



## **Supporting Peacemaking:**

*How U.S. local and regional religious bodies provide support to those engaged in peacemaking in particular countries*

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Where there is conflict and brokenness and injustice, many people of faith, attempting to be faithful to their religious traditions, engage in peacemaking – healing brokenness and transforming conflicts and injustices. One commonality among the religions of the world is a commitment to work for peace in all of the arenas of life: in their own lives, in families, in their religious institutions, in communities, in nations and between nations. Peace is a gift of the creator that brings healing in the midst of the brokenness, conflicts and injustices that often mark our life together on this planet.

### *Peacemaking includes:*

- developing relationships and structures that prevent or stop war and violence;
- lowering levels of hate and suspicion between people;
- healing the hurts that have occurred;
- increasing security and stability;
- providing justice for all;
- promoting economic security and fulfillment of basic needs;
- fostering reconciliation and wholeness.

Many stories can be told about people of faith in the U.S. and in all the nations of the world working for peace in their own country when there is brokenness. Here is a story from Liberia, a country in Africa.

In 1990 Liberia descended into the depths of an all-out civil war. Over the next 13 years, thousands of civilians were killed, caught in the crossfire of fighting between government forces and several rebel groups.

The conflict was also marked by violence between Muslims and Christians. There were reports that Christian rebels were cutting out the tongues and shooting the kneecaps of Muslims, obviously angering the Muslim community.

Muslim and Christian leaders acted quickly to respond to the tensions and armed conflicts. Influential Muslim leaders, and Liberian Council of Churches, formed the Interfaith Mediation Committee to build bridges of understanding between the religious communities and a strong foundation for a sustained peace in Liberia.

The Interfaith Mediation Committee later renamed the Inter-Religious Council, was a welcome presence in the war-weary nation of Liberia. The general perception of the Inter-Religious Council as a politically and factional neutral body enabled it to play a central role in negotiating peace among rebel groups and government forces. The Inter-Religious Council formed a standing committee of an equal number of Christian and Muslim leaders to engage rebel groups, political leaders in the region and diplomats to facilitate resolution of the multi-dimensional conflict in Liberia.

After three years of engagement with the principals of the conflict as well as regional and international bodies interested in brokering peace, the Inter-Religious Council assisted in calling the parties together at the Accra Peace Conference in June 2003. The Accra Peace Conference led to the resignation by Liberian President Charles Taylor, a cease-fire agreement, the establishment of a UN mission to oversee peacekeeping operations, and a provisional government where rebel groups maintained representatives.

The Inter-Religious Council continues to play a key role in sustaining the fragile peace established at the Accra Peace Conference. The Council regularly meets with rebel group leaders, provisional Liberian President Gyude Bryant and UN mission representatives. In addition the Liberian Council of Churches has been accredited to conduct civic and voter education for Liberia's 2005 presidential election scheduled to take place in October.

### ***Why do religious communities engage in peacemaking?***

The task of peacemaking is not a peripheral one for the religions of the world. It is a calling or requirement that is at the heart of communities of faith. Indeed sacred texts of the world's religions have much to teach about the need for peacemaking. They also provide wisdom and insights about the nature of peace and the task of peacemaking.

A careful study of these scriptures would be useful for anyone attempting to understand why people of faith engage in peacemaking. Two resources that might be helpful are *Peace and Justice in the Scriptures of the World Religion: Reflection on Non-Christian Scriptures* by Denise Lardner Carmody and John Tully Carmody and the *Peace Primer "Quotes from Christian and Islamic Scripture Tradition"* published by the Muslim Peace Fellowship and the Baptist Peace Fellowship [mpf@forusa.org](mailto:mpf@forusa.org) and [www.bpfna.org](http://www.bpfna.org).

A sample of these teachings:

The Dhammapada, a sacred text of Buddhism states: "A man is not just if he carries a matter by violence; no, he who distinguishes both right and wrong, who is learned and leads others, not by violence but justly and righteously, ... is called just". *Dhammapada 19/256-257*.

