

# ShALOM!

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## Let Peace Begin With Me

**THIS SUMMER I'VE** grown increasingly weary of watching the news. Violence and general meanspiritedness seem to rule the day, and a steady diet of news-watching saps my spirit. So I wonder, how can I pursue peace and “let peace begin with me” in a world that seems hell-bent on war, violence and hatred?

The eighth of the ten core values of the Brethren in Christ Church on “pursuing peace” reads: “We value all human life, and promote understanding, forgiveness, reconciliation, and nonviolent resolution of conflict.” In our current context of polarization, divisiveness, meanspiritedness, and serious and deadly conflicts of all kinds, this value speaks to me of the possibilities for something different.

What if more people practiced this core value every day? What if we really valued all human life and guarded the essential dignity and worth of every human being regardless of whether or not they deserve it? What if we put as much energy into understanding people as we do attacking them or trying to destroy figuratively and literally those with whom we disagree? What if we were genuinely interested in understanding why they believe what they do, why they act that way, what happened in the past that informs what’s happening now, what are the root causes of the present conflict, and how might we address those root causes in a way that helps people feel genuinely heard and understood?

What if we could forgive and let go of past hurts, horrific as they might be, and

choose to move forward rather than dwell on those past hurts? What if we worked toward true reconciliation in the sense of finding a way to make two or more different ideas exist or be true at the same time (Merriam-Webster definition), rather than require one idea (or people group, or faction) to cease to exist or give in?

And what if we were committed to non-violent resolution of conflict? We know conflict is inevitable and part of being human, but when it happens, as it surely will, what if we were so committed to valuing all human life, and to understanding, forgiveness and reconciliation that we refused to allow the conflict to degenerate into violence – whether the violence of angry words and character assassination or the violence of guns and bombs? Violence turns into an endless cycle when retaliation, retribution and revenge are believed to be necessary responses rather than understanding, forgiveness and reconciliation.

I know all this sounds simplistic and perhaps even naive, but what might happen if more of us lived by this core value? I want to be a person who pursues peace, values everyone, and tries to understand, forgive, reconcile and resolve conflict nonviolently. I want to be an instrument of peace. Let peace begin with me, and with you.

**Harriet S. Bicksler, editor**

A longer version of this introduction appeared in July on my blog, “Pieces of Peace,” at [harrietbicksler.wordpress.com](http://harrietbicksler.wordpress.com).

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# Peace Begins With Me

By Drew Strayer

I AM INFINITELY grateful that we have a Prince of Peace who leads by example and by command how to live a life of peace. He has led many faithful brothers and sisters before us into lives reflecting peace that offer encouragement. While my concern about peace being lived out in our world must begin with me, thankfully there are many shining examples of lives of peace lived well before mine. My essay will seek to share “How Peace Began in Me”.

My journey to peace began when I was young and continues to this day. I have studied peace, conflict resolution, and conflict transformation in Oregon, Virginia, and Northern Ireland, not to mention in my work each day. This training in peace began

long before I chose a specific field of study, however.

I came to experience life with Christ at an early age and remember peace in God’s presence as a child. From the age of five, I attended, was baptized, and later became a member of Brethren in Christ churches and received teaching on peace during that time. Meanwhile, from ages 12-18, I attended a Christian School where the pledge of allegiance was performed each day, along with much flag-waving, conservative political “encouragement,” and support for military intervention. Then as my 18th birthday approached, I needed to submit a Selective Service registration to the United States government. Due to the variety of Christian influences in my life in the preceding years, I must say the process was not as easy or obvious as I expected.

Within my church, I knew veterans who had chosen to serve and those who were drafted all worshipping together with others committed to peace and nonviolence. At my school, however, the conversation was completely one-sided and while we could recite that Jesus was the Prince of Peace, it was virtually understood that peace *today* was accomplished by the sword. I can’t count the times I heard comments at school like: “If it weren’t for military intervention, the Bible never would have been allowed in [insert occupied country name here].” I find it very telling that almost all of those countries are now harassing and perhaps persecuting Christians following the exodus of U.S. military might. I can’t help being concerned about what “acceptance of the Bible” and “understanding the Gospel” meant in those countries and souls. How can a God of love and peace ride the barricades and flames of occupation and war and leave a loving impression?

In this mix of influences I found myself ready to sign the card saying I was willing to serve if called. It seemed the appropriate, respectable thing to do since I had such a heart for justice and protecting the weak in their hour of need. Besides, I thought I could hand

out Bibles while I did patrols if it came to that. And why wouldn’t any country want our men and women in uniform on their soil if we were “helping them”? My lack of understanding at that point in my life embarrasses me now.

