

Promoting front-line Family Care throughout the Anglican Communion

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RECONCILIATION AND THE FAMILY



Photo: Benny Gool.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu writes: We humans learn mainly through imitating, copying examples; we learn by aping others. That is why Jesus assumed our human nature, to be as one of us, this Pioneer, as Hebrews puts it, to show us how to be truly human, and so He described Himself as 'the Way'. He washed the feet of His somewhat dim disciples, carrying out the task of the most menial slave – He did it to set them an example. I have laboured this point because I intend to tell part of the fascinating story of my motherland South Africa, to say that God, with an amazing divine sense of humour, set up South Africa amazingly, unbelievably as – yes – a beacon of hope. Most people would say, "Oh, come off it – South Africa a beacon of hope – stuff and nonsense! If it was to become an example, then it would be how to become a pariah shunned by most of the civilised world and of how a country could rush down the precipice to perdition with such reckless abandon."

Yes – many in the world expected South Africa to go under spectacularly in a catastrophic racial bloodbath. They could see no other way. Then the totally unexpected happened. Instead of seeing a people destroy themselves in an orgy of revenge and retribution, the world was awed by the magnanimity of a Nelson Mandela. He should by rights have been consumed by bitterness and anger and a lust for revenge. Instead he spoke of forgiveness and reconciliation. And he had the credibility bestowed by his sufferings – 27 years of incarceration – to inspire his people to walk the path of forgiveness and reconciliation. The world looked on in amazement at the workings of our Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Thus it was that South Africa emerged in this regard as a beacon of hope for lands emerging from conflict.

Nelson Mandela is a spectacular example of the spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation. But we were humbled to witness other examples from so-called ordinary people. In my theology no one is ordinary. They did what seemed to come naturally; to forgive, even sometimes to embrace their former tormentors. They must have learned much of this behaviour in their homes. Babalwa Mhlauli was a teenager when her father was brutally murdered by the apartheid Special Branch, together with three of his comrades. Their car was set alight. He had 43 wounds in his body. His right hand had been chopped off – discovered later preserved in alcohol at the police station and used to intimidate those who were arrested. Babalwa described how the police had harassed her family. Aware of the brutal killing of her father, she said to a hushed packed city hall in East London, "We would like to forgive, but we want to know whom to forgive." She was still too young to have developed this attitude on her own. She must have learned it at home.

Another example, this time of a white South African, is Beth Savage. She had been taught from an early age – unusual in South Africa then – to respect all people regardless of race.

She was badly wounded in a hand-grenade attack on a Christmas dinner party where many of the white guests were killed. She spent several months in intensive care and when she was discharged could not bathe, clothe or feed herself. Her children had to help her do these things. She told the Commission that the experience, which had left her in this condition with shrapnel still in her body, had enriched her life. Amazing – and then she went on to say that she wished to meet the perpetrator of this dastardly deed in a spirit of forgiveness. Wonderfully, she wanted to forgive him. Then – quite staggeringly – she went on to say she hoped he would forgive her.

It was because of people like Babalwa and Beth that South Africa did not experience the widely-predicted racial bloodbath. It was normal, so-called ordinary people who demonstrated this willingness to forgive. They give hope that the most intractable problems can be resolved, that they have been imbued with this spirit of forgiveness in their homes and have set examples that can be emulated.

A dear friend given to aphorisms likes saying, "Anything that has happened is possible". May it indeed be so for our world wracked by so much conflict and strife.



Reaching out: Rainbow Nation.

CANADA



Becoming Peacemakers in our Families

On Good Friday and Easter Sunday, we reflect on what it means that the Prince of Peace lays down His life for us. Jesus calls us as His followers to be peacemakers, yet how often do we stop to consider what it means to be peacemakers in our own families?

'I therefore... beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.' This passage from Paul's letter to the Ephesians (Ch 4) speaks to all of us as followers of Jesus. While often applied to our communal life in the Church, it has profound significance for our communal life in families.

There are so many ways in which the burdens of contemporary life affect us. As a family therapist, I have frequently encountered these challenges which can result in such conflict: stress and anxiety, time (mis-)management, illness (physical and emotional), addictions, financial pressures, sexual difficulties or abuse, parenting differences, grandparent and extended family problems (including issues of ageing), value differences.

Most conflicts in the family are rooted in communication breakdown. In today's economically stressful time, financial stress and poor money management can become major factors. This is doubly compounded if a family is suffering from work layoffs and unemployment.

I frequently hear concerns about differing parenting styles and values, and also grandparenting issues, as being triggers for communication breakdown. But one of the most serious factors is the mismanagement of

anger. If physical, verbal or emotional abuse prevails in a family, then communication is severely damaged. Bullying has no place in a family setting, just as it has no place in the school or workplace. Likewise, if either withholding (refusing to be honest) or stonewalling (refusing to negotiate) are used as methods of non-communication; then communication is broken or irreparably blocked.

Peacemaking requires a combination of patience + listening + compassion + willingness to reconnect. Peacemaking is hard work, but is an essential dimension of our calling as Christians. Jesus said "blessed are the peacemakers", and throughout the history of the Church, those who have entered into conflict situations in order to make peace have been esteemed. Peacemaking is not avoidance of conflict, it is engaging with conflict in order to seek understanding and just relations.

God is present in the sacred moments of people connecting with one another, seeking healing and peace. We need to pray for the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, to give us the 'peace that passes all understanding'. To become peacemakers, we can pray for God to give us a gentle spirit, to guide us in speaking truthfully in love, to be able to listen deeply to the other (in other words, to hear well), to have the will to make peace, and to be open to a process of forgiveness. In these ways, we can welcome Christ, the Prince of Peace, into our homes.

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KENYA

From my own experience as a priest, I have encountered many families who do not see eye-to-eye with their own members: either husband and wife are not on good terms, or the children. Sometimes the children are aligned to either father or mother; parents-in-law are in dispute with their sons and daughters-in-law or other relatives.

