counter them.



A wall outside an immigration services office in Little Tokyo, a historic Japanese American cultural and commercial district in downtown Los Angeles. MCC photo/Daniela Lázaro-Manalo

The parable of the mustard seed tells of Jesus likening the kingdom of heaven to the smallest of seeds, which when planted can grow into a mighty tree that shelters others in its branches. I recently learned that of the millions of seeds a tree produces, only one in a million will grow to maturity. The odds are stacked against these seeds.

Our current political landscape is rooted in the violent displacement of many, plowing the earth through invasion and spreading roots deep into the soil in the form of colonialism, capitalism, patriarchy and white supremacy. These roots have grown into a complex system of oppression that demands loss – either of self and loved ones when we speak up, or at the cost of our own humanity when we fall silent and complicit.

Legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term “intersectionality” to describe how systems of oppression interlock and reinforce one another like tangled roots beneath the surface. Environmental racism, for instance, places communities of color in flood-prone areas with inadequate infrastructure, leaving them most vulnerable when climate disasters strike – a direct result of how colonialism displaced communities from safer lands and how capitalism prioritizes profit over protection.

When social movements fail to embrace intersectionality, they can inadvertently entrench other forms of oppression. The 19th-century women’s suffrage movement, while fighting for women’s voting rights, largely excluded women of color and often reinforced racist narratives to gain white support. Similarly, early feminists seeking to distance themselves from being labeled as “disabled” – since women’s supposed emotional and physical fragility was used to deny them rights – unintentionally reinforced ableist assumptions that people with disabilities were less deserving of full citizenship.

These intersections are sometimes overlooked by well-meaning movements focused on single issues. We think in silos, compete for limited resources and believe there isn’t room for all our concerns. This scarcity mindset keeps movements divided and weakens our collective power. Faith communities also absorb these harmful narratives, separating spiritual matters from social realities, individual salvation from collective liberation.

A mustard seed requires all the right elements to grow. When planted, nurtured, and protected collectively, it grows large enough to shelter everyone. This understanding drives the upcoming *Parables of Peace* curriculum, which recognizes that systems of injustice are deeply interconnected, creating overlapping challenges that require integrated responses. The curriculum will invite communities of faith to examine how oppressive systems become internalized within us, affecting how we perceive ourselves and others – patterns that prevent us from recognizing our own worth, the full humanity of others, and the interrelated nature of justice work.

The kingdom of heaven Jesus described – that sheltering tree grown from the tiniest seed – emerges through our collective commitment to justice. When we understand that all justice issues are interconnected, we tend the conditions necessary for God’s kingdom to take root.

We are called, not to despair at the odds of the seeds we plant taking root, but to trust in the radical possibility of transformation. This means not only understanding intersectionality but also doing the personal work of undoing internalized racism and confronting the fears that keep us from acting boldly.

Tend the seeds of justice. Nurture them until they grow into the beloved community where all find shelter and belonging.

Self-policing scripts and healing the split within

by Abby Endashaw, MCC U.S. summer service program lead, and IFS trained therapist

In our culture, Black women are often praised for being strong – resilient, unbreakable, able to carry the weight of the world. This is reinforced in media as Black women are cast in roles like the matriarch, the caregiver, the trauma survivor, or the career-oriented achiever. This celebration of strength can be a double-edged sword. While seemingly empowering, the “Strong Black Woman” trope demands silence, self-sacrifice, and the suppression of emotional needs. In order to live up to this ideal, we shut out our vulnerable parts, developing inner critics that act as policers of our emotions: handle it alone and don’t let anyone see your vulnerabil-

ity. Make surviving look effortless in order to be seen as capable.

This pressure to project strength is just one example of racial and gender-based stereotypes shaping how marginalized communities are expected to show up. Asian Americans face the “model minority” myth, pressured to be quiet, compliant, and relentlessly high-achieving. Latino men confront stereotypes of aggression and hypermasculinity that force them to hide vulnerability. Indigenous women are often rendered invisible or hypersexualized, fracturing their sense of self. These social scripts are tools used by systems such as white supremacy and patriarchy to judge who is considered acceptable within dominant culture’s narrow expectations.

W. E. B. Du Bois described the experience of living within these constraints as “double consciousness.” He named the internal conflict of seeing ourselves through our own eyes and at the same time through the critical gaze of a dominant culture that often devalues or misjudges us. For many of us, this creates a split identity. This survival

strategy can lead to internalized oppression, where we police not only our own behavior but sometimes the behavior of others in our communities, all in an effort to navigate oppressive systems and protect ourselves.

This is how systems of dominance like white supremacy and patriarchy maintain themselves. We doubt our worth and conform to narrow standards of acceptability, and silence parts of ourselves that feel pain or anger or joy in ways that feel “too much.” We become guarded and perfectionistic, always watching to avoid rejection or harm.

Internal Family Systems (IFS) therapy teaches that our minds are made up of many parts. Some parts carry fear, shame or grief. Others act as protectors, pushing us to perform or to hide vulnerability. None of these parts are bad or wrong. They developed as strategies to keep us safe in environments that often reject or punish our true selves. IFS invites us to listen to these parts with curiosity and compassion instead of judgment. When we do, we open the door to healing and wholeness.

Healing from internalized oppression starts by accepting ourselves with compassion and extending that compassion to others. When we accept the parts of ourselves shaped by pain and survival, we begin to let go of the pressure to perform and the burden of perfection. This creates space for new ways of belonging – not based on fitting into dominant culture’s narrow scripts but rooted in mutual care, respect and authentic connection.