At this point, my dad prompted me to pray and read the Word as I made the decision. I followed his advice and found life and peace, though not how I expected. The more I read and prayed, the more I could not ignore the clear and convincing call of God to live in peace with everyone, at all times.

Psalm 139:13-14 taught me that God intentionally gives life to each person on earth with care and creativity: “For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made.” Since I am God’s adopted son and God is the giver of life, all humankind is a brother or sister. How could I kill my brother or sister, I wondered?

In the Sermon on the Mount, as recorded in Matthew 5:44, Christ directly speaks this command to each of us: “But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” As far as I can tell, there was no loophole in that concise command that would allow me to prepare to kill anyone.

Then there is 2 Peter 3:9 – “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” – finished the story for me. How could I cut short a life? I have no idea what future God had for that life he had created with intention, tenderness, and creativity. If it is his will that none perish, does that mean that just like he put my mother and father and friends in my life to draw me back to him during my crisis of faith, perhaps he was putting people on a path to intersect in love with the life I might cut short? How could I cut off God’s will for salvation and reconciliation for a person the Author of Life had made?

With that new conviction, I signed the card, and in large letters, since I knew no better at the time, scrawled “Conscientious Ob-



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jector” over my information. In God’s mercy, my name was never drawn. (If any are considering registering as a Conscientious Objector, you can find the official process for U.S. citizens at [www.sss.gov/FSconsobj.htm](http://www.sss.gov/FSconsobj.htm).)

I share this part of my life story because I believe God uses stories to encourage us and open our eyes through the experiences of others. The path I have taken is not the same as yours. God is working on things in my life that many of you dealt with years ago. Even so, there may be things he is working on in you that I have already learned. For those

who are open to God’s message and his way of using the least among us, I pray that my story offers hope, encouragement and peace to each reader. For those who have questions, keep pressing in to the Father who gives bread and doesn’t throw stones. To those caught in a path of anger, violence and pain, you are in my prayers – there is peace and hope in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ! To those who perceive judgment in these words, please know that God alone can judge; my failings are too numerous for me to even consider yours. Grace and peace to

each of you in the name of our loving, grace-filled Father, righteous Judge and almighty God, Amen!

*Drew Strayer is pastor of community groups at Manor Church (BIC) in Lancaster, PA. He serves the Life Groups within the church and the ministries out in the community and enjoys finding ways to connect the two. He loves hiking and camping with his family in God’s creation and feeling small amidst the beautiful things God grows.*

## A Peace of Something Bigger

By Aaron Holbrough

**PEACEMAKING LIKE APATHY** is infectious, but only one makes earth as it is in heaven. The big problem with peacemaking is that it doesn’t always leave you feeling satisfied. We live in a world that promises instant gratification, and if you can’t have it now it isn’t worth it. Why would you choose the way of peace that might cost, when retribution, or retaliation has an instant if only short lived high? We have bought into the deception that peace is something that can be forced into existence with bullets, laws, or intimidation. The problem with this mentality is that anything but genuine peace isn’t really peace.

Growing up, my twin brother and I were occasionally terrorized by our older sibling. There were times when we were able to exact our revenge, and for a brief moment feel victorious. The problem was that the lull in our conflict was usually my older sibling reorganizing his thoughts and looking at the calendar for the next time mom and dad were away from home.

Peace is not an end as much as it is a means. Jesus says, “Blessed are the peacemakers; they will be called children of God.” Jesus didn’t say bless the peaceful, but those who are in the act of creating peace. This peace creation is hard work, which is why so many leave it untried. True peace always has a price. As we watch the life of Jesus demonstrate the very things he taught, the price for the peace he offered was his own life. Peacemaking is

an investment in the future not just in the present.

One of the reasons I think real peace is so hard to find in our world is that many just don’t believe in it anymore. I recently had a conversation with someone who introduced herself by saying she was an Anabaptist but believed there is a time for war. I was taken aback by the odd placement of her statement. It was as if she was trying to make something clear right up front. Puzzled I asked her if she thought there was a time for greed or for hatred. She didn’t see the connection. I tried to explain that just because destructive actions seem inevitable we should never give them a place at the table.

When you say you believe there is a time for war you are already justifying it as an outcome. War, like hatred or greed, is never justifiable, yet is a part of our world. As a follower of Jesus I am confronted with these realities every day, and hope that they confront me with the desire for a better way each time. If only more people actually believed that when Jesus said, “blessed are the peace creators,” it is an invitation into a way of living. There will be a cost to this activity but as my mom always taught me, nothing good comes without a price.