On my first Sunday service, I encountered a family which was clearly divided. Normally, the people move out of the church during the recessional hymn, led by the priest, and then greet each other outside the church, making a circle before sharing the word of Grace. I noticed a man skipping an elderly lady and others in the queue. When I inquired why he did not greet some people, I was told they were in the same family and had a difference. So I arranged meetings with them to know their relationship with God and with their family. The bone of contention seemed very minor to me. Family A had bright children in school and good jobs, while Family B had average children and lesser or no jobs. I reliably learnt that this enmity had caused the loss of life of one of the family through witchcraft. Members of both these families are strong members of the congregation, holding key positions in the Church and professing Christ as their Lord and Saviour.

I called a reconciliation meeting and opened with the Lord's Prayer, emphasising, while closing our eyes and again when they were open, 'Forgive me as I have forgiven others.' I chose texts to be read by both families. After two hours of fellowship, there was a breakthrough; a new relationship was established and reconciliation was achieved. Now the family is intact, friendly and accommodating each member.

Reconciliation is hard to achieve. One reason is that a family member is not ready to forgive and another is not ready to embrace humility. In Christian tradition, humility ranks high. The appreciation of humility springs from the prophetic conviction that humans are made of dust, totally dependent and sinful, and have nothing to be proud of except God's being mindful of them. So in any given situation no one should count him/herself right, but thank God for forgiving them. Emphasis on forgiveness and embracing humility is the key to reconciliation.

If reconciliation is effected properly in families and between person to person, community to community, nation to nation, then there will be no ethnic wars such as happened in Kenya and elsewhere. This will also entail reconciliation to God, our maker and the provider of all that we often quarrel about.

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ARGENTINA



Happy Couples – Marriage Encounter.

Photo: Mariano Carrera.

Anglican Marriage Encounter

‘Love does not consist in gazing at each other but in looking outward together in the same direction.’

Antoine de Saint-Exupery

Eduardo G. was sitting in my office and recalled the incident that had happened six months before. He had just got home from work and Maria, his wife, told him that she felt that they were not talking and communicating enough. Eduardo said that he had had a long day and wasn't in the mood to argue with her. All he wanted was to watch TV alone. Maria left the room without saying a word. Now Eduardo was telling me, with irrepressible pain, that they were divorcing. A whole family was tearing apart.

Cold statistics say that in the City of Buenos Aires, 50% of married couples will divorce. Currently, most divorces occur between people aged 35-45 after an average of ten years' marriage. Until recently, this average was 20 years.

Couples now do not marry in their 20s, but postpone formalising the link until they are in their 30s. In 1960, only 7% of the couples were not legally married. In 1990 it grew to 18% and now is over 30%.

There is a crisis in the institution of marriage, even for those couples who

cohabit. To deal with the pressures that modern life puts on couples, we have implemented a special programme called EMA – acronyms of the Spanish words for Anglican Marriage Encounter. Starting some 15 years ago, it has been a great success. God restores couples and families through EMA, bringing healing and offering a second chance to start again.

During the weekend, couples are helped in an atmosphere of confidentiality to look inwardly at themselves, to communicate with each other and to realise the strength they have as a couple.

After this, we provide a follow-up which deepens the topics discussed during those 48 hours. As a local church, we also offer spiritual challenge through house groups and an Alpha course.

We believe that if they are reconciled as individuals and as a couple, the restoration gets to their children. Yet sometimes this is not enough. So the programme includes helping the children to improve communication with their parents through the Youth Group.

We offer tools to the family that encourage dialogue, mutual understanding and forgiveness, so that they may *look outward together in the same direction*. This is the basis for them to face and overcome

together problems as they occur. When two people renew their love and energy through joint projects, attend to mutual needs and expectations, act as a team trusting each other, and find ways to retain their bond, updated and with re-enchancement, then they are heading the right way.

The most important thing is to make the determination to love and support each other. I have witnessed how God breathes new life into families, as in the vision of Ezekiel in the Valley of Dry Bones.

Although Eduardo and Maria's marriage ended up in divorce before they could be helped by a Marriage Encounter, there are many stories that have a happy ongoing (not ending!). This is the case of Rodrigo and Sabrina, who were invited to an EMA by some friends. They were heading towards a divorce after eight years of marriage. After that incredible weekend, they took up the challenge to persevere and after three years they do not regret the decision they took. Nor do the rest of the family.

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HONG KONG



Marriage Camps co-organised by the Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui Welfare Council and the Church often cover issues on conflict resolution and reconciliation.

Photo: HKSKH Welfare Council.

Reconciliation in the Family starts from reconciliation inside oneself

*Make me a channel of your peace,
Where there is hatred, let me bring your love,
Where there is injury, your pardon Lord,
Where there is doubt, true faith in You.*

Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui Welfare Council has adopted the prayer of St Francis as its theme song, signifying its mission in fulfilling people's needs. As our society progresses and develops, people's emerging needs have changed from the tangible – food, shelter and physical safety – to intangible ones such as love, sense of security, and faith. Such needs are often found in personal issues faced by our clients and their families, and reconciliation is one of the most prominent issues in this area.

A man was recently referred to our counselling service because of his anxiety problem. He could not focus on his work and had significant weight loss. He related his anxiety problem to his unsatisfactory marital relationship, as he and his spouse quarrelled frequently over trivial matters. Despite understanding the importance of acceptance and communication in marriage, he found it difficult to control his anger and anxiety during these disputes.

A social worker noticed that one of her home-care clients, a 90-year-old lady suffering from a terminal illness, had mood swings with idiosyncratic fears. Upon further probing, the client described continuing conflicts with her son. However, she was unwilling to apologise for these, despite her regrets. She felt unsettled after her 70-year-old son was admitted to an aged-care home, and had not seen him since.

A school social worker met a student's mother on the school campus, and found that the mother was in distress. She complained about her son's behaviour – his truancy and running away from home. The son also had complaints about her. Their relationship was tense, as both were filled with anger and bitterness.