This work is not easy, but it is possible! Together, we can dismantle the invisible walls built by systems of dominance, and rebuild a world where worth is not measured by conformity or survival but by care and freedom. A world where everyone has the space to be fully seen, loved, and accepted exactly as they are.



Abby Endashaw introduces a fishbowl activity during the Mennonite Church USA Women and Leadership Summit in Greensboro, North Carolina. MCC photo/Daniela Lázaro-Manalo

Worship resources

Scripture readings

John 4:7–26
Acts 8:26–40
Galatians 3:26–29

Meditation

INHALE
 We resist.
EXHALE
 We remain.
INHALE
 In defense of dignity
EXHALE
 all disruption is sacred.

—Cole Arthur Riley, [[@blackliturgies](#)],
(2025, April 8), *Instagram*

Please call me by my true names (excerpt)

by *Thich Nhat Hanh*

My joy is like Spring, so warm
it makes flowers bloom all over
the Earth.
My pain is like a river of tears,
so vast it fills the four oceans.

Please call me by my true names,
so I can hear all my cries and my
laughter at once,
so I can see that my joy and pain
are one.

Please call me by my true names,
so I can wake up,
and so the door of my heart
can be left open,
the door of compassion.

(Read the full poem at [plumvillage.org](#)
[/articles/please-call-me-by-my-true-names](#)
[-song-poem](#))

Songs

VT 174 Christ Has Broken Down the Wall
VT 6 Let's Walk Together
VT 802 Draw the Circle
VT 427 Creating God, Your Fingers Trace
VT 809 Sing a New World into Being

VT = *Voices Together* hymnal. Harrisonburg, VA: MennoMedia, 2020.

The threads in my hand (excerpt)

by *Howard Thurman*

Only one end of the threads, I hold
in my hand.
The threads go many ways, linking
my life with other lives.[..]

One thread is a strange thread —
it is my steady thread;
When I am lost, I pull it hard and
find my way.
When I am saddened, I tighten my
grip and gladness glides
along its quivering path;
When the waste places of my spirit
appear in arid confusion,
the thread becomes a channel of
newness of life.

One thread is a strange thread —
it is my steady thread.
God's hand holds the other end . . .

from *Meditations of the Heart* (Boston:
Beacon Press, 1953)

Closing benediction

by *Daniela Lázaro-Manalo*

Go forth knowing your true names,
as one body with many stories.
May your resistance be rooted in
love,
your disruption sacred.
Go now to build bridges where walls
divide,
to speak truth where silence
harms.
May the door of your heart remain
open
against all odds,
and may peace guide your every
step.
Amen.

IMPORTANT ADDRESSES

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U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510
(202) 224-3121
[senate.gov](#)

Representative _____
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515
(202) 224-3121
[house.gov](#)

President Donald Trump
The White House
Washington, DC 20500
(202) 456-1111
[whitehouse.gov/contact](#)

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- Download your advocacy toolkit at [mcc.org/advocacy-toolkit-us](#)
- Follow us on Instagram ([instagram.com/mccpeace](#)) and TikTok ([tiktok.com/@mccpeace](#))

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All biblical quotes are from the New Revised Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.



Facts & figures: Racial equity

Communities of color are

50%

more likely to live near
toxic waste facilities than
predominantly white communities



5.5 fewer years

American Indians and
Alaska Natives have a
life expectancy
5.5 years shorter than
the U.S. average

Black women are

3-4 times more likely
to die from pregnancy-related
complications than white women

The median white family has

10 times

the wealth of the
median Black family

5 times

the wealth of the
median Hispanic family

Sources: American Heart Association, Centers for
Disease Control and Prevention, Environmental
Protection Agency, Indian Health Service, Lakota
People's Law Project, Pew Research Center, The
Sentencing Project

Right: Murals line the walls of Roosevelt High
School, the site of the historic East LA school
walkouts in 1968. The sign says "Enough" in
Spanish.



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MCC photo/Daniela Lázaro-Manalo

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Policy Principles

U.S. policies to address racial inequity should . . .

Resources for learning more

Mennonite Central Committee U.S.

mcc.org/what-we-do/initiatives/justice-equity
mcc.org/dismukes

The Coalition to Dismantle the Doctrine of Discovery

dofdmenno.org

ReconciliAsian

reconcilianasian.org

The Equal Justice Initiative

eji.org

The Sentencing Project

sentencingproject.org

Faith in Action

faithinaction.org

Oppression trees

ipsmo.wordpress.com/resource-list/oppression-liberation-trees/

Address root systems, not symptoms.

Effective policy must tackle the interconnected systems of colonialism, capitalism, patriarchy, and white supremacy that create overlapping harms. Policies should examine how environmental, economic, healthcare, and criminal legal systems reinforce each other rather than treating each issue in isolation.

Center those most impacted by intersecting oppressions.

Policy development should meaningfully include the voices and leadership of those who face multiple, compounding forms of discrimination. Their expertise and lived experience must guide solutions.

Invest in community-controlled resources.

Rather than relying on punitive approaches, policies should redirect resources toward community-controlled healing, education, housing, and economic development programs that address the social causes creating racial disparities in the first place.

Repair historical harms through restorative approaches.

Policies should acknowledge and actively work to repair the ongoing effects of slavery, genocide, and other historical traumas through reparative justice approaches that provide concrete material remedies, not just symbolic recognition.



Hidden LA learning tour participants gather around at the sacred and protected Kuruvungna Village Springs site, located at University High School in Los Angeles. Photo courtesy of Sue Park Hur/ReconciliAsian



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