The Bhagavad-Gita, a sacred text of Hinduism, teaches “When I see my own people ranged, drawn near, impatient to give battle, my limbs cannot hold me and my mouth becomes dry and trembling shakes my whole body.” *Bhagavad-Gita 1:28-29*

The Qur’an, the sacred text of Islam, teaches a great deal about peace and peacemaking: “Whosoever pardons and amends, his wage is the affair of Allah, who does not love tyrants.” *Surah Shura, 40*

“Be steadfast witnesses for Allah in equity, and let not hatred of any people seduce you that you deal not justly. Deal justly, that is nearer to your duty.” *Surah Ma’idah, 8*

“The good deed and the evil deed are not alike. Repel evil with that which is better, then he between whom and you there was enmity will become like an intimate friend.” *Ha Mim, 34-35*

The Hebrew scriptures, sacred to Jews and Christians, states: “Some take pride in chariots, and some in horses, but our pride is in the name of the Lord our God.” *Psalms 20:7*

“You have plowed wickedness, you have reaped injustice, you have eaten the fruit of lies. Because you have trusted in your power and in the multitude of your warriors, therefore the tumult of war shall rise against your people and all your fortresses shall be destroyed.” *Hosea 10:13-14*

From the Rabbinic tradition important to the Jewish community, “The sword comes into the world because of justice delayed and justice perverted, and when Torah is misinterpreted.” *Pirke Avot 5:8*

The New Testament in the Christian Bible teaches: “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven;” *Matthew 5:44-45*

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.” *John 14:27*

“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” *Romans 12:21*

### ***Supporting peacemaking in other countries***

It is also true that, besides engaging in peacemaking where they live, religious people want to be supportive of peacemaking in other countries. In these situations, individuals and religious bodies often “support” the peacemaking of those in a particular country instead of actually doing it. It is important, as we say below, for those in the particular country to suggest to Americans and those from other countries what our role should be. It is not helpful or appropriate for Americans or people of other countries to support peacemaking in another country without significant consultation with those who are indigenous in that particular country.

U.S. religious institutions, including local and regional religious bodies, are often engaged in supporting peacemaking efforts in particular countries. It is also significant that the religious bodies in the U.S. engaged in supporting peacemaking in particular countries are not just national ones.

National religious bodies are engaging in supporting peacemaking as they often have the relationships with the religious bodies overseas. Yet, regional and local religious bodies in the U.S. are also supportive of peacemaking either through national bodies or directly with religious bodies overseas.

For instance, there has been an 18 year religious war in northern Uganda between rebels and the government. The story of the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative - Christians and Muslims who for seven years have come together to bridge the religious divide - is a story of persistence in peacemaking. Anglican, Roman Catholic and Muslim religious leaders have been anything but cowards in their seven-year long struggle to bring a peaceful solution to the 18-year old war that has devastated the people and many of the villages of the Acholi region of Northern Uganda. Chiefly, the ARLPI has served as a link between the LRA Rebels (Lord's Resistance Army) and the Ugandan Government, a position that has, at times, made them a target of both groups.

Pete Truax, a member of a Minnetonka, Minnesota, Roman Catholic parish sold his business in 1995 and dedicated himself to peacemaking, along with Dan Vaughn, a retired CPA from a neighboring parish. They came in touch with Monsignor Matthew Odong, rector of Sacred Heart Seminary in Uganda and Vicar General for the His Grace John Baptist Odama, Archbishop of the Gulu Diocese. Through friendship with Monsignor Odong, Vaughn and Truax became involved in supporting a seminary and finding financial support for drilling wells and various building projects.

At the request of Monsignor Odong, Truax and his colleague set about trying to raise broader awareness of the nearly two-decade war in Northern Uganda and to try to get the U.S. government to put pressure on the Ugandan government to stop the war. Working with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops to carry out this request, the retired businessmen became acquainted with Father Mike Perry, the USCCB Africa Policy advisor. In September of 2001 Bishop Wilton Gregory, Fr Perry, and several representatives from the USCCB made a trip to Uganda and met with Ugandan Roman Catholic leaders.

Archbishop Odama was invited to a major conference at the University of Notre Dame in September to tell the story of the hidden war in Uganda, the conflict, the struggles to find nonviolent solutions, and the need for international support. While the Archbishop was in the country, key meetings in Washington were arranged with high-ranking officials in the U.S. State Department and the National Security Council. Included in the meetings, along with the Archbishop of Gulu were Monsignor Odong, Don Vaughn, and Pete Truax. The work in Northern Uganda by indigenous religious leaders has been underway for seven years, but they took new hope that it was possible, with the support of local religious partners in the United States, to bring the Ugandan parties together with U.S. government officials to focus attention on the Ugandan conflict and to seek ways to address it.

The religious community in Minnesota found other ways to be support of the peacemaking efforts by religious leaders in Uganda. For example, the Immaculate Heart of Mary School Children began letter exchanges with children in Uganda; advocacy work began in congregations, and at a major 'Africa Day' high school event students were urged to write and visit their federal legislators on this issue. The University of Minnesota Newman Center, the University of St. Thomas, and Luther Seminary in Minneapolis all held meetings in the spring of 2003 with Fr. Mike Perry to discuss the Bishop's Solidarity with Africa Statement and to encourage support for the Ugandan peacemaking efforts.