From our experiences in working with individuals and families, there is a paradoxical phenomenon in reconciliation: the road to reconciliation with others is built upon the foundation of reconciliation with one's inner self. During our intervention, a key process is to lead the clients to meet with the different parts of their inner self. Often, they realise that these inner parts were fighting against each other, or one suppressing the other. The first step in reconciliation begins when the client is

led to encounter each inner part and acknowledge and recognise it.

The man realised that his uncontrollable anger and anxiety in marital disputes originated from his own feelings and self-perception of uselessness, which could be traced to issues in his original family when young. As he looked deeper, following the counsellor's guidance, he saw fear behind his anger. Moreover, he realised that behind his fear was a yearning for love and security, and his anger was in fact a strong desire to protect himself from being hurt. Such discovery has enabled the client to reconcile the angry self and the fearful self, and he has become less reactive to the trivial disputes with his spouse.

Behind her ambivalence, the old lady has an inner shame and guilt pulling her away from the wish to reconcile with her son. After acknowledging the presence of such feelings, the shame and guilt became smaller and more manageable. The social worker helped the lady to work out different approaches of reconciliation. Eventually she wrote a letter to her son and immediately felt relieved.

Before their joint interview, the school social worker has spent sessions working with the mother and the son separately, helping each one to encounter their own inner parts. During the joint interview, both were willing to listen to each other through the ears of the 'positive parts', such as yearning for love and respect. After this, the clients were willing to engage in active listening and genuine communication to improve their relationships.

In addition to working out reconciliations in marital conflict, reconciliations at a broader level are found in various services of the Welfare Council, such as elderly services, palliative care, mental-health services, services for children and youth. Our social workers, counsellors and priests help the clients first to reconcile with their inner self in order to bring forth their inner peace and enable reconciliation with others.

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AUSTRALIA

For the sake of the children

Interpersonal conflicts can be pervasive for a number of families who are unable to reconcile their differences when separation occurs. In Australia, 33% of marriages end in divorce (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008), and divorce and separation are arguably the most common transitions that families will experience. In response to this trend and in keeping with the changing nature of the Family Law system in Australia, there is an increasing demand for post-separation programmes. Anglicare WA Separation Services, through a range of programmes, supports these separated families for the sake of the children.

Why is it important to support these families? We know that separation and divorce can be a very difficult time. We also know that when parents can agree about the best interests of their children and can communicate well together, the outcomes for all members of the family are usually very positive. On the other hand, when parents continue to argue about their children, they can feel caught in the middle of the conflict and show signs of distress.

Anglicare WA Separation Services sees the importance of a holistic approach to family support, which includes supporting the parents with individual counselling sessions,

educational groups and family dispute resolution. This can assist parents to deal with their own hurts, learn new and more effective ways to communicate and develop strategies to work co-operatively as parents.

Supporting children directly through therapeutic group sessions and individual counselling also assists children to understand that the separation is not their fault and realise that they are not alone. It is also critical for children to have a voice in matters that concern them. So children in Anglicare WA programmes are invited to share their feelings and experiences of the separation and have this shared with their parents via a specialist consultant. Through this process, there can be a significant reduction in acrimony between parents in conflict and more positive outcomes for children, such as more successful contact arrangements.

Families going through separation and divorce do not 'break up' but rather are restructured and reorganised. Separation is a time for redirection and re-equilibrium. Separation services programmes assist families to deal with the emotional and psychological aspect of the separation, gain insight and feel empowered. When separating parents can successfully negotiate their way through the myriad of emotions and tasks and begin to see



For the sake of the children.

the trees from the forest, more positive post-separation relationships can develop. Unresolved, enduring parental conflict violates children's core needs. At Anglicare WA Separation Services there is an unapologetic mindfulness of the children and for the sake of the children all our services are geared towards supporting parents to reconcile their differences.

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ENGLAND



Far from home.

Runaways

Coventry is a city rebuilt after the devastating effects of World War II. A mishmash of old and new buildings, grey concrete and yellowing bricks, it is here that The Children's Society's has set up Safe in the City Coventry – a project that focuses on supporting young runaways.

Like all of the Society's projects, Safe in the City Coventry is fulfilling a local need.

Children and young people in the area are running away on an increasingly frequent basis. Young people like 14-year-old Amber (not her real name).

When Amber was six months old, her dad went to prison. From then on, he was often in prison. She recalls, "I was at primary school and we'd have a dad's day, and all I'd be thinking was, 'where's my dad?' I felt left out." She says that she always wanted to have a relationship with her father. It seems that this simple childhood dream is behind a lot of her frustration.

At 11, it all became too much. Her dad was out of prison, he had another family and the relationship she was trying to build up with him wasn't working. She knew her brother was using cannabis to help him feel calm so she decided to experiment. Soon she claims she became paranoid and the pressure for her to have a relationship with her dad was growing.

When asked what she is proud of achieving since she has been working with The Children's Society, Amber is direct: "I haven't been arrested since December."

When the pressure got too much, Amber started stealing cars. It made her forget; gave her the buzz of doing something bad – until the police caught her.

The Children's Society started working with Amber after she ran away again. She attended the Reunite project, which helped her to meet

other young people who were in a similar situation. She also met Beth, her project worker. Beth is firm with Amber. She is a positive role model she can look up to. She is the first person Amber talks to when she has a problem. And this year she has still had a lot of problems.

Things sometimes have to get worse before they can get better. In February, Amber took an overdose, leading to an overnight stay in hospital and a referral to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services. This was the turning point. With Beth's support, Amber has slowly got back on track. While the relationship she wants with her dad has not happened yet, Amber has built bridges with her mum. There is less shouting in the house, they listen to each other now and talk a lot more. She thinks about the consequences before she does something.

Amber attends a special project that works with children who have been involved in car crime and is learning car maintenance. This has inspired Amber to set up a women's-only garage in the future. To meet her, you don't doubt that she can achieve this. She is bright and funny and under Beth's guidance she is gaining confidence.