I know that there is always a tension in solving conflict with love. There is always a chance that those to whom you have extended grace won’t care and our actions will have been in vain. But we aren’t tasked with

peace creation because of a guaranteed outcome; we are peace creators because that is what our heavenly father does. We are called children of God not because of our success but because of our effort. And a genuine effort comes when it is something you believe in. You only believe in peace when you recognize it has value even without obvious victory, and your efforts alone overcome the ease of destructive thoughts and behaviours.

Perhaps one reason we don’t see enough peace on a global level is because we don’t believe in it on a personal one. I wonder if more of us were engaged in the creative act of making peace in our lives, if we would see it more in our world.

What if we saw peace as more than just a desired end? What if we understood Jesus’ words as a posture for living regardless of outcome? What if we were like Leo Tolstoy who was convinced that this peace message of Jesus was a key that needed to be firmly inserted in the door to open up the rest of Christ’s kingdom message? Perhaps it is a secret that could wake the church out of its slumber and into the business of our Father.

Something peculiar happens when you are engaged in our Father’s kingdom – you see him at work. It is amazing when you start believing in the way of peace again; you begin to see the efforts of other people. This discovery gives us opportunity to celebrate it when we see it. Perhaps this is a second key to earth as it is in heaven. If the first one is

apprenticing in our Father's peacemaking business, the second could be discovering all the places God is showing up in peaceful ways. Imagine praising someone for their patient response to a drunken patron, or thanking someone for their kindness to you when you made a mistake. To believe in peace is to also be aware of its existence. Perhaps part of what's missing in our world is that there aren't enough people to see that the answer lies around us – that the Kingdom has come, and it is lived out through the lives of those who believe in it and worship its king.

Let's become a people of hope again, not

just for what happens after this life, but for the opportunities in it. Let's be about our Fathers' business and find satisfaction not merely in outcomes but in our peaceful posture. And may we discover that God is and has been at work in this peace business under the guise of neighbours and and strangers.

What would happen if we caught a glimpse of God at work? Would it change our world if we discovered the kingdom in the actions of those not aware that God is using them to make earth as it is in heaven? I think it could certainly help to live like we all are a peace of something bigger.

*Aaron Holbrough is pastor of The Parish in Peterborough, On., a Network Church of BIC Canada. In 2010 Aaron recognized that the part of the Christian community he belonged to looked nothing like what he had discovered in the message and life of Jesus. Remarkably absent was the emphasis on peace in the life and teachings of Christ. After more than 20 years of pastoral ministry, he began to search for a movement that better embodied the kingdom message of Christ. When he joined the Brethren in Christ, Aaron never felt like he was becoming an Anabaptist, but that he had been one all along, and now he found a voice. Aaron blogs about his Anabaptist ideas at [www.realsimple-faith.com](http://www.realsimple-faith.com).*

## Should I Call the Police?

By Mary Ward-Bucher

**PEACE IS ABOUT** creating an “us.” Peace cannot reproduce itself without community. This is why, even as a community organizer in Philadelphia, I don't believe that peace can ever begin with just me. It takes courage to listen to the Spirit of God together and to act to disrupt normalized patterns of violence. In my experience, part of that engagement must include some difficult wrestling with the role of law enforcement in our communities.

In my city, the police have complex relationships with every neighborhood they serve. In some instances, police officers are extraordinarily helpful in preventing harm. In other cases, the use of police force is one part of the cycle of violence many people experience every day. This reality, along with a well-remembered history of racially-motivated police brutality, causes conflicted feelings in some communities, especially communities of color, when the question is raised, “Should I call the police?” There is a tremulous lack of certainty as to the morality of such a call because the outcome can be so uncertain.

Before I provide specific examples, some words of caution. The following stories must be understood in their entire context—that is, in a context where even in seemingly desperate places, life happens in spite of the occasional awful event. It is very difficult to

discuss this issue because of the politicized “divides” between rural, suburban and urban communities. We worship, live, work, and play here. My children happily attend a public school. Unlike the media's newsfeed, life is not simply a string of tragedies intersected by narratives about the most recent tragedy. There are also countless positive stories of people accomplishing great things together.

Police officers are sometimes part of those positive stories. Police officers often volunteer their time for school and sports programs, for example. On the street, I have witnessed officers responding in ways that both resolved the disturbance and avoided an arrest. Such actions easily bolster opinions of police as restorers of the streets in which we dwell.

Unfortunately, not every cause for a 911 call is so benign. When my children were young, I once spotted two pre-teen boys playing with a loaded gun on my neighbor's steps. I immediately called the police, but not without feeling apprehension about what might happen to these boys and the danger that prevented me from just confronting them myself. While waiting for the cops, I dreaded the encounter, not knowing if someone would lose their life. When a police cruiser finally arrived, the boys ran away, leaving the responding officers with an empty doorstep. Even though the thought of two

boys running around with guns was unsettling, I felt an odd sense of relief because no one died in that moment.

