

Congratulations Zihuatanejo—a community that promotes a culture of peace
By Liberato C. Bautista

Your Excellencies, the municipal president, Mayor Eric Fernandez Ballesteros, the First Lady, Lic. Wendy Carbajal, and all his dedicated colleagues in the municipal government;

Distinguished leaders and representatives of civic organizations, especially the main collaborators—Rotary Club of Zihuatanejo, and its president, Ma. Gerarda Gonzalez Montalba; the Por Los Niños Zihuatanejo AC, and its general administrator, Lawrence (Lorenzo) Marbut; the Faculty of Tourism of the Autonomous University of Guerrero, and the affiliate of Sister Cities International, and its chairman, Giovanni Gullo;

Esteemed leaders of the Peace Center of the Detroit Renaissance District (of the Detroit Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church) who introduced me to this great program here, particularly its executive director Barbara Talley and its Latin America coordinator, Patricia Ann Talley-Tucker, and to Catalina Beach Resort and its owner, and my gracious host, Eva Bergtold;

Ladies and gentlemen, good evening. May peace prevail on earth!

It is with great joy that I join you here in Zihuatanejo, on such an occasion when your city celebrates peace and is certified again as a community that promotes a culture of peace. At the outset, I congratulate the organizers and sponsors of this event. I especially mention Barbara Talley, the energetic executive director of the Peace Center of the Detroit Renaissance District, and Patricia Talley-Tucker, its indefatigable Latin America Director, for both their infectious charm and committed desire to involve us all in the search for peace. I also thank the Rotary Club of Zihuatanejo, especially its president, Ma. Gerarda Gonzalez Montalba whose hosting has been so great that I am indebted to her gracious hospitality and in awe of her warm friendship.

Barbara, Patricia and Gerarda—they come from two different countries—the United States of America and Mexico. I can see that in the audience today we have participants who come from more than just these two countries. I add my own country, the Philippines, whose history is bound up to the history of Mexico. Mexico and the Philippines are two countries that revolted against Spanish colonialism. They gained their freedoms and independence by asserting self-determination. These two countries are now bound by deep friendships and mutual cooperation. Truly, peace in these two countries resulted from the assertion that their peoples must be free from colonization because they fought for their sovereignty, asserted their inherent dignity, and protected their human rights.

We celebrate peace today by committing ourselves to the promotion of a culture of peace. This peace that we will promote must make no place for hatred and racism. Peace must make no place for intolerance and xenophobia. Peace must make no place for discrimination and exploitation. Peace must make no place for any form of oppression and injustice.

Peace is about these and more. The desire for peace is the same as the desire for God's sacred image in each of us to shine and be part of that rich diversity of God's creation. The Nobel Peace Prize winner, Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa, called this diversity as the "rainbow people of God." Each one of us—in harmony and peace—contributes to that colorful rainbow. Each one of us makes peace and lives peace by including everyone in the nurturing of families and in the building of communities and nations. The desire for peace is the same desire for human dignity and human rights. A culture of peace protects human dignity and promotes human rights.

Your presence today is solid proof that peace knows no borders. In fact, peace breaks down walls of division and instead erects lasting friendships. Peace shuns hatred and intolerance, and instead prospers love and inclusion. When peace envelops our hearts, we are warmed up to exhibit only love. When peace exudes our personality, compassion and joy equally exude. When peace inhabits our lives, we are inspired to desire justice.

Oh what a joy it is to be with you today. For today is about peace. It is about promoting a culture of peace. Between the calm waters of the Pacific Ocean and the gentle breeze from your hills and mountains, we are at this busy public square providing testament to the enduring desire for peace by peoples of this city. While a day in September of every year has been declared by the United Nations as an International Day of Peace, this same international organization has also declared the promotion of a culture of peace, not just for a day, but for all days of the year.

I am here with you today as a representative of a non-governmental organization whose desire is for true peace and justice to prevail on earth. Civil society organizations, like your sponsor, the Rotary, are deeply committed to public and civic service. Many of these organizations are collaborating at the international level to promote peace through the International Day of Peace (which is on September 19 this year) and through several declarations by the United Nations that all address the promotion of peace and a culture of peace. In fact, this year's theme is about the Right to Peace. It is a human right that remains aspirational unless we all work together to make it real. Making it real will mean making real a fundamental purpose of the United Nations—to "save succeeding generations from the scourge of war."

Thank you for inviting and welcoming me to your beautiful and tranquil city. I have only been here for three days but I have already experienced your infectious friendship. I have

already benefited from your gracious hospitality. I have already witnessed your contagious hope for peace.

By being here, I have been infused with energy just looking at your smiles and joining you in laughter. After all, how else might we exhibit peace except by making them visible in our lives and in our relationships? How else might we celebrate peace except by making them real in our families, homes, streets, workplaces, and in the halls of governments?

