

Efforts of Church of Hong Kong for peace and reconciliation

The Rev. Peter Douglas Koon(HongKong)

Peace and Reconciliation programme in the Church

In Hong Kong, some church set up designated department / commission to take care of the issue relating peace and reconciliation. For example, the Justice & Peace Commission under the Catholic Diocese is often involved in peace and reconciliation programme. The Hong Kong Christian Council has its social committee to handle relevant issue. Hong Kong Anglican Church has not yet established similar association / committee to manage the issue about peace and reconciliation. However, some parishes and organizations under the Province have been actively involved in the peace and reconciliation programme.

May I share with you today the work of the Mission for Migrant Workers (MFMW), under St. John's Cathedral, how they promote the sense of peace and reconciliation in the community.

Peace and reconciliation for migrant workers¹⁾

In a life full of conflict, peace and reconciliation are part of everyone's dreams. Migrant workers are of no exception.

1) By MFMW- The Mission for Migrant Workers, St. John's Cathedral, Hong Kong

The work and ministry with migrant workers have given the Church the opportunity to get to know the various conflicts that migrant workers encounter. From conflict with family, fellow migrant workers, local people in Hong Kong and employers, to conflict in an even larger context such as with the Philippine and Hong Kong society in general.

Though each type and level of conflict requires different approach and strategy, MFMW has seen how the migrant workers strive for the resolution of such conflicts. Together with them, we learn precious lessons that further guide the Church us in our work.

In the work of the MFMW, in assisting migrant workers reconcile the various forms of conflicts they encounter, we have come to realize the importance of empowering migrant workers through raising their awareness and understanding of the their situation as well as harnessing their collective experiences and strengths for common actions.

However when we approach a conflict situation, we always bear in mind that migrant workers, especially women, are at a disadvantaged position. In the economic, political, social and cultural spheres, women migrants are usually at the weaker side of any conflict.

In countries where they come from, culturally, women are held in a much lower regard. They are usually confined in homes and find difficulties in finding viable jobs. If ever they can, they are usually the last option to be hired and the first one to be fired when crisis strikes. The jobs that are available to them are those stereotyped for women such as domestic jobs, in the entertainment sector or in **textile and other related industries**.

Meanwhile, in countries where they work, women migrant workers are discriminated as migrants and also as 'minority'. Especially for domestic workers, they are held hostage by policies that make them vulnerable to abuses. Concretely for domestic workers in Hong Kong, for example, the Two-Week rule (where their working visa is cut to 14 days if the contract is prematurely terminated for whatever reasons), **forces many domestic workers to hold on to their jobs even if they face abuses from their**

employer.

It is in this context that the MFMW try to empower migrant workers. We conduct various educational activities with them that tackle the different dimensions of migration and being a migrant and encourage them to bind themselves together in self-help groups. Confronting conflicts is better faced together than individually.

Reconciliation becomes more meaningful for migrant workers if they are aware of their situation and are empowered in the process. If they are empowered, then they can come from a relatively stronger position in the reconciliation process.

Resolving conflicts of migrants with family and fellow migrant workers is relatively easier. This is because the commonality of interest in terms of being a migrant worker leads to a more reconciliatory attitude between each other.

Reconciling the interests of migrant workers and their employers is a harder task. Our orientation and ministry necessitates our partiality with migrant workers. However, we still do believe that a harmonious relationship between employers and employees can also be had if proper education on labor, police and immigration ordinances as well as cultural orientation are given to migrants.

Likewise, such orientation and proper education is necessary for the receiving society that needs migrant workers. The creation of a ministry alongside migrant workers is a big step to **recognize that indeed, in any society, there is the good-hearted section that will feel for the marginalised and act accordingly.**

Nevertheless, there still remains the problem of the standing or institutional **policies of both governing bodies of both the sending and the receiving countries, that, more often than not, intrinsically places migrant workers at a losing end.** It is especially in this type of conflict that the collective effort of migrant workers and the caring section of the society, is required to achieve beneficial reforms in the minimum. It is always hoped that eventually, the “blinded” are given light.

In their everyday lives, migrant workers encounter conflict stemming from their

condition of being a foreign worker. Their faith has strengthened their resolve. Peace is realized when justice is served. Each conflict that can be resolved is but a step towards a lasting peace that migrants, together with peoples of the local community do dream of.

(Inspired by Isaiah 58:6-12, where fast is to loose the bonds of injustice.)