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# **Theological Reflection and Prayer**

The Swahili word ‘Umoja’ translates as ‘togetherness’ or ‘unity’. It has recently been taken up by Tearfund as a central concept in their ‘Church and Community Transformation Process’ in the Inhassoro district of Mozambique in south-east Africa. Yet even more foundational to this is the biblical witness in which two particularly key words have shaped the mission of those communities called to live for and serve God’s unfolding mission.

The Old Testament word ‘shalom’ is often translated as ‘peace’ but involves much more than an absence of conflict. John V Taylor says of the shalom promised to the people of Israel that “this all-embracing inter-relatedness and answerability arose from one primary relationship which God had initiated. All the threads in their network of relationships, their ‘bundle of life’, seemed to run directly to a single nexus in the hand of God. The *shalom* depended on him [such that the] blessedness of this inter-related, God-related community might be thought of either as wholeness or harmony . . . more free than equality, more generous than equity, the ever-shifting equipoise of a life-system.”

The New Testament word ‘koinonia’ likewise translates variously as ‘communion’, ‘fellowship’ and ‘sharing’. It speaks of the transformed corporate relationship we now enjoy with God as church through the agency of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. The gift of grace here acts as catalyst and inspiration in the community of faith so that no matter what challenges confront its members, nonetheless they can work together in mutual edification, sharing resources, including money (2 Corinthians 13), as tangible expressions of their reconciled and redeemed existence.

Elsewhere in his correspondence with the church in Corinth the apostle Paul uses three metaphors in the one chapter (1 Corinthians 3) to speak of the shared new life of the community of Christ: nurturing infants, farming fields and constructing buildings. This year’s World Development Appeal is entitled ‘Farming God’s Way’ and takes as its focus fresh attempts by local communities in the Inhassoro coastal district in Mozambique to improve their lot. Despite some recent progress this former Portuguese colony is still one of the poorest countries in the world ranked 181 out of 188 nations on the Human Development Index. It lies within a cyclone region that is prey to strong winds and heavy rain and subsequent flooding as well as the opposite threat of prolonged drought in semi-arid conditions all of which makes it extremely difficult to eke out even a bare existence.

Horácio Valoi is a trained facilitator who works with Tearfund’s local Partner organisation CEDES (Ecumenical Committee for Social Development) in a project of integral mission where communal bible study and agrarian education enables family households and self-help groups to gain the necessary skills to imagine and enact a better future. In so doing they are no longer dependent on external donors but become empowered to emerge from their former fragile state towards a more sustainable and fruitful life. In the words of the old chorus: ‘God helps those who help themselves’ – this is the reality of the Umoja process – we are partners in God’s field: as he nourishes, so we flourish, to the mutual benefit of the local church.

**Prayer**

Living and eternal God, whose greatness is evident in the wonders of the earth, the surging of the seas and the vast expanse of outer space, we praise you for your almighty power. On earth and sky and sea, we find traces of your glory, beauty that takes our breath away; splendours that delight us; such diversity of plan, such attention to detail that we appreciate afresh your artistic upon and within creation.

Your greatness, though, is yet more evident in your Son Jesus, full of grace and truth, the One who reveals your glory, even as he exposes our misery, the misery of those who have turned from your ways to pursue our own paths, coming to grief in sorrow, sin and shame. We thank you that you have not left us to languish but have come to us in Christ, calling us back from our lost existence, welcomed home by your saving love, fully forgiven at the cost of Christ’s own life.

Yet even we enjoy the glorious freedom of the children of God, let us not mistake such liberation for license, vanity or apathy. By your Spirit’s work within and among us, may we recognise that our redemption is the root of true repentance and with it comes the obligation to play our part in the wider mission of the body of Christ, including our prayers of intercession.

We pray, O God, for the church in Mozambique, especially for the role of Horácio Valoi as he seeks to develop the work of CEDES among the local community. In an extreme environment, where poverty and climate change are not just abstract theories or topics of debate but the stark realities of everyday life, we ask that you will give the people in Inhassoro the means to turn harsh facts into grounds for hope. We pray that your promises of old may help sow the seeds for creative change, new life coming to birth before their very eyes as they till the soil and work the fields. Let them discover afresh that the wisdom of the scriptures is as productive in farming the earth as learning in classrooms or study groups, partnering together in the tasks of the gospel. When setbacks occur, disasters strike or challenges emerge along life’s way, grant to your people the tenacity to endure and the capacity to overcome. So may they live to your glory and inspire us by their story, a witness of trust and hope and togetherness. These things we ask in the names of Jesus Christ. Amen.