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IRELAND



Building relationships: children play at a contact centre.

Photo: Mothers' Union.

Reconciliation in separated families – Contact centres

In the mid 90s, a group of Mothers' Union members from Northern Ireland planned a place where parents and children who no longer live together could meet and spend time in each other's company in warmth and comfort. With the aid of the Mothers' Union in the diocese, in parishes and from Mary Sumner House, the dream became a very successful Contact Centre.

The Central Belfast Child Contact Centre is sited in a parish centre which is easily accessed by the whole community. Its aim is to provide a child-friendly meeting place which encourages good relations between separated parents and their children. It is also hoped that the parents will benefit by these arrangements, and many recognise that they must develop a good working relationship for the sake of their children. The fact that a large number of families coming to the Centre have

then been able to arrange access and outings away from it is a measure of its success.

The Centre is staffed by a part-time social worker and a volunteer team of over 30 Mothers' Union members and some husbands. All volunteers are vetted and attend regular trainings as well as social team-building events. They provide refreshments and encourage the separated parent to use the toys and play areas to help build a good relationship with their children. There is no charge.

Visits to the Contact Centre are arranged through referrals made by a solicitor, social worker or Court Children's Officer. The Contact Centre does not make written or verbal reports about the parents or children, other than noting dates and times of attendance. However, if staff or volunteers believe that a child may be at risk then a report to the referrer may be prepared.

The Centre is very busy and demand is constant. One father travels from Scotland,

another from England, some come from just round the corner. The volunteers feel they are appreciated by most of the families and are often told so by parents and children. It is a demanding role which is sometimes difficult, but the rewards are in seeing children flourish and grow in confidence.

One Dad said, "My daughter is eight – we might never have met if you hadn't helped me. Now I know and love her and her Mum is no longer against me being involved in my child's life." Volunteers have noted that sometimes their work in the Centre helps the parent's relationship and as one said, "Against the background of broken marriages and single parents struggling to bring up children, every good visit makes my role as a volunteer worth every minute."

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Corrymeela

Background Note

Northern Ireland is one of the four countries of the United Kingdom and shares a border with the Republic of Ireland. It was created as a distinct division of the United Kingdom in 1921 when the Republic of Ireland broke away following a War of Independence. The majority of the population in Northern Ireland – mainly Protestant by religion and Unionist in politics – preferred to be part of the UK as British citizens. A minority – mainly Roman Catholic and Irish Nationalist in politics – wished to be part of the Republic.

In 1969, groups on both sides demonstrated that they were capable of seeking to impose an armed solution to this problem and the British army was brought in as peacekeepers between these two communities. Northern Ireland was for 38 years the site of a violent and bitter conflict.

That the churches were perceived by some observers as being major contributors to the problem, was challenged by the work and witness of a variety of inter-church groups, chief amongst which was The Corrymeela Community, a Christian charity established over 40 years ago and a pioneer in enabling Christians of all denominations to re-evaluate their faith and their politics. The Community's activities continue to be essential in much more peaceful times.

From its Ballycastle Centre on the Northern Irish coast and its Belfast city centre base, Corrymeela works across the whole of Northern Ireland, and across all sectors of society. It is a 'safe space' where individuals, families, groups and communities from diverse backgrounds can meet each other in an atmosphere of trust and acceptance and where differences can be acknowledged, explored and accepted.

The Ballycastle Centre hosts approximately 5,000 people each year who take part in individually-designed residential programmes. A

further 1,500 participate in day programmes or come as visitors, and around 900 people come to the Knocklyed residential centre. The people are primarily from Northern Ireland but also come from the Republic of Ireland, Great Britain, America and Europe. Groups come from schools, local communities, churches, youth clubs; people come as members of families, carers, victims, prisoners' families, politicians, ex-paramilitaries and citizens involved in work for reconciliation.

The groups and people have the opportunities to engage in dialogue, be involved in building a sense of inclusive community, listen to different stories and perspectives, share their experiences, explore alternative ways of moving out of violence and finding new ways forward together. Staff, volunteers, and members all learn from each other and find mutual support. Much of Corrymeela's work with families is focused on the summer. Not only do Protestant and Catholic families come from all over Northern Ireland, but there are families from ethnic minorities and families who are refugees and asylum seekers, expressing a new diversity to our society and bringing a new enrichment.

Volunteers of every age turn up from all around the world to support the full schedule, and the various family, youth and community groups as always bring bountiful energy and creativity to the experience. With trips to the beach, water games, arts and crafts, countless games and summer concerts, there is always something for everyone.

Witness of a volunteer

"Back again having just returned from a week's volunteering with the Corrymeela Community being what is called the 'Cover' person. What this involves is basically being responsible for health and safety and hospitality in the Centre. If there's a fire, the Cover sorts it. If there is an accident, the Cover sorts it. If there are visitors to the Centre wanting a guided tour, the Cover sorts it ...and so on – a support person who is watchful rather than busy. I say a week's volunteering but what I really mean is a week of listening to some of the most heart-rending, love-filled, hope-inducing stories I have heard in ages ...a week of witnessing love in action as teenage boys are shown 'good touching' by being taught to massage their mums; as young children experience gentle care at the hands of men when significant male figures are either missing or the cause of great pain in their lives ...a week of leading and being led in simple acts of worship where the presence of God was palpable, even when the name of God was never uttered. What joy – what unspeakable joy – and I am left wondering who was the volunteer here ...me or the groups that came to Corrymeela. I certainly felt more cared for than caring – and the fire alarm never went off once!"

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Puppets - a tool for reconciliation.

Photo: Mothers' Union.

Working with Puppets

I have been working for many years in the area of reconciliation in Northern Ireland, as a member of the Corrymeela Community as well as within the Church of Ireland, and at international gatherings such as the Lambeth Conference.

Generally, the training sessions I lead use interactive and experiential ways of examining similarity and difference, learning more about our own and others' identity and our own responses to conflict.