# How can your congregation or religious body support peacemaking in other countries?

**Here are some ideas:**

## *Prayer and worship*

Pray for the peacemaking efforts in particular countries and study the scriptures of your faith that are applicable to the peacemaking process. Plan worship services based on peacemaking work in specific countries; inviting representatives from those areas to share their stories.

Many resources are available for planning worship services, and for encouraging people to pray for peace. The headquarters of your religious body may have helpful information, worship resources, and prayer suggestions to help guide your planning. The internet also has many resources. A few (among many) that may be helpful include:

[http://lutheran\\_peace.tripod.com/ppstart.pdf](http://lutheran_peace.tripod.com/ppstart.pdf) (Lutheran Peace Fellowship)

[http://www.mpfweb.org/91101\\_response.html](http://www.mpfweb.org/91101_response.html) (Muslim Peace Fellowship)

<http://www.pcusa.org/peacemaking/worship/worship.htm> (Presbyterian Church USA)

<http://www.shalomctr.org/> (Jewish Resources)

## *Personal Support*

Communicate regularly with those who are involved in peacemaking efforts. Listen with compassion as peacemakers share their work, their questions, their excitement and their pain. Sometimes simply being available for peacemakers to share deeply is the most important service that can be provided.

Phone calls, cards and letters, e-mail communication – all these are important in letting those involved in peacemaking know that they are not forgotten; that there are religious bodies in the U.S. and other countries that are supporting what they do. Some congregations regularly send letters, small packets, children's drawings, etc. Letters and other communications sent by those engaged in peacemaking in particular countries can be sent to your religious body to be posted and read during your worship services.

## *Education and Advocacy*

Learn about the conflicts and brokenness that require the existing peacemaking efforts. Since conflicts are multi-faceted, with many competing "truths," try to get information from a number of different sources. Take the necessary time to understand the complexities of the situation. Talk to people who are familiar with the country and the conflicts. Find people in your community from the country or region to explain their understandings of what is happening. National religious offices often have staff familiar with conflicts in many countries, or can refer you to people who can give you information. Talk to people who are involved in various sides of the conflict.

Again, good information is available on the web. One good source for basic information about countries, their histories and current situations is available from the US State Department at

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/>

Many humanitarian aid agencies have excellent material on their websites about countries in conflict. These include: Catholic Relief Services <http://www.catholicrelief.org/> and the Mennonite Central Committee <http://www.mcc.org/>

Once you have educated yourself and your faith community about the situations in particular conflict areas, learn about the policy implications for the United States. Provide information and opportunities for people in your congregations to communicate with elected officials about their concerns about the conflicts, the need for peacemaking and U.S. policies.

Several faith-based organizations work at advocacy issues. These include: Washington Office on Latin America <http://www.wola.org/> Africa Faith and Justice Network <http://afjn.cua.edu/>

### ***Interfaith Dialogue***

Particularly in areas in which religious issues are part of the conflict, develop and participate in local interfaith dialogues with members of faith traditions that are in conflict in a specific country or region. This can be helpful in understanding the complexities of the situation. A useful guide to developing interfaith dialogue is available at [http://users.online.be/interfaith\\_guidelines/](http://users.online.be/interfaith_guidelines/)

In addition, the Presbyterian Church USA has a good list of pointers, from a Christian perspective, at <http://www.pcusa.org/pcusa/wmd/eir/dialog.htm>

### ***Financial support to peacemaking efforts***

Sometimes the simplest forms of support are the most important. Money is usually in very short supply in peacemaking efforts, and raising money for particular indigenous peacemaking projects can make a great difference in the effectiveness of local peacemaking efforts. What seems like a small amount of money in the US can often provide great help to peacemaking work in other countries. Financial support also indicates to peacemakers that congregations believe in peacemaking work and are walking alongside of the work.

### ***Some other good ideas for supporting peacemaking in particular countries:***

- Send people from your religious body to a particular country to work with people from that nation in peacebuilding efforts.
- Support people from other countries engage in peacemaking to come to the U.S. to study peacemaking and conflict transformation.
- Participate in established accompaniment projects like those in the Middle East or Columbia. Accompaniers are those who physically stand with people who because of their positions are threatened with violence.
- Establish partnerships between judicatories and religious bodies in the U.S. and peacebuilding efforts in particular countries;
- Send people to a specific country to learn about the conflict in that nation so that they can make presentations in the U.S. and enlarge support for peacebuilding in that country;
- Support the education of U.S. college and seminary students on the need for peacebuilding in particular countries, including the experience of seeing the peacemaking efforts in that country.

