

Today's Interconnected World
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Thank you – it is a privilege to be among you this morning. I heard about the Olinda church back when I was 6 or 7 and went to the UU fellowship up the road in Windsor. Going to that Sunday school, thanks to my Mum and Dad, helped me to learn values that still motivate me and which I still try to aspire to fulfil. I have thought back to those values since I became involved from beginning February in the work of the United Nations in the difficult job of diminishing the effects of the corona virus on peoples and community's health and well-being. I am always reminded of the relevance of what I absorbed then to the universal challenge all people now face - to differing degrees.

Universal in that the virus affects everyone everywhere, regardless of nationality, of gender, or religion, starting in China, with Thailand where I am speaking from the second country with a recorded case, and there are people affected in all the places I have lived, Pakistan, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, other places and even now in Kingville/Leamington.

Universal.. but to differing degrees. In India, Bangladesh, India and Indonesia and the Philippines the challenges are still very big -as COVID is still spreading, But in places like Vietnam (zero), Japan, Taiwan, S. Korea, Bhutan and Thailand, the disease has much less effect.

But how it affects people is different too. Here in Thailand in a country almost twice as big as Canada less than 60 people have died since beginning February – Canada has had nearly 7,000 death. But the economic and social effects may end up being more in a country in which tourism is vital and trade crucial. So fortunately, there are many less people who have died or had their lives turned upside down by illness...- but there are homeless and hungry people where there were none before. This is an issue here – but where I was living before in Pakistan or its neighbors India and Bangladesh – hundreds of million who had slowly pulled themselves out of poverty have quickly fallen back; with all the hardships associated with that.

Five years ago, the world committed itself to 17 Sustainable Development Goals to be met between 2015 to 2030 – fundamentally to leave no behind. Despite Asia being the fastest region to economically grow – progress was slower already in early 2020 on most of the goals. Ironically, the ones where there was the most progress the last years: education and health and progress on reducing poverty, are the ones most at risk now of falling back.

So why is the effect different on countries and on different groups of people so much? What is the same – is that the most vulnerable are made more vulnerable: the migrant informal work in Mumbai India, the partly employed middle aged black man living in the Cass corridor near first UU in Detroit. The frustration at this injustice can have other effects – the destruction from frustrated demonstrators – even just 50 km from here in Detroit - has roots in frustration at being left behind. (excluded from salvation). This includes being left behind on how the justice system

treats them – but accentuated by more middle- aged black men and women dying from COVID and losing their job. How countries help or don't help their most vulnerable is shaping the differences among countries (and within countries) now.

So it is a bleak situation. – But it need not be. When Michael Fox founded UU Olinda -it was just a few months from the massacre of the Donnelly family 200 km NW – killings based on intolerance, misplaced righteousness and jealousy. This was followed months later by a ferry sinking near London killing 182 people. It was brave of him to found a church based on rejecting the doctrine of eternal punishment. As you know – the Universalists believed in a God who embraced everyone, and this eventually became central to their belief that lasting truth is found in all religions, and that dignity and worth are innate to all people regardless of sex, color, race, or class.

What was believed by those people in Olinda in 1881 would be consistent with the basic reasons the UN was founded in 1945:

- to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small, and
- to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom,
- to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours

So you may think now..... what do the Black Donnelly's and Michael Fox and the founding of the UN have with the effects of COVID -19?? Neil must be tired – late on a Sunday evening in Bangkok!

“Let me quote my boss, the United Nations Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres:

Everything we do during and after this crisis must be with a strong focus on building more equal, inclusive and sustainable economies and societies that are more resilient in the face of pandemics, climate change, and the many other global challenges we face.

What the world needs now is solidarity.

With solidarity we can defeat the virus and build a better world.”

How we apply that solidarity can unite us or can divide us more!

The UN – and others did warn about the effects of pandemic -especially after ebola and SARS. But the world did not act on this warning. If there is good news it is in this case, a situation that we can cope with --- and with persistence and goodwill and solidarity we can overcome it.

Unlike in 1881 – we have more tools in our box to make it through this: we can communicate, we do have science, we have the capabilities – we just need the will to cooperate. But that will does not come out of nowhere. It comes in good part from the values we have and how we apply them.

Values of community and solidarity have helped the Olinda UU community come through much in 120 years. The will to act in solidarity is rational – but it also come from the values people have.

So these values from 1881, are as relevant now as they were when this church was founded. And applying these values can have an effect on this community and if applied by everyone – on the world.

One of the keys sources of the UU principles is to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science. When the church was founded, in 1881 Louis Pasteur found the first vaccine. Applying that science now to a vaccine and to treatment is crucial – but that openness to science and objective approaches is also key to dealing with the economic and social effects of the pandemic. (Thailand has been good in doing this..)

But as the SG says – as important is, the value of solidarity – and the principles that UN is based on, especially “the inherent worth and dignity of every person” and “Justice, equity and compassion in human relations”.

Societies with solidarity are societies where there is trust. Studies – including those I learned about at the University of Windsor from 1978 to 1982 and also much more recently - show that the presence of trust brings a wellspring of positive outcomes: Communities with a strong sense of trust are better able to respond to crises. Trust is associated with stronger economic growth, increased innovation, greater stability, and better health outcomes.

It is associated with better success in overcoming the virus – in Switzerland compared with France, in Germany compared with the UK, in South Korea compared with Italy, in Thailand compared with Indonesia and even in Canada compared with the USA.