Deciding whether to call the police is not uncomplicated. A few summers ago, we were caught off guard by a teenage boy chasing and beating a Mexican immigrant over an apparent rent dispute. My husband and a neighbor immediately bolted towards them and the boy disappeared. The victim wanted neither the paramedics nor the police. He was uncomfortable with getting the authorities involved, due to recent arrests of both documented and undocumented immigrants in the neighborhood.

The police can be perceived as a constant threat, as well as a reminder of personal and communal injustice. My daughters' former teacher is a committed, peace-building Christian. She is also black. Less than a year after she moved with her husband and children to a predominantly white Philadelphia suburb, police officers detained her teenage son for simply walking home from school. Brandon (not his real name) is an honor student, active in his church and a recipient of two full university scholarship offers. And yet, a white resident called police because this boy looked “suspicious.” Needless to say, Brandon and his family felt incredibly angered and humiliated by this experience, and have been on edge ever since.

Many people do not consider the tool of the police their own to use, or at least, not a completely safe option. Because of situations like those described above, I now believe that using police assistance must be both carefully considered and a last resort. Most importantly and whenever possible, police assistance should not be a means to avoid having direct encounters with someone else. Several years ago, a neighbor had a friend over for a visit. When he overstayed his welcome, she called 911 and told the dispatcher that the man had a gun. A small fleet of police cruisers showed up with an army of police officers and broke down the door. Six cops yanked the man out of the house, threw him to the ground and stood on top of him – yes, all six officers – demanding that the man tell them where he put the gun. There was no gun.

This is an extreme example, but still

provocative. Much smaller-scale action is a fact of life in much of the United States. Is someone playing music too loud? Call the police. Is someone littering? Call the police. It is not my intention to make a moral judgment about the worth of the entire law enforcement profession, but rather to ask us to consider the current state of our motives and relationships. We must simply work harder to interact face-to-face with one another if we are to survive. Jesus shared the parable of the Good Samaritan with an audience like us – one very familiar with danger, insecurity and prejudice. On that lonely road, there was no option to call the police upon the sight of an approaching Samaritan. Instead, a merciful act filled a place full of fear and danger with hospitality and caring.

When there are relationships of any depth, other avenues appear for resolving

problems and the need for police involvement decreases. My family and I labor with others in our community to make these connections happen by encouraging community members to build relationships through opportunities like creating green spaces together or giving children healthy play options. As a result, we are slowly witnessing a positive transformation here. I am hopeful, as we continue to become more indispensable to one another, that our best days are ahead.

*Mary Ward-Bucher serves as a community organizer and youth mentor in Philadelphia, Pa., and teaches religious studies courses at Temple University. She and her family are part of the Circle of Hope Network of Brethren in Christ Churches.*

## The Theology of Pastries

By Josh Crain

**AT 32 YEARS** of age I am in the curious quandary of being an Anabaptist pastor in a city made famous by its Army War College. I find myself living as a person of peace in a war culture, asking how to speak into the lives of its residents without alienating them and wondering if words spoken on a mountainside almost 2,000 years ago can still ignite our imaginations.

But before I get to that we should discuss pastries and standing in line.

My wife and I have a dear friend, Anna, who is a pastry chef by trade. If you aren't friends with a pastry chef, I highly recommend you remedy that as soon as possible.

Multiple times a year Anna will bake delicacies for her close friends – Red Velvet Cupcakes, Askinosie Chocolate Pie, Summer Fruit Tart with Gingersnap Cookie Crust. Evenings spent together sampling new confections are filled with laughter and punctuated by words of admiration such as "perfect," "delectable," and "transcendent." There has yet to be a cross word spoken between our group while tasting these treats.

Because tasting isn't threatening.

On the afternoon of December 7, 1941,

my grandfather stood in line for a ticket to see Gary Cooper's portrayal of Sergeant York, an excellent marksman who became a World War I hero.

My grandfather never finished the film.

Before Sergeant York could receive his ticker tape parade and the closing credits could begin, the film was brought to an abrupt halt and the house lights were raised. A man walked to the front of the theater to announce that Pearl Harbor had just been attacked. My grandfather stood to his feet, gathered his things, and left the movie theater to stand in line for the second time that day.

Within minutes of hearing the news of Pearl Harbor he had enlisted in the United States Air Force. This story has been passed down in my family with reverence and admiration, shaping our identity and fashioning what we value: self-sacrifice, loyalty, patriotism.

Identity is revered. And tasting isn't threatening.