One of the creative tools I most readily employ is puppetry. I first started using hand puppets in my work in the early 1980s and never cease to be amazed at their effectiveness, whether in the presentation of a story, or in a workshop addressing sensitive issues around prejudice, sectarianism, racism and reconciliation. In a workshop, participants are asked to look at all the puppets, all of which are wearing a 'badge', be that skin colour, gender, age or disability; 'clothing' indicating possible religious affiliation or other badges promoting issues such as fair trade or their support for a political party, or some other group. All of them will live in the same community as the group/operators. Participants are free to choose one puppet,

practise operating it, think about the character and give her/him a name. Then they must decide if they were born here; if not, why are they here and for how long? Where does s/he live? What is life like for him/her? How do they feel about living where they live? When they are ready, they take a few minutes each to introduce their puppet or to speak through their puppet telling the others a story about them, who they are, where they live, what life is like for them. When everyone has had some time to introduce their character, they consider how the puppets might relate to one another and what sort of story they together might tell... the results are sometimes quite extraordinary.

Participants in these sessions have shared their learning about the different attitudes and anxieties around similarity and difference within themselves and their group; their 'waking up' to difficult issues generally kept hidden within the Church and their discovery of the many creative ways to get a message across about sectarianism and other forms of prejudice.

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information on making and using
the puppets as well as scripts see
www.puppetwoman.org**

MELANESIAN BROTHERHOOD



Reconciliation drama: acting out the parable of the Lost Son.

Photo: R. Carter.

Blessed are the Peacemakers

In the conflict that broke out in the Solomon Islands in 2000, it was the Anglican religious communities, both Sisters (The Sisters of Melanesia, and the Sisters of the Church) and the Brothers (The Melanesian Brotherhood and the Society of St Francis) who very bravely became peacemakers and symbols of hope to the nation. During the conflict, they crossed enemy lines, carried the wounded for medical treatment and the dead for burial. They had searched for the missing and used their trucks to bring food and medical supplies to women and children. They managed to negotiate the release of hostages, and members of the Melanesian Brotherhood had even camped in the no-man's-land between enemy lines to try and convince the opposing militant factions that a better way was possible. In the aftermath of the conflict, they helped in the disarmament process, removing and destroying guns and weapons so that they could never be used again. In 2003, seven members of the Melanesian Brotherhood were taken hostage by one of the rebel groups. Anglicans prayed for them around the world, but three months later, when an Australian-led military intervention arrived in the Solomon Islands, it was learnt that these seven Brothers had been tortured and murdered. These Brothers' longing for peace and the sacrifice they had made became for many a catalyst for peace and reconciliation in the nation.

The process of healing within the community took a long time, and for the nation even longer and is still taking place. We do not forgive and forget. If we forgive, it is by painfully remembering and trying to become all that those whom you have lost would have wanted for us – trying to be the people that they inspire us to become.

In their work for peace, many of our community had witnessed extreme brutality. In the process of healing, as we remembered those who had died and the traumatic events that many of the community had witnessed, we became aware both of the desolation and damage the violence had caused but also of all that led to consolation and hope. Describing the experiences of trauma they had been through, people identified how

they feared violence would happen again; how often their thoughts and dreams were disturbed and full of sorrow or fear; how they felt angry and sometimes unable to control that anger; how a smell or a taste or a touch or a noise could remind them of all they had been through; how events would repeat themselves over and over again in their memories; how they felt restless or lethargic or ill or distant from those around them; how they could not understand how God had abandoned them; how they felt this feeling of guilt and dread.

When these same Brothers and Sisters were asked what strategies brought them hope and healing, so much of what they shared was in fact what I can only describe as Christian grace. They said:

"I feel so thankful for life"

"Prayer helps, praying for others and being prayed for and the Holy Eucharist"

"People who love and care for me without condition"

"Creative activities"

"The forgiveness of God"

"The support of the community and knowing we belong"

"Realising that something good is still possible and can come out of all of this".

We began to realise more and more how the healing of memories had such an important spiritual dimension. Somehow our story needed to find its meaning in Christ's own story.

Forgiveness is most difficult when the perpetrators of some of the most brutal acts do not even admit they are wrong or any responsibility for the pain they have caused. There is no answer to this. But as I meet those Brothers who suffered and read again their list of strategies, I realise that healing and forgiveness are a mystery and a miracle of grace. It is not the settling of an account or based on a balance of logic; it is freely offered and undeserved. This gift is not always received, but it is a hand held out against all the odds in the hope of final restoration. I think of the father of the Lost Son watching and waiting. There is profound pain in that waiting, which is the result

of the sin which has violated the relationship, but there is an even greater love in the waiting, for it is also an inner realisation that the love of God is still more powerful than the worst wrong.

If you ask us how this Community can forgive those who murdered our Brothers, I do not know; and yet when I see Christ in my Brothers I realise they are holding no hatred or bitterness, but are free in a way the perpetrators are not. Thus strangely even hatred can be transformed into compassion and mercy for those who are still prisoners.

What did we learn from this conflict? What are we still trying to learn?

- The reconcilers must themselves be reconciled. The community itself refused to be divided on ethnic lines but remained an inclusive community of mixed tribal and language groups. The Communities believe that a plan which is embarked upon in hostility and division will not bare good fruit.
- Shared leadership. It was very significant that not only the community reflected a mix of language and tribal groups but also the leadership, with a leadership drawn from those very different tribal groups that in the nation were in conflict.
- Forgiveness. Many of those who came to the Brotherhood were actually seeking not only peace but forgiveness. They came to the church because they were seeking the way of breaking with the violence of the actions they had experienced or been part of.
- Unless the younger members of the society are taken into the community decision-making processes and empowered, they will remain alienated and easily manipulated into violence. By attracting and empowering that very disaffected age-group, the religious communities have shown the vitality and potential for this very group to become the community builders.
- The traditional signs and rituals of faith have a part to play in peacemaking. Within Melanesian society, ceremony, ritual and symbolic action and objects have as much power as words. In the role of peacemaking these actions are vital community signs of rites of passage and of sacred authority to bring change. For example, those returning guns did so in the context of prayer. They washed their hands publicly in 'blessed Holy Water'. Returned guns were exorcised and prayed over before being destroyed. Those haunted by memories of their torture needed to be prayed over. The funeral of the seven martyred Brothers became in itself part of the symbolism of bringing peace and new life out of their tragic deaths.