So the values remain relevant, which helped create an enabling environment that permitted the hard work of my parents as immigrants to give me more chances. Such values helped create a relatively prosperous, empathetic (if still imperfect) society, a society that can deal with the virus – and use values drawn from Universalism to better apply the tremendous capacities we now have to meet the global – universal – challenges that still remain: in the health response, in the humanitarian actions, and in the socio-economic response.

The UN SG Guterres recently said: “Let’s not forget this is essentially a human crisis. Most fundamentally, we need to focus on people – the most vulnerable.”

And to conclude with two quotations from the former UN SG I knew the best, Kofi Annan. They are relevant to the moment:

As long as inequality and other social problems plague us, populists will try to exploit them.

**We may have different religions, different languages, different colored skin,
but we all belong to one human race**

**That quote summarizes what I believe and which I first learned from UU and
what is relevant to remember, and to feel, now.**

Universal truths

Universal values

Science and objectivity informed by values..

When the church was founded.....local global...

Today.... Universal roots of spirit of what motivate Fox still relevant

Today SG...

Today – most successful – where there was community – where there was science – where
there was value on human life

Need to be relevant..

Did not listen to warning - but a warning we can cope with

Need to use those value to cope with challenges that may be harder to cope with

But unlike 1881 – we can communicate, we do have science, we have the capabilities – we need
the will – and will comes from reason but will also come from value

Relevant now almost 120 years since this church was founded

Where the Asia region was - and I was - in the beginning of 2020.

What happened to people and societies in the regions since then.

What has worked and not worked.

What is different than in Canada. What is the same as in Canada.

The roles of shared values, of science, of community and of solidarity

What next - is there a roadmap, or guide book?

Played on weaknesses and build on strengths...

he "**Black**" **Donnellys** were an [Irish](#) family who emigrated to [Ontario](#). Five of the family were murdered by an armed mob in the township of [Lucan Biddulph](#) in February 1880 and their farm was burned down, the culmination of long-standing conflict between the family and other residents. No one was convicted of the murders, despite two trials.

- May 24 – The overloaded steamer *Victoria*' capsizes on the Thames River near London, Ontario, killing 182 people.

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- to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small, and
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Finally, when we get past this crisis -- which we will -- we will face a choice.

We can go back to the world as it was before or deal decisively with those issues that make us all unnecessarily vulnerable to crises.

Our roadmap is the 2030 Agenda and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

The recovery from the COVID-19 crisis must lead to a different economy.

Everything we do during and after this crisis must be with a strong focus on building more equal, inclusive and sustainable economies and societies that are more resilient in the face of pandemics, climate change, and the many other global challenges we face.

What the world needs now is solidarity.

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Thousands of people working in the shadows of the Swiss economy lost their jobs overnight in March, as hotels, restaurants and families fired their undocumented cleaners and maids in response to a lockdown enforced by the central Swiss government.

Unable to draw on state support, most were then forced to rely on charity to survive. Ultimately, that demand led volunteers and city officials to set up a weekly food bank at the ice-hockey stadium near the river.

After years of attempting to infect animals, he announced that he had developed a means of protecting sheep against anthrax - by neutralising the virulence of bacillus anthracis and then injecting this into the animals - but few believed him. He was asked to prove his claim by a public demonstration, and immediately accept the challenge. Although there is agreement that Pasteur inoculated a number of animals with his vaccine on 31 May 1881, and the demonstration took place at a farmyard in Pouilly le Fort near Melun, France on 2nd June, different accounts have related the numbers, and species of animals used.

Choose the civilizing way...

Research shows that the presence of trust brings a wellspring of positive outcomes: Communities with a strong sense of trust are better able to respond to crises.¹ Trust is associated with stronger economic growth,² increased innovation,³ greater stability,⁴ and better health outcomes.⁵

1. [1st Principle](#): The inherent worth and dignity of every person;
2. [2nd Principle](#): Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;
3. [3rd Principle](#): Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;
4. [4th Principle](#): A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;
5. [5th Principle](#): The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;
6. [6th Principle](#): The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all;
7. [7th Principle](#): Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

- Direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life;
- Words and deeds of prophetic people which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love;
- Wisdom from the world's religions which inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life;
- Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God's love by loving our neighbors as ourselves;
- Humanist teachings which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science, and warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit;
- Spiritual teachings of Earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature.

Meanwhile, citizens of Europe's high-trust countries have had it relatively easy. Germany has had little confrontational policing. The Netherlands implemented what it terms an "intelligent lockdown", closing schools and restaurants but allowing socialising with up to three visitors. There are no limits on circulating outdoors other than staying 1.5 metres apart. Mark Rutte, the prime minister, says people are "treated as adults, not as children".

As for Sweden, it has no lockdown at all. Schools and restaurants are open, though citizens are advised to avoid non-essential travel. "We use the phrase 'freedom under responsibility'," says Lars Tragardh, a Swedish historian. On Mr Hale's index Sweden and Germany were the only eu countries that never reached maximum stringency.

The Swedes and Dutch are following government recommendations: mobility is down by about 40%, according to Google data. But in France and Italy it is down about 80%. Worryingly, Dutch and Swedish covid-19 mortality rates outstrip those in neighbouring countries. The Dutch death rate per head is almost four times that in Germany. Sweden's is double that in Denmark, which has a tight lockdown.

This suggests that during epidemics trust is a double-edged sword. High-trust countries will probably do better economically, as they usually do. But in public-health terms, high trust may have lulled Dutch and Swedes into a false sense of security. For now, most are satisfied with their governments' responses. But so are most Romanians. Perhaps that will help to close Europe's trust gap.