In the Apostle Peter's first epistle he borrows heavily from the 34th Psalm and urges his Christian audience to live a new kind of

life now that they "have tasted that the Lord is good" (1 Peter 2:1-3). And in Acts 17 the Apostle Paul stands atop Mars Hill and chooses to convince his audience of the goodness of his God rather than berate them for the shortcomings of their own gods.

Identity is revered. And tasting isn't threatening.

I find myself living in a war culture, desperately holding to values of peace and non-violence instilled in me by a first-century rabbi-carpenter who was himself violently executed for his teachings. The question for me, my church staff, and my denomination is simply this: how do people committed to peacemaking and opposed to war and violence relate meaningfully to fellow Christians who are in the military? Or who have family in the military? Or who ascribe to a theory of justified warfare and see no conflict between following Jesus and engaging America's enemies in combat?

We remember that identity is revered. And tasting isn't threatening.

A younger version of me had a direct method for teaching unsettling concepts:

Speak the truth.

Drop the mic.

Exit stage left.

It felt great. It was terribly ineffective.

Our identity, our conception and expression of who we are, consists largely of what we believe. I believe that Jesus is Lord, that my toddler son is cute enough to be in the 95th percentile for adorableness (that's a real word – check me on it), that baseball is boring, that Radiohead is one of the greatest bands of all time, and that a proper cup of coffee requires freshly ground beans. All of these beliefs and many more make up a major share of how I conceive of who I am, and the degree to which I believe any one of these things will dictate how defensive I will be when that belief is challenged.

This is why many of us naturally insert ourselves into belief affirmation systems. Our friends, the books we read, our churches, and our news networks largely align with our beliefs. It feels fantastic; we're right and we get it and those people are wrong and they don't.

But you grow and mature because you experience a disruption; you hear something you haven't heard before and it forces you to change. You meet a Muslim and discover he's

kind. You visit Haiti and find Christians emitting unspeakable joy in the midst of poverty. What do you do with that?

If Jesus does anything, he brings disruption.

I was 27 years old before I understood Jesus' teachings to be calling me to a life of nonviolence as his disciple. I experienced a disruption. For a long time I thought in order to have other people come to the same realization I did, I had to be the disruption for them. But identity is revered, and attempting to be the disruption for others will usually only make them raise their defenses and tune me out.

When teaching soldiers, families of soldiers, or just war theorists, the question I must ask is: do I love them? If I love them I'll meet them where they are; if I set out to disrupt them I'll have a mess on my hands. Rather, if I can help them taste what I've tasted perhaps it will work in them something even greater than what it worked in me.

Attempting to disrupt someone isn't helpful, but it's a completely different posture to sit next to someone and say, "Hey,

taste this. Check this out; this changed me so I want to do my best to share it with others." And then I also must surrender the outcomes because I have no idea what will change them.

In our zeal for nonviolence our rhetoric has occasionally made the mistake of casting soldiers as the enemy. My grandfather was willing to give his life to protect his family, neighbors, friends, and country. He did not sign up for military service with malicious aspirations; his intentions were purely honorable. The intent of a soldier usually is.

May we become pastry chefs for the Kingdom of God, inviting all to taste the goodness of Jesus and the beauty of this renewed way of living he has called us to. May we proclaim the peace of God while patiently giving space to those who will face a crisis of identity upon hearing the good news. And may we do all of this in love, playing our part in God's reconciliation of all things

*Josh Crain is senior pastor of the Carlisle (Pa.) Brethren in Christ Church.*

## Peacemaking Through Theater-Making in Palestine

*By Elizabeth Malone*

"**THERE'S ROOM AT** the inn in Bethlehem," says Dr. Mitri Raheb, pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Christmas Church only meters away from the Church of the Nativity in Manger Square. Dr. Mitri Raheb also founded the Diyar Consortium which runs programs for people from "the womb to the tomb." A part of this consortium is The Diyar Academy for Children and Youth. They provide a theater program for middle and high school students. Diyar's Ajyal Elder Care Program includes a small drama club made up of several women ages sixty to eighty. This summer, I directed a piece of theater that brought together these two groups titled "Me and My Grandma | A Night of Intergenerational Theatre."

My interest in making theater in Palestine

began in 2008 as I was questioning my place in the theater while also learning about the Occupation. In 2010, Juliano Mer-Khamis, the Artistic Director of the Freedom Theatre in Jenin, Palestine was murdered outside of the theater in his car. I was shocked that theater was costing lives. It seemed more important than ever to go to Palestine and use my skills to build up the dignity of the youth. How could I be a part of peacemaking through theater-making?

