



Shalom News North America

An instrument of hope, formation, and action concerning priority matters of social justice.



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Peace of the Season

Happy Holidays!

Late December brings us three notable cultural/religious holidays. Hanukkah, which commemorates the Jewish people's successful rebellion against the Greeks in the Maccabean War in 162 BC as well as the survival of Judaism over the many years since, begins at sunset on December 20 and ends at sunset on the 28th. Kwanzaa, a celebration of African American people, their culture and their history, begins on December 26 and ends on January 1. In between, we celebrate either Christmas or Consumas, either the awareness of God born into humanity and what that means to us, or the power that Consumo, Lord of consumerism, has over us.

May our celebration of the holidays be an expression of our counter-cultural values, our Christian heritage, and a witness of God born again in us throughout every day of our lives.



Celebrate the Winter Solstice

The night of December 21st has the longest hours of darkness for those in the northern hemisphere. Edward Hays in *Prayers for a Planetary Pilgrim*, writes, "Fearful that darkness and death would rule over the earth, our ancient forebears circled sacred fires built on hilltops and in holy places...the Old Ones danced about fires and chanted hymns to the sun's glory. They wanted to awaken the sun, lest they and all creation die in the freezing darkness of an endless winter."

Hays says that watching and waiting are important components of the winter solstice; they also mark the season of Advent for Christians soon to celebrate the birth of Jesus, the Light of the World. Unfortunately, "citizens of the 21st century, often held comfortable prisoners by the marvels of technology, can easily be out of touch with Mother Earth and her seasons. Life then becomes an endless production line, devoid of communion with cosmic realities." Instead, let us embrace cosmic incarnation at the winter solstice; let us be "one with the Old Ones who have gone before [us] and in communion with Earth at this sacred moment of changing seasons."

Economic Justice and Integrity of Creation

North American Hearings on Poverty, Wealth, and Ecology (Kairos)

From November 6 to 11, representatives from churches in Canada and the United States, joined by guests from every continent, met in Calgary, Alberta for a consultation on issues of poverty, wealth, and ecology. Some participants travelled to Fort McMurray to witness the scale and impact of the tar sands and to dialogue with local residents. After hearing testimonies on issues of social, financial, migrant labour, indigenous, and climate justice, the participants issued a call to action entitled "[There's a New World in the Making](#)." Read more [here](#).



UN Report Links Global Well-being to Environment

Improvements in the living standards of the world's poorest people are being hindered by environmental degradation and the effects of climate change, such as drought, storms, flooding, and rising sea levels, according to a major report from the UN Development Program. Sustainability must become "how we choose to live our lives," concludes the 2011 Human Development Report, which emphasizes that living conditions need not be fueled by consumption of more fossil fuels. Learn more [here](#).

Poor Countries Take Charge of Climate Response

Two years after the Copenhagen climate summit, it remains unclear how developed countries will deliver on their pledge to provide developing countries with \$100 billion a year to help them pay for, and adapt to,

global warming. In the meantime, many of the smaller and more at-risk developing countries have already adopted a variety of on-the-ground measures to combat climate change. They are making a commitment not because they have to, but because it is the right thing to do and every little bit counts. They are hoping that the richer countries, as well as developing countries that are big emitters, will follow their lead. Read more [here](#).

Keystone XL Denied Approval

President Obama has announced that he will NOT be approving the Keystone XL tar sands pipeline as most observers had expected. Instead, he sent the proposal

back to the State Department for an independent, expert, and thorough review of the pipeline's true environmental costs, which most analysts are saying will effectively kill the project. The president explicitly noted climate change, along with the pipeline route, as one of the factors that a new review would need to assess.



[Please send President Obama your thanks](#) for delaying this decision and urge him to ultimately reject Keystone XL. It is imperative that the White House, the media, and the energy giants feel an overwhelming surge of popular support for this historic decision.

Human Dignity

Slavery Today

On Dec. 6, 1865, the 13th Amendment to the Constitution was passed, abolishing slavery and involuntary servitude in the United States. While this date may be of interest primarily to history buffs, the issues are still very relevant today as we witness a modern form of slavery experienced by migrant laborers who endure inhuman working conditions and meager pay and many in the American labor force who find their wages and benefits cut back or eliminated in the name of cutting expenses or balanced budgets.

In addition to the right to peaceful assembly and association, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of self and family, including food, clothing, housing, medical care, and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment...or other lack of livelihood beyond one's control. When any of those conditions are not met, a type of slavery exists. What can we do to abolish it again?

Immigration Enforcement Efforts Breaking Families Apart

A recently released report reveals yet another devastating consequence of the enforcement-only approach to immigration in the U.S. — a startling number of children whose parents have been detained and deported are placed in foster care and face enormous barriers reuniting with their families. According to the Applied Research Center, 1 in 4

people deported in FY 2011 (nearly 100,000 people) left behind a U.S. citizen child. The report found that the odds of reuniting the families are so low that the parents “basically fall off the face of the earth when it comes to the child welfare system.” Read more [here](#).

Celebrate Human Rights

December 10 is International Human Rights Day, calling to mind the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a document proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948 as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and nations. It sets out fundamental human rights to be universally protected—rights such as freedom of thought, conscience, and religion; freedom of opinion and expression, and freedom of peaceful assembly and association.

This year, across the globe, we have seen thousands of people claiming those human rights. They have publicly demonstrated across the world. They have organized peaceful protests, they have successfully employed social media and, at times, they have faced violent repression.

Eleanor Roosevelt, one of the authors of the Declaration, reminds us that human rights begin “in small places, close to home.” Since this is one of the UN International Days that we celebrate as an international SSND community, we are invited in a special way to examine those places, close to home and world-wide, to determine what human rights need to be defended and how we can make that happen. [Click here](#) for more information and resources.