As we gather to celebrate peace, I hope we engage ourselves in a deeper understanding of what peace truly is about and what it requires of us who desire it. Indeed, to those who desire peace are responsibilities to keep it, to make it, and to build it. Peace must be beyond desiring. In the end, it is about making sure we live peace. A culture of peace, according to the United Nations that declared it, is “a set of values, attitudes, traditions and modes of behavior and ways of life.” Lest we dwell alone on the desire for peace, and neglect the devastation of war, let us be reminded of what the Constitution of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has said: “Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences for peace must be constructed.” What we are doing here today is precisely the construction of those defences for peace. It is a very hard thing to do because the infrastructure for wars is far more developed than that of peace.

So how do we then live peace and not just desire it? We live peace by keeping peace—making sure that it does not disturb harmonious relationships. Making sure that our streets are safe from predators and crimes. Making sure that our workplaces are safe from hazards and harm. Making sure that our schools are conducive to learning and free from bullying. Peacekeeping is about the assurance that our communities are peaceful and orderly. And yet, peace is more than *peacekeeping*.

We live peace by making peace—making sure that whatever takes away peace or makes it impossible to prosper, like wars and conflicts, are ended. Peace is about *peacemaking*. When such wars and conflicts have already begun, we must work to prevent their escalation and stop the pillage, plunder and devastation that they bring. The UN Declaration on a Culture of Peace recognizes that “peace [is] not only the absence of conflict, but also requires a positive, dynamic participatory process where dialogue is encouraged and conflicts are solved in a spirit of mutual understanding and cooperation.” Promoting a culture of peace is therefore about peacemaking—making conditions in our families, communities and societies that will not allow for conflicts to prosper. Such conditions include the “full respect for and promotion of all human rights and fundamental freedoms.”

Necessarily, the conditions that keep peace and make peace are conditions that build peace. So, from peacekeeping to peacemaking, we move on to *peacebuilding*. In promoting peace,

we realize that there are conditions of injustice that make peace impossible to achieve. Eliminating these many forms of injustices everywhere—in our social, economic, political and cultural life—is part of our peacebuilding work. It is part of what makes a culture of peace.

Peace is about eliminating the injustices we inflict on our children—when we spend more money for wars rather than build more public schools and invest in their education. I commend you for your focus on peace education in the public schools, among school children and youths as well as college students. Peace is about eradicating the injustices we inflict upon women—when we discriminate against them on the basis of their sexuality and on patriarchy. Peace is very much about women's empowerment. The role of women in peacemaking and peacebuilding is crucial and must never be disregarded. Healthy mothers make for healthy and peaceful families and communities. We must therefore not deny mothers of needed maternal health care, and of their infants of much needed natal care. Public and national defense spending should never be at the expense of reducing support for women and much needed social services to them. Peace is also about reversing the disillusionment of many of our youths and young adults and instead integrating them into meaningful and productive endeavors in our communities. Indeed, there is a culture of peace when these and many more are visible in our daily lives and relationships.

Peace is also about being in harmony not just with peoples but also with mother earth. My coming here is very special because of the welcoming embrace of your indigenous peoples. Thank you Professor Candelaria Donají Méndez Tello (Autonomous University of Guerrero in Zihuatanejo) and Professor Talia Weltman-Cisneros (Wayne State University) for raising the veil of invisibility of Afro-Mexicans and of the indigenous peoples of this region and country. From indigenous peoples we learn about reverence for Mother Earth. For indigenous peoples, peace is constitutive of reverence for the earth. When we violate the earth—by polluting it, by unsustainably extracting its minerals—we are sowing the seeds of unpeace and injustice.

I end my reflections on the importance of what we are doing here. The achievement of peace includes responsible and sustainable stewardship of all of God's creation. This also includes defending human dignity and protecting human rights, including environmental rights. Our desire for peace goes beyond its political and economic ramifications. Our desire for peace is a cosmological one. I submit to you that the desire for peace, and the promotion of a culture of peace, is a project lauded by the heavens and may it be then that it is lived out here on earth.

It is now my pleasure to witness the recertification of Zihuatanejo de Azueta as a community that prospers a culture of peace. My congratulations to you all. This recertification is the result of your laudable efforts to comply with requirements that

qualify you as a culture of peace community. This replica of the peace pole, which your mayor now receives, represents such laudable efforts. May you remain resolute in demonstrating that peace can truly prevail in our lives and in our transactions—be they personal, political or commercial—if we will it. May God be with you in all your peaceful endeavors.

Good night and thank you very much.

Liberato C. Bautista
Assistant General Secretary for United Nations and International Affairs
General Board of Church and Society
The United Methodist Church
New York City

Zihuatanejo, Guerrero
Mexico

February 9, 2014