Revd Richard Carter was the Chaplain to the Melanesian Brotherhood. He lived and worked in the Solomon Islands from 1987-2005. He became a Melanesian Brother himself in 2000. He is currently working as a priest in London.

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ISRAEL/PALESTINE



Breaking down barriers: leaders of the future.

Photo Musalaha Project.

Musalaha Ministry of Reconciliation

Families as a whole can have a greater impact in society than an individual. Fathers influence as leaders in the community, while mothers engage in social work and the youth and children in their schools and youth groups. Israeli and Palestinian societies are family-oriented. Musalaha Ministry of Reconciliation has taken the potential of the family and is training Israeli and Palestinian families to become agents of reconciliation who will transform society. That's why every other year Musalaha takes more than 100 people out of the country for their Family Leadership Conference. This Conference seeks to fulfill Musalaha's vision to equip and empower leaders from Israeli and Palestinian communities to form leadership skills and become reconcilers in their societies. Musalaha trains these leaders together with their families because Israeli and Palestinian societies are structured around the family unit. As the family grows together as reconcilers, they can together impact all sectors of their societies for change that brings about peace and justice.

The Family Leadership Conference serves as a starting point for networking opportunities, as people begin to establish relationships with those from the 'other side'. The language of 'us versus them' is deconstructed to provide an open space for a new definition of 'we'.

Every second day the theory and practice of Musalaha is presented through teachings, workshops and family interactions. The Director and an Israeli Pastor serve as the teachers and leaders of the Conference. The week's events are divided into different segments. One

section is devoted to building relationships between families from different backgrounds, focusing on the theme in Ephesians 2 of breaking down walls in order to create new identities. Another lecture presents a theology of reconciliation rooted in the nature of God as found in 1 John 4, which is love. Participants explore and discuss how the socio-economic and political climates affect the process of reconciliation.

Along with the teaching, time is spent discussing obstacles to reconciliation as a process of engaging with one another and learning about forgiveness. Participants break up into small groups as they study Jesus' teaching on forgiveness as written in Matthew. We have found this activity to be difficult because many people are accustomed to forgiveness only after certain expectations of repentance are met. But Jesus' words are about an impossible forgiveness, a forgiveness that does not require repentance but rather gives birth to it. Many attempt to bury their pain and struggle, digging up bitter emotions. Some are sometimes surprised by the iceberg-like structure of their anger, including one Palestinian leader who discovered his deep-seeded hurt stemming from damage done to his village and his people. Israelis and Palestinians experience the transforming catharsis as they are forced to sit face to face and allow dehumanisation and injustice, oppression and victimisation, to encounter one another and be overcome.

"It was good to listen to my brothers on the other side," said an Israeli leader. "On a personal level we didn't have much to forgive because we had not met before. But we practised forgiveness together by sharing." He saw the challenging experience as a call to move deeper: "We

need to get down to business. We need to build relationships, because we don't need to stay just with reconciliation, but to take that forward. We must now go forward."

On the last night of the Conference, everyone gathers together for Communion and the youth distribute the bread and wine as the sacramental meal broken and shared by Israelis and Palestinians. Communion not only represents the symbolic ingesting of the life and way of Jesus, but also embodies the open sharing of Jesus who invited everyone to his table.

"For the parents it was very touching," said a Palestinian pastor. "I was deeply touched because we want to pass on a legacy, not only for our kids but for the next generation. And I watched my children living in that new reality and believing in it."

Many of Musalaha's leaders, who attend these conferences, not only have children who are active in reconciliation activities, but who are also becoming young leaders in Musalaha's programmes. Most of the local counsellors at our Children's Camps are the teenagers who have attended our family conferences.

Reconciliation is the fertile ground in which forgiveness is made possible, and intolerance is tempered with the reality of our neighbour's suffering. In order to overcome old prejudices we must be converted to a new one: the prejudice of love for the other whose face we are now coming to see, whose name we are now coming to understand, and whose story we are now coming to hear.

Church Mission Society (CMS) supports Musalaha with annual grants and the CMS Transcultural Manager for Europe and Middle East also provides technical support and is a member of the board.

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COLUMBIA



Bogotá.

Photo: Y Care International.

Background Note

In over 20 countries around the world, children are direct participants in war. An estimated 200,000-250,000 children are serving as soldiers for rebel groups or government forces in countries such as Afghanistan, Colombia, DR Congo, Uganda, Iraq, Myanmar and Sudan.

Child Soldiers

Child soldiers in Colombia who escape from armed groups face a life of stigma and fear. But Y Care International's YMCA partner in Bogotá is challenging this and helping them to rebuild their lives and take their place in society. This rehabilitation is taking place during a live, armed conflict. As a result, the work which the YMCA carries out with these young people puts staff and volunteers at risk. "We are trying to make peace in the midst of war," says a counsellor. The staff can face opposition from their own families, who question why they want to work with young people whom they see only as killers.

Local Colombians fear – some might say with good reason – the former child combatants. This fear permeates Colombian society and affects every area of life for these children. They are rejected by other young people, face hostility from neighbours and are often virtually unemployable. Many are even abandoned by their own families who don't want to be associated with them for fear of reprisals.

For Bogotá YMCA, the single biggest challenge they face in re-integrating former child soldiers into society is this stigmatisation and rejection. The project is working to build awareness of the young people as victims of the ongoing conflict rather than only perpetrators.

Diana's story

Diana is 20. She lives in Bogotá, Columbia's capital city. She rents a small apartment and is studying IT at Columbia's national training centre. She has dreams and aspirations. In many ways she is like any other young woman. In many ways she is not. "Bogotá is OK, but a bit cold. It's a big city and people are not very friendly," she observes. "I really like the military museum, though. I've been there four times. I like to look at the guns".