I traveled to Palestine for the first time in 2012 for the Christ at the Checkpoint Conference in Bethlehem. I returned in 2013 to collaborate with the Diyar Academy youth, creating an original piece of theater with 17 teenagers titled "palesTime," exploring how time is perceived in Palestine. This year, my

third stay in Palestine began much like the past, entering occupied territory that under the circumstances was "calm." As we all know, the story changed and this quaking land erupted once more. To be honest, I do not feel equipped to write about Palestine. However, if I stopped at my feelings of inadequacy, I would not be doing what I actually can do. The question I continue to ask myself remains: What is possible with my individual skills, training, desire, time, and commitment?

A dear friend and fellow volunteer reminded me that "peace starts with me" means that we have to overcome our own fears of reaching out to those in unspeakable need and unfathomable tragedy and simply show them we care, even if we fumble our

way through. Feeling unequipped is now a signal to take the risk. My work with the youth of Diyar began with this feeling and has resulted in strong relationships built on mutual trust and commitment to staging meaningful theater in Bethlehem.

Each morning for several weeks I met with the Ajyal women to work on an adaptation of CS Lewis' short story "A Man Born Blind" and Leo Tolstoy's "Three Questions." Katy, a newcomer to the drama group, played the character of the Queen. I watched her concern for getting her part just right, consistently checking in with me to ensure that she was communicating the grace and depth of her role. Antwanete often ended rehearsal by playing on the piano as we gathered around and sang together. Lorees patiently waited for her turn to enter the stage and offered her talent in singing as an addition to our night of theater. Nobody would guess that the news headlines contained the words "kidnapping," "raids," and "clashes" if they were to enter our rehearsal room without knowledge of the rising tensions on the ground. Their commitment to storytelling in unrest was a testament to the value of the work.

In the afternoons I rehearsed with the youth, creating a short play inspired by Franz Kafka's "Before the Law" along with Tolstoy's "Three Questions" which combined the youth and the Ajyal women. Every day, without fail, I entered the rehearsal room with the certainty that theater has the power to change the course of a young person's life but with the uncertainty of how to achieve such big goals with war at the doorstep. Their need to express their real fear of living in a place where their futures are becoming more uncertain by the day was apparent.

I began with writing exercises for the youth: Describe a memory of wanting something and getting it. Describe a memory of wanting something and not getting it. What do you want in the future? What is in the way of getting what you want? Through this we talked about their obstacles. Ameer described a time when he went through a checkpoint and a soldier took his shoes. He had to continue on his journey barefoot. Ghazal told the story of a close relative in the hospital on the other side of the wall and not being allowed to visit him. Georgina simply

wants to be able to wear shorts without ridicule. Nizar desires to ride his bike to school but this has caused controversy in his family. Taleen and Georgina would like to pursue acting but it is not an acceptable career for a woman. All of them want to swim in the sea, play in parks, and enjoy their childhood but are limited by high walls and permission documents. Education is highly valued, but jobs are scarce. Most of them want to stay in Palestine but fear the outcome of this choice. This group entrusted their stories to me, and in turn I did my best in helping them process their struggles and envision how they could be a part of the inevitable change for their people. Theater has the power to release the past, work through the present, and concoct hope for whatever lies ahead. It's magic, I think.

As the pressure of opening night grew, the teenagers were working through conflict and the women were uncertain they could remember the details we repeated each day. I became overwhelmed by the lack of time that often accompanies work of this nature, and we struggled to keep a calm and joyful atmosphere. Outside of rehearsal, circumstances seemed to threaten the show altogether. Antwanete entered the space in panic. She lives near the checkpoint, and tear gas was set off near her house, sending her to the ground, only to be revived by a neighboring four year old girl and her family. She could have easily called in and stayed at home, but she came to rehearsal. Another woman lost her sister a week before the show, and culturally she had every right to dismiss herself from the process, but she arrived, dressed in mourning black, with resilience, saying that she wanted to do it as a way of honoring her sister. Ameer's house was nightly occupied by Israeli soldiers on his roof, staking out the neighborhood. Manar's cousin was taken off the streets to jail without reason on his way to nightly prayer. Perspective seemed to meet us at just the right time, reminding us all that our work mattered more than ever.

The resulting show, "Me and My Grandma | A Night of Intergenerational Theatre," was met with a standing room only audience. Diyar's mission statement, "That we might have life and have it abundantly," rang true that night. The community of

Bethlehem gathered and lingered, celebrating their families' accomplishments and enjoying the abundance that comes out of watching the energy of the youth and the grace of the aging commit to one another's stories. As I stood on stage, I remembered the words of Palestinian poet Rafeef Ziadah:

We teach life, sir.

We Palestinians teach life after they have occupied the last sky.

