

Making *Justice and Compassion* a Reality

Dr. Franklin Pyles on expressing the love of Christ as a lifestyle

BY PETER WHITE



In his President's Report to the 2008 General Assembly, Dr. Franklin Pyles spoke about the importance of justice and compassion to The Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada. *cmAlliance.ca* recently interviewed Dr. Pyles and asked him to share his thoughts about these two issues.

Alliance.ca: In your report you said that in today's world there is a tremendous emphasis on issues surrounding the search for justice and the need to express compassion. What are some of your thoughts on the issue of justice?

Dr. Franklin Pyles: The need for justice arises in all of our relationships as people, and in our relationship with God. It is that fact that we have not behaved in

just ways that creates our need for a Saviour. People all over the world, throughout history, have suffered from injustice and it is the duty of the Church to speak to the world the Word of God and the demand of God that all people behave in a just manner.

A.ca: Where does compassion fit in?

FP: Compassion is part of justice, for it is unjust to ignore the need of another person. However, the needs of the world for food, clothing, clean water and health are so great that this area of action deserves to be treated by itself. We stand in a tradition of caring for people, of offering a cup of cold water in Jesus' name, a tradition that includes Dorcas who sewed clothes for the poor and Paul who collected an offering. Compassion is part of our calling as an Alliance.

A.ca: How do justice and compassion interact with each other?

FP: As I just stated compassion is really part of justice. That is, if I see someone naked and hungry, as the Apostle James (see James 2:15, 16) says, and say to that person "be warmed and filled" but do not actually give them food and clothing, is the love of God in me? And, because this is clear to us now from the Bible, not to care for this person is an injustice. Likewise, when people are oppressed, as are tens of thousands of children who are sex slaves, not to care about the injustice is also a lack of justice.

A.ca: How do justice and compassion connect with evangelism and worship?

FP: The easy thing to say would be that this is a way to attract people to Christ. But I would say this is part of Christ's work for people, and that when we do acts of justice and compassion we are truly worshipping God. This is what the LORD said to Isaiah in chapter 58 when he called caring for the poor a true fast.

We must teach the true, biblical mandate for caring for people and our world



A.ca: From your perspective, why is a greater emphasis on justice and compassion important in today's world?

FP: It is always important and has always been addressed by God's people. What a heritage we have as Christians! The early Christians denounced the Roman circus, Christians picked up the poor and needy and cared for them in monasteries in the Middle Ages, William Wilberforce fought against slavery, Amy Carmichael against child prostitution, and A. B. Simpson's heart was broken when he saw the body of a baby girl floating down the Yangtze River at Wuhan and he asked "does no one care?" and was told that—if it was a boy they would care.

A.ca: In your report you said that the issues of justice and compassion are the mandate of the Church of Jesus Christ. Yet you fear that over the years our expression of justice and compassion has diminished. Their importance has lessened in our church lives. Can you elaborate on your observation?

FP: We existed in a hiatus as evangelicals because we lived in fear of the social gospel. But the social gospel was an attempt to reinterpret the Gospel as only meaning justice and compassion for the people of the world, and the naïve belief that it could be achieved through the work of the church, thus attaining the Kingdom of God.

The rejection of this false teaching was absolutely correct, but the rejection of the mandate to care for the poor was wrong. But now this is being recovered and health is returning to our churches.

A.ca: The issues of justice and compassion have captured the imagination of the emergent generation. You referred to these as their clarion call. Why do you think these issues have become so important to them?

FP: Justice and compassion is the focus of the young generation for several reasons. First, the high level of communication has brought world needs before everyone through television. Now we see the multiplication of this communication.

Children are taught about many justice and compassion issues at school. Rock stars and movie stars take up specific causes and sometimes hold benefit concerts. Politicians run for office referencing

the world's need. And, terrorists claim that they in turn are justified in their brutality because of injustice. So, who wants to be left out? Not many.

But our mandate must be different. We must teach the true, biblical mandate for caring for people and our world. This is a reason for engagement that will survive the fleeting interest of media and stars.

A.ca: How do you see justice and compassion becoming more prominent at the local church parish level? What are some practical, effective strategies churches can implement at the local level?

FP: The Parish concept is a way to set acceptable boundaries on our involvement in the community so that our involvement may be very deep and holistic. I encourage churches to define a geographic and/or demographic boundary which they realistically believe they can influence. When that has been



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determined I encourage them to survey the area so that spiritual needs may be identified and so that justice and compassion needs may also be identified.

One church discovered that the children of the local elementary school were in need of fresh fruit. The church now supplies that need for those children. Another church has become the chaplain for a mall. The list of opportunities to serve is almost endless if we will get out into the community and ask questions.

A.ca: In your report you suggested that by the year 2030 you wanted the C&MA to be recognized across Canada as a church that walks the talk, where justice and compassion is reality, not just theology. From your perspective what will things look like by 2030?

FP: In 2030 I believe that every church will know what it does to bring the presence of Christ into the lives of people around it, and that will include practical ministry and spiritual ministry. And I believe the people in the surrounding communities will sense the love of Christ from these congregations, even if they never ever attend.

A.ca: What are some of the key changes we have to make as a denomination to realize this vision?

FP: As stated above, we have to take the positive step of actually knowing what goes on in our communities, and listen to our communities, and respond to the needs that they express. There is no use at all talking about justice and compassion, we simply need to get out there and do it.

A.ca: What we are really talking about is a transformation of how we address these issues. What do you see as the biggest obstacle to overcome.

FP: The biggest hurdle is our own personal agendas. For myself, I have a very busy schedule. But, I want to respond as my local church calls me to help. And each of us must make this commitment.

A.ca: Who needs to take the lead on the ground at the local parish level?

FP: Of course the pastor and elders must take the lead. But, in every congregation there are people to whom the Lord speaks and he lays a burden and vision on their heart. So, if you are one of those people to whom the Lord has given a cry for a need around your church, speak up. Your elders may not have seen it for the Lord may desire you to be the one to point it out. And, accept responsibility, for the church cannot move forward until people step out and say that they are willing to be the hands and feet of Jesus for this need.

A.ca: Do you have some final thoughts to share with our readers?

FP: Let us remember that love is not an abstraction, it is an action. We need to show God's love, not once, but as a lifestyle.

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