## Providing Support that is Helpful and not Harmful

Peacemaking can often be as complicated and messy as the conflicts themselves. Here are a few ideas that may assist in the making decisions about when and how to get involved. The strategies that you choose should:

### *1. Support the stated goals of indigenous peacemakers*

Peacemaking in general is relational; it is based on respect, listening to all sides, and being able to see beyond your own viewpoint to understand the concerns of others. Supporting indigenous peacemaking also requires the capacity to move beyond your own viewpoint and to listen to all sides. This may be challenging if the conflicts seem tangled, irrational and hard to understand.

Outside support is most often useful when it arises out of discussion with and respect for the priorities and concerns of indigenous faith-based initiatives, and when there is long-term commitment to enhance the capacity of indigenous faith-based groups to be engaged in long-term peacemaking. The peacemaking process is often a long one. It is also vital that support of peacemaking reflects mutuality – an eagerness to learn from the indigenous peacemakers as well as to share with them.

Again, one of the most important tasks that U.S. religious communities can do is to continue to hold peacemakers in prayer, for both their personal and professional lives.

### *2. Reflect “standing with” rather than “doing for”*

Keep in mind that you are providing support to peacemakers, not doing the peacemaking yourselves. Concentrate on building relationships, not on supplying solutions. It is important to recognize and value that we are playing a secondary role of support to those who have the knowledge and the commitment to work on peacemaking in their own situations

Respect the integrity of the religious witness already in that context even if it is not your own. Cultural and social realities may make peacemaking decisions look very different from decisions made in our culture.

Be prepared to provide support in what may seem like very small ways. One very respected person of faith who worked with indigenous peacemakers for decades said, at the end of his career, that sometimes the most important things he did was to take paper clips and computer disks to peacemakers in situations where they needed them (and asked for them!).

Continually check with those engaged in peacemaking to determine if your efforts are still faithful, mutual and effective. Be willing to make a commitment for the long term, recognizing that the needs might change over time.

## *Steps to Take as you Begin to Support Peacemaking in Particular Countries:*

1. If you know what country you wish to support, broaden your contacts beyond the people who convinced you to get involved in that country. In nations where there are conflicts, make sure you get suggestions from the various parties to the conflict about what might be helpful. Check with others including your denominational or faith group national offices.
2. If you don't know which country you want to support, check with your denominational or faith group national offices for their suggestions.
3. Learn about the conflict. Talk to people in your local universities and colleges. Go to websites on the country.
4. Ask for the names of people and agencies in particular countries from your denomination or ecumenical agencies (like Church World Service) of people who are engaged in peacemaking..
5. Contact entities engaged in peacemaking in particular countries to ask how you can help. Do a fact-finding trip to the country to find out how to help. Do not come with a plan already formed.
6. Continually check with those engaged in peacebuilding to determine if your efforts are still faithful, mutual and effective. Be willing to make a commitment for the long term, recognizing that the needs might change over time.
7. Recognize that much of our work can begin at home, monitoring the economic and military policies and practices of our own government and those of multi-national institutions such as the World Trade Organization. These institutions can have an enormous positive or negative impact on the prospects for peace and justice in other countries, and it is the responsibility of U.S. people of faith to be vigilant and prophetic in regard to the actions of these entities.

Additional copies of this resource are available from the Churches' Center for \$1.00.

Additional information is available at the websites of the Churches' Center for Theology and Public Policy ([www.cctpp.org](http://www.cctpp.org)) and Church World Service (<http://www.churchworldservice.org>).

Two other resources that will be helpful in supporting peacemaking in particular countries are available at the websites and in a printed version:

***Living as Peacemakers in a Broken World* - \$.50**

Two-session study resource that can be used by groups of youth, young adults or adults.

**The Role of U.S. Regional and Local Religious Bodies in Supporting Peacemaking Efforts in Other Countries** – *A Shalom Paper*, the journal of the Churches' Center for Theology and Public Policy - \$3.00  
For more in-depth individual study

To order or for more information, call 202-885-8648 or write [info@nrldi.org](mailto:info@nrldi.org) or Churches' Center for Theology and Public Policy, 4500 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Washington, D.C. 20016.

You are also encouraged to subscribe to the United States Institute's Peace Religion and Peacemaking listserv by sending an email to [rstuebner@usip.org](mailto:rstuebner@usip.org). In addition Church World Service has several networks that may be helpful to your efforts. Go to [www.churchworldservice.org](http://www.churchworldservice.org) to learn more.