More information:

[www.diyar.ps](http://www.diyar.ps)

[www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com), Rafeef Ziadah 'We Teach Life Sir'

[www.compass-collective.org](http://www.compass-collective.org)

*Elizabeth Malone is assistant professor of theatre at California Baptist University.. She is a member of the Madison Street Brethren in Christ Church in Riverside, Ca.*

## Editor's Notes

### 2014 subscription renewals:

If you still haven't responded to the 2014 subscription letter or renewed your subscription, please do so soon. The subscription rate is \$15 for one year, and we continue to welcome extra gifts. Checks should be payable to the Brethren in Christ Church and sent to the editor (address on page 2). Thanks to those who have responded; your renewals and extra gifts make it possible to continue to publish *Shalom!*

### Upcoming topics

**FALL 2014:** Immigration reprised. This is still a highly relevant topic, given the state of affairs along the southern border of the U.S. this summer. If you have perspectives you'd like to share, please contact the editor.

**2015:** We welcome suggestions for future topics.

# Musings from the Back of a Pickup Truck

By Titus Peachey



**IT WAS JUST** just after breakfast when the pickup truck arrived that would take me, a Mennonite Central Committee worker in Lao People's Democratic Republic, on a trip into the countryside to visit a health clinic. To my surprise, on the back of the truck stood four Lao soldiers, armed with AK-47 submachine guns and grenade launchers. My travels that day with a doctor from the Ministry of Health would take us through "insecure territory," and the ministry had arranged for soldiers to travel with us for our protection. Today, nearly three decades later, I still struggle with the implications of what happened that day in 1984.

The logic of taking four soldiers for protection is as common and everyday as the air we breathe. This logic permeates the evening news, our entertainment industry, our national security policy, our school playgrounds and even our homes. If someone threatens you, be prepared to threaten them back. If someone attempts to harm you, harm them first. Intimidate, frighten or beat anyone who might plot ill against you. And in a fascinating sequence in Luke's gospel (Luke 9:51-56), we find that this same logic was also active in the minds of Jesus' disciples.

On their way to Jerusalem from Galilee, Jesus and his disciples walked through Samaria, widely known as hostile territory due to the long-standing enmity between Samaritans and Jews. When they were refused hospitality at a Samaritan village, James and John seethed with anger. "Shall we call down fire from heaven to destroy them?" they asked Jesus. Having just argued about who was the greatest, they were eager to use their power to set up the kingdom in Jerusalem. Peeved by the nettlesome Samaritans in their path, their response was as old as Cain and Abel and as new as drone strikes in Afghanistan: a holy and revenge-filled fire from heaven.

Jesus rebuked his disciples, and they went

on to another village.

To my deep regret, I must acknowledge that I did not challenge the preemptive fire from heaven assembled on the pickup truck that day in Lao PDR. I sat in my front seat and tried not to think about the soldiers in the back. By taking my seat that day I violated my most deeply held beliefs about the nature of God, the way of Christ and my own commitment to peace. Had any of the four Lao soldiers been harmed or had they harmed or killed someone else, I would have been devastated.

My reflections on this troubling experience surfaced with greater intensity in an MCC project visit to Iraq in 2004, just about a year after the U.S. invasion. Knowing that we would be spending time with a landmine clearance agency which regularly used armed guards and not wanting to repeat the experience in Lao PDR, I arranged in advance not to travel in one of their vehicles. Yet everywhere we went there were U.S. military Humvees and trucks, all with many M-16s sticking out the side with trigger fingers at the ready. There were huge military bases, military convoys, guard posts and checkpoints. We were still surrounded by lethal firepower even though our vehicle was unarmed.

And so I have come to realize that for all intents and purposes, I am still in an armed pickup truck.

As U.S. citizens and members of a community of faith who follow the way of Jesus, we struggle with a mighty contradiction. For as we pledge our allegiance, not to nations but to a God who calls us to love even our enemies, we travel the world in a metaphorical U.S. pickup truck bristling with real weapons. "Fire from heaven" streaks from the truck with regularity, creating the smoldering ruins of villages such as the disciples of old had envisioned. With high-tech weaponry available in abundance, there is no need for government to implore God to send

down fire from heaven. Yet God's blessing is regularly invoked by political and religious leaders alike.

Held in the truck by thousands of economic tethers sewn by our own hands, we are bound to the interests of corporations in the global market that bring many of us the good life. We purchase relatively cheap food, fuel, clothing, electronics and entertainment brought to us through trade policies that are often unjust. In the context of a military that outspends the next 15 countries combined, our malls, sports industry and Hollywood are like a narcotic, dulling us to the pain we visit on God's children here and abroad.

Yet many in our communities are realizing the truth of the prophet Samuel who warned the people of Israel about the inevitable oppression of a king with a standing army (I Samuel 8). A highly militarized power structure will take resources from the people, sucking up the very air that the common good needs to breathe. While the king will have his chariots and horses, his drones and smart bombs, the people on the margins and the agencies that serve their needs will struggle to survive. Indeed not everyone on our U.S. pickup truck is enjoying the ride. While high-cost weaponry glistens on the exterior, poverty and hunger stalk the interior of the truck.