Diana is a former child soldier. Today she

wears the normal teenage uniform of denim jeans and jacket, but since the age of ten, she wore combat fatigues and lived like any other serving member of a military force, hiding in the thick jungle with fellow members of the guerrilla unit to which she belonged.

Fuelled by poverty in a country in which 3,000,000 do not have access to a proper education and there are high levels of unemployment, an estimated 83% of children who join the illegal armed groups do so voluntarily. Push factors include: having family members, friends or neighbours who have been killed; abuse at home; lack of education and work. Pull factors include: seeking revenge for violence to a family member; earning a small wage which can be sent to impoverished families; and, for girls, freedom from a repressively stereotypical notion of femininity, in which women are idealised when weak and compliant.

Diana comes from Tolima, an area that is predominantly rural. "I have nine brothers and sisters, but two died". It is highly probable that Diana's siblings were killed by an opposing military faction. Diana, whose mother abandoned her when she was eight years old, followed in the footsteps of her older brothers by joining the largest guerrilla force, the FARC (the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia). Her formative years were those of a serving soldier: living in the jungle, following orders, camaraderie, training. Many child soldiers are used as lookouts, for spying and helping set up ambushes. Some are used for carrying guns and bombs and some use them. Staff at YMCA Bogotá don't ask who did what. They just try to help young people who are dealing with difficult pasts in which they have been both perpetrators and victims.

It's difficult to imagine the life of a child soldier. You leave your family at an age when children in developed countries are contemplating going to 'big school'. You live in the bush, constantly on the move. Fear is a normal part of life. You're still a child, but have to act like an adult, without the love and protection of your parents and family. Violence is ever present.

Once inducted, the child soldier may be given a pistol after one week, an AK-47 after three months, and taught how to take apart, clean

and put a gun back together. They may be taught how cook; to avoid being sighted by an enemy helicopter; to serve as a bodyguard for a commander...and to give their life if required.

"They are trying to face up to the past and carve out a new life which is quite alien to them," comments the Latin America and Caribbean Programme Manager at Y Care International. "Things like never holding a gun, the daily routine of a normal life, earning a living, even girls wearing jewellery and make-up, are new and strange."

Against the backdrop of the Andes, which surround the sprawling metropolis of Bogotá, an unremarkable three-storey building in the suburbs is home to the YMCA's project to help rehabilitate former child soldiers – up to 30 at a time – who have been demobilised from both guerrilla and paramilitary factions. This 'transition' house is part of the effort to break the cycle of violence and give them the opportunity to rebuild their lives. Dedicated staff face the multiple challenges of this work. Clara, a project worker, recalls how, as a new member of the house staff, she flinched the first time one of the boys touched her face. Upset and nervous, she had to be comforted by other staff members. "It turned out that after only three days, the boy already saw me as his mother," she says.

A key element of the programme is that there are 'rules of the house' to help instil in young people who are used to taking orders, the norms of social behaviour. Because they've grown up in an army even a simple request like, "can you pass the salt?" can make them uncomfortable. They don't know how to react because they've been conditioned for years to accept orders and they don't have even basic social skills. An important element of the YMCA's approach is to teach this social awareness and encourage young people who once saw each other as enemies to live together peacefully.

The youngsters eat communal meals prepared by a cook and then engage in activities like the arts and cultural activities, supported by a facilitator. This gives them the opportunity to learn to relate in a different way and to come to terms with their pasts. The model used by the YMCA in Colombia focuses on empowering the young people to 'deinstitutionalise' and reconstruct their lives, first within the centre, then within the broader community and their families. They are encouraged to ask questions and participate in decisions relating to their lives; to recognise their natural abilities and to accept their differences and those of others.

This article is based on research funded by the Baring Foundation, carried out with Bogotá YMCA, on the rehabilitation of former child soldiers in Colombia, and on articles written for Y Care International by Pamela Nowicka and Luiza Sauma.

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DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO



Reconciliation workshop for civilians and militaries organised by the Diocese of Bukavu, March 2009.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, a series of wars have led to an unhealthy environment among the population. This can be seen in family divisions, tribal and inter-ethnic conflicts, and mutual antagonism, even within church communities across the country and most particularly in the East.

After the free, democratic and transparent elections that took place in the country in 2006, the President of the Republic, Joseph Kabila Kabange, supported by his government and the people, initiated a development process. Today, peace is only a reality in part of the country. In the East, former Rwandan combatants (FDLR), known as the 'Interahamwe', continue to sow terror and desolation, plunging thousands of families into great torment.

The government, churches and non-governmental organisations, with the support of the international community, are determined to restore peace throughout the country, and continue to make efforts not only to disarm the notorious Interahamwe, but also, and above all, to foster reconciliation between individuals, families, tribes and ethnic groups.

The Anglican Church of the Province of Congo is conscious of its call to participate in the great mission of our Lord Jesus Christ and, remembering his words in the Beatitudes – 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God' (Matthew 5.9) – places reconciliation at the forefront of its priorities. Among its activities, the Church has worked for the reconciliation of the Hema and Lendu people in the Diocese of Boga. In the Diocese of Bukavu, the Church initiated a process of reconciliation among the Banyamuulenge and Babembe tribes living in the highlands of Itombwe in Fizi district. Two royal families in

conflict over an issue of succession were reconciled through the mediation of the Bishop of Bukavu. This involved the Mwami family of the Mubuku people in Kalehe territory and the Mwami Katana family of the Irhambi people in Kabare territory in South Kivu.

The Diocese of Bukavu continues to organise activities such as meetings on de-traumatisation and football matches between the military and civilians. These aim to promote military-civilian reconciliation in order to dissipate the trauma and animosity between these two groups, who must begin working together to rebuild a peaceful nation.

Thanks to these same activities and de-traumatisation sessions, a number of women, formerly rejected by their husbands after being raped, are now accepted and restored to their homes to continue living together with their husbands and their families.

