

January 23, 2016

Dear Citizens of Flint, MI,

“...They have called you an outcast, saying: “It is Zion; no one cares for her” (Jer. 30:17, NASB). Which is why the poisoned water crisis was allowed to happen in the poverty-stricken, black-majority city of Flint.....and why it took a year for your cries to be heard.....and why your concerns were so easily dismissed.....and why the lives of your youngest (including those ‘in-utero’) and your most vulnerable.....who are overwhelmingly black and poor.....have knowingly been sacrificed for the chance to palm an extra dollar or two.

It has been said by one religious man that your need—“a new, safe, water system for the city”—is so massive “that all the religious groups working together won’t be able to solve it.”

What this religious man who serves a God for whom nothing is too hard says is correct. The church “won’t” solve it. We could—but we won’t—because it’s easier to serve by sending a few dollars or bottles of water your way than it is to take a whip and drive out those who profit from taking advantage of people in need. The church won’t solve much of anything in the way of social traumas because the millions you (and others) need to fix a crumbling water system or dysfunctional penal system have been spent by church members flying back and forth across the globe to attend very important meetings....and resting at night in very comfortable hotels....and remodeling church sanctuaries....and giving only to causes that support personal theologies. Any spare cash that remains goes to pay court costs and handling fees for attorneys who—by the way—are profiting nicely from drawn out denominational controversies and internal church unrest. The 35 richest people in the world—who hold a combined wealth of more than \$940 billion and live in this country—could build you a new water system, but why should they take on what all the religious groups working together won’t do?

In other words, whether we are driven by faith or greed, each of us has a complicity role in what happened to you in Flint...and to the children and teachers who died in Sandy Hooks, Connecticut ...and to the 21 transgendered women murdered in 2015. We commend your wisdom in not believing that your elected state officials had “everything under control.”

We, the Cabinet on Ethnic Church Affairs (CECA), believe that God is grieved and pained that the least of the Creator’s children are—time and time again—treated like outcasts. CECA’s work (as Native Americans, Middle Easterners, African Americans, Hispanic Americans and Asian Americans) is to seek and advocate for liberation, justice and reconciliation on behalf of Christ—until such time comes when God says, “My children have suffered long enough.” Toward that end and to address our collective moral shame, we recommend the following so that what happened to you never again happens in the wealthiest country in the world:

1. Legal counselors must be about the business of engaging in legal “unrest” by working to change the privilege laws in Michigan and elsewhere that make it efficient for officials to disguise wrong-doing under the cover of “the freedom to discuss issues and exchange ideas.” While we acknowledge the difficulty this challenge presents for those who might be sharing a bed with said officials, we believe there are several ethical attorneys of

integrity in the state of Michigan and beyond who are capable of leading such a revolution. The burning question is, “Who is willing to potentially lose a position of prominence in exchange for doing justice?”

2. Religious officials must be about God’s business of cleaning house and speaking truth to power—even when the person of power is sitting in the pew, or the official is being threatened with dismissal, or those members who have the means to keep the church budget from drowning threaten to withhold their wealth. We use the word ‘member’ because disciples don’t do things like that.
3. The medical community must collaboratively develop a plan to provide follow-up care for those who have been affected by lead poisoning and are facing lasting health and developmental problems. We suspect this will take courage and tenacity—like that demonstrated by Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha, who has been labeled “an unfortunate researcher” and accused of causing unnecessary hysteria.
4. Lastly, those of us who are in Christ Jesus, or love Allah with fullness of heart, mind, soul and strength, or who have promised to faithfully serve YHWH—because the Lord our God is One—must ourselves become one in service. Our challenge is to minister with ‘ones’ of different faith traditions or who claim no faith at all, and yet are equally distressed, poor in spirit and barely able to contain righteous rage that, once again, those who have the least have suffered the most. Think how much we could accomplish together were we to organize a non-profit, 501 (c) (3) Citizen Response Team Fund which could be used to address community needs as they arose. Just imagine 322 million people in the US donating ten dollars a year and yielding over 3 billion dollars to help one another—which in this current crisis would be enough to pay for 80 KWA pipelines! Together we have the capabilities, qualifications and resources to put an end to communities being held hostage by the greedy, the self-serving, and the vainglorious. But can we agree to use them for this purpose?

*“...They have called you an outcast, saying: “It is Flint; no one cares for her.” But **they** have forgotten the Lord’s promise to “restore you to health” and “heal you of your wounds.” We, too, shall not leave you desolate.*

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