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‘Let Justice Flow: Transforming Lives!’ World Development Appeal 2013

Resources for Public Worship All-age reflection

Introduction

This year’s Appeal highlights the ways in which our partners in Rwanda and India are embracing the work of community development and peace building as integral to their life together and witness to the gospel.

In particular, Moucecore, with its locally based, small group structure, makes it possible for people whose past stories still hold many painful memories to work together on concrete projects that now serve the common good. In doing so, they do not change the past, but they create a different context for the future, and for living with what they have to bear. They begin to understand what costly reconciliation might mean.

This all-age, interactive reflection invites both children and adults to imagine how this might happen, and how it is that creating room for something new does not have to mean denying necessary space to those memories that continue to shape us.

What you will need

The leader needs a number of books, one quite large (like a dictionary, or a large reference or “coffee table” book), and the others of various sizes. The large book should be covered with bright red paper, and the other books with other bright colours.

A very small table should be set up in front (a sturdy cardboard box, covered with a cloth, is fine), and a short distance away, a larger table. The small table should be small enough to have space only for the large red book, while the larger table, set if possible with a freestanding (and empty) bookshelf or bookends, should be able to hold a whole row of books.

All-age reflection

Adults and children are asked to imagine that the small table belongs to them. They are also to imagine that the bright red book, which you are holding up in your hand, is a diary that they have been keeping, in which they have been writing down sad or difficult things that have happened to them, or to people they know or have heard about.

Take some time to talk with the children and/or adults about some of the things that they might have included in the bright red book of sad things. When you are ready to move on, point out how large the red book has to be, as sad or painful things do happen to people, and if anyone wants to write them all down and remember them, they will need a very large book.

Now place the big red book of sad things on the small table, and point out that it takes up all by itself all the space there is. Every time you look at your table, therefore, you are going to see the big red book. As long as you only have room on your table for the book of sad things, then the sad things are what you are going to be thinking about, all the time.

Now ask the children what might happen if they were to make a larger table for themselves. After you have talked this through with them, draw their attention to the larger table, and then place the big red book on the table/bookshelf, at one end. Point out that there is still lots of room on the larger table, so perhaps you will be able to put other books on the table as well. Then begin to take out the other books you have prepared, one by one, and place them on the shelf.

Work with the children and adults to imagine what these other books might contain. You already have a big red book for sad things. So you might also have a yellow book of favourite stories, for example, or an orange book which tells you how to make all your favourite foods, or a blue book in which you write all the good things that have happened to you or to others you know, or a green book in which you record all the things you have tried to do to encourage others. Use your imagination! And use as many books as you can.

Finally, ask what has happened to the red book. The answer will be that it is still there, and it is still just as big. But notice that the big red book is not taking up all the available space anymore, not because the big red book has become a small red book, but because you have created a bigger space in which to keep it.

The red book is still there. And it always will be, because sad things happen to people. But you can make sure that the table in your house has enough room not only for the red book, but for the yellow and orange and blue and green and spotted and purple . . . books as well. And then every time you look at your table, you will see not just the red book, not just the sad things, but all the other brightly coloured books, too.

For further reflection

With adults or older children, you can reflect on the insight of the psalmist that those who trust in idols will become like them (Psalm 115.8). In other words, we are profoundly shaped by the things to which we give our attention, and the biblical story invites us to give our attention to the things that will give us life, and will be life-giving for others.

Older children and adults could also be given pieces of coloured paper, matching the colours used for the books, and invited to talk with one another about what they would write in a red or a green or a blue book. This exercise can also lead to a reflection on what we (often unthinkingly) give our attention to or spend our time on, and whether these are the things on which we are called to set our sight as People of the Way.