Members of our churches regularly receive biblical teaching through sermons and seminars on love and forgiveness of the enemy so that they cannot dwell on revenge against enemies who have caused them harm by looting, sexual abuse and killings.

We would like to plan many more activities like these, but we face the constraints of logistical and financial means. We pray that peacemakers will come to our rescue so that we can carry out our duty at the heart of our communities and families torn apart by conflict.

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MOZAMBIQUE

We are in the world as a family with a mission, which is to maintain and promote reconciliation.

The family is the example and agent of reconciliation. Even when divided and suffering strife, families that work on their differences for their common good are wounded healers, signs of hope and reconciliation. Reconciliation is recognition that we are one. We belong together even when there are differences of functions and opinions.

Anglicanism is an instrument and agent of reconciliation. It may be messy as we look at it in some aspects, but its consistency in expressing its family nature cannot be said to have vanished. Like a normal family, it is a school, factory or a field where the seed of reconciliation is watered and protected.

Let us share one or two examples of how Anglicanism as a Family is in the business of reconciliation.

For about 20 years, the Diocese of Lebombo, with the Council of Churches in Mozambique, has embarked on a programme called 'Swords into ploughshares' which encourages users or keepers of guns to exchange them for instruments or tools of production. The programme has so far collected about 800,000 items of war and violence. Most of them were handed over by families, groups of families, or individual family members who wished to be relieved from the fear and destruction that these instruments imposed in the family context. Guns held or used secretly have been replaced by tools such as ploughs which help families to grow food, publicly and together. Even their relatives and friends benefit from the environment of reconciliation that is created.

Another example in Anglican life is the Anglican liturgy which is a symbol and agent of reconciliation in God's hand. Praying together, speaking to God, some speaking fluently using their own words or simply reading the written prayers closely, uplifted by sounds, gestures and smells, we are reconciled among ourselves and can work to reconcile the world and indeed the whole creation "...with angels and archangels and the whole company of heaven". We Anglicans stay together because we pray together as a family.

Both reconciliation and family are fruits of dialogue. This dialogue has to be continuous and at various levels, and it has to be genuine and transparent. Where there is no dialogue there may be speculations and rumours which result in divisions that can damage the unity of the family; we cease to be accountable to one another in terms of our time, resources, skills and even emotions. Dialogue is about being one another's keeper not one another's cheater.

In many ways, the Anglican family creates an environment of continuous dialogue, thus working always towards reconciliation. We thank God for such a vital calling for the world and beyond.

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Teams of Life, Mozambique.

Photo: R. Carnegie.

Reconciliation work by local churches in Africa

David and his mother stand amongst the small round huts, a community for people displaced by conflict in North Uganda. David (not his real name) had been abducted a few years before by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). He had suffered terrible cruelty and been forced, under threat of death, to commit atrocities himself. After two years, David managed to escape. He was taken to a rehabilitation centre run by the Anglican Church. Over many months, the Church social workers helped David to come to terms with his traumatic experience, not least understanding and accepting his own enforced violence, including against his own father at the time of his abduction. The LRA aim to make these children commit such appalling deeds against their own families that they believe there can be no going back. In time, David was ready to return to his mother's camp home, but he was profoundly anxious about how his family and community would receive him: as a victim or as a violator? The Church counsellors worked with his family and community leaders to help them to understand David's experience and help him to return. Now David is part of the youth group, where they run a milling machine as an income-generating activity. Both he and his mother have trained as community health workers. He has been greeted at the local church. Once again he feels he belongs. He is reconciled with his family, his community, his church – and his past.

Like hundreds of thousands of other women, Marie (not her real name) had suffered violent assault and rape during the conflict in the eastern part of DR Congo. Left mutilated, pregnant and with HIV infection, Marie was rejected by her husband and family. Women from the Mothers' Union helped get medical treatment and psychological help for her trauma. They brought her together with other women who had similar experiences. They found strength and support together. Some of the women, widows who had been thrown out of their homes when their husbands died of AIDS-related illness, had formed a group to give testimonies in local churches about HIV and sexual violence, to challenge the stigma and discrimination. Each time they speak, other women come from the congregation to ask for advice and support. Together they are working to transform the cultural values of blame and to find a path to reconciliation.

In northern Mozambique, the local Anglican churches have 'Teams of Life'. These are groups from the church and community who want to transform the situation of HIV. Working together, they educate the youth, support individuals affected by HIV, and counsel families on accepting and caring for members who are sick. They bring a sense of hope and life where once there had been despair and death. Some of the 'Team of Life' members are living with HIV; some are not. Their shirts bear the slogan: 'In Christ there is neither HIV-positive nor HIV-negative. We are all one in Christ.'

We are all one in Christ. These three examples are stories of hope. In each case the local church has worked with the most vulnerable amongst its membership and wider community to bring reconciliation in all its forms: in rebuilding lives after trauma; in overcoming stigma and discrimination; in confronting gender-based violence and abuse of children; in reuniting families through understanding and acceptance. In essence, these local churches are participating in Christ's work of reconciliation, restoring people's relationships with each other and with their deepest spiritual selves.

As the Archbishop of Canterbury's Secretary for International Development, Rachel Carnegie travels widely. She has worked since the mid-1980s in development programmes in Asia and Africa on issues of children and youth, HIV and gender. She says that encounters such as those in this article have provided her with the greatest inspiration for her work.

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A Prayer for Reconciliation

Cor.1.20

Almighty God,

in whose reconciling work
we are called to share,
bind us together
with the gracious cords
of faith, family and friendship.
Strengthen us with
courage, wisdom and patience
in bringing hope, healing and
happiness
to couples, children and families,
and their communities
who are threatened by
conflict, violence and division;
through the peace and love
of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

Revd John Bradford

**THE NEXT
FAMILY NETWORK
NEWSLETTER**
The next newsletter is
to be on the theme of
The Family and Trafficking

Visit the Family Network website: www.iafn.net

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