Several days after James and John had nearly fire-bombed a Samaritan village, Jesus told a story about a man who was robbed while walking on the rocky road from Jerusalem to Jericho and left beside the road for dead. Holy people, a priest and a Levite, came along and passed by on the other side of the road. Jesus' disciples leaned in to listen, knowing that the next person will be the hero. Likely expecting it to be someone like themselves, they are astounded to hear Jesus declare that a Samaritan was the one who offered grace and healing to the wounded traveler. It is almost as if Jesus deliberately reached back several days' journey to the vil-



lage the disciples wanted to reduce to a pile of ashes and picked up a Samaritan to place into the story.

In so doing, Jesus challenged the disciples even as he challenges us to reject the popular narrative of enemy stereotyping and violent revenge that so characterize our national life. Yet Jesus goes way beyond inviting us to be civil or tolerant toward our enemies. In the form of a story, he reminds us that people whom we may want to destroy may in fact be capable of offering grace and healing from God. He reminds us that it is we who carry self-images of cultural and national superiority, who may in fact be the wounded ones in need of healing.

And so, I wonder:

What would happen if we were bold enough to humanize our enemies as Jesus did? What would happen if we routinely remembered the victims of U.S. drone strikes in our Sunday morning prayers and regularly drew attention to them in letters to our local newspapers?

What would happen if our churches be-

came a place where nonviolent peacemakers of all nations and religions were so celebrated that their names rolled off the tongues of our youth as easily as the names of sports stars, movie actors/actresses and pop singers?

Where might God's Spirit lead us collectively, if we who benefit from the protection of the guards on the pickup truck withheld our war taxes? What if our tax dollars went instead toward local and international acts of justice, mercy and peacemaking? Might we find blessing in such a corporate act of restoration and healing?

What would happen if we loved the soldiers on our pickup truck, especially those wounded in soul and spirit from the brutality of war? What if we recognized that their wounds symbolize our collective failure to learn and practice the ways of peace?

What would happen if we invested the same energy to prevent our nation's bombs from falling on others, as we have invested in seeking our own exemption from military service?

What would happen if training in nonvi-

olence became a part of preparation for baptism?

In all likelihood, I will travel the world on this metaphorical U.S. pickup truck the rest of my life. I will be blessed by the many good things on the pickup truck, but I hope I will never stop struggling with the contradictions between the faith I live by and the logic of empire that permeates many of the realities in my life. For this struggle, surely we all need another visitation of fire from heaven, like the fire of the Holy Spirit that descended on fearful believers at Pentecost. This was not a fire that destroyed. Rather, it brought together the entire known world, breaking down the barriers of language, culture, race and nation, inspiring a season of sharing and unity. Would that such a fire would burn within our community of faith on the pickup truck, inspiring courage and creativity in our commitment to living Christ's way of peace.

*Titus Peachey is the peace education coordinator for MCC U.S. Reprinted by permission of MCC U.S.*

## Peaceworks: A Youth Movement for Peace

by Stephen Jarnick

**MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.** once said "Peace is not merely a distant goal we seek but a means by which we arrive at that goal." It seems that there are two distinct types of peace. The first is the absence of war. The second is a way of being, a lifestyle, a choice about how we want to be as we go through life. In our modern western culture, where questioning the righteousness of our military is often equated with being unpatriotic, there's tremendous pressure to go along with achieving peace by any means – even if it requires not being peaceful.

It seems reasonable that Christians should be leading the way when it comes to finding nonviolent solutions to problems. After all, our faith was founded by Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, who said things like "Love your enemies," "Do good to those who hate you," "Bless those who curse you," and much more that should make his expectations of us very clear. But 2,000 years later

many Christians have become incredibly creative at coming up with reasons why it's okay to ignore Jesus' teachings about the way of peace and instead follow the way of fear, self-preservation and righteous aggression. These Christians usually support their views by citing hypothetical scenarios involving home invasions and terrorist attacks rather than anything Jesus had to say.

In an effort to try to bring Christians back to the teachings of Jesus, an organization called Peaceworks was born. It actually wasn't any kind of structured organization at all, just a few people developing a lot of web content. We didn't have much in the way of resources but we did have the somewhat audacious tagline of "turning every church into a peace church." We also had enough faith to stumble forward, trusting God to open doors along the way. You might think our smallness would be detrimental but in many ways it was an advantage. We knew what we were

trying to accomplish was important, and when we demonstrated that our intentions were pure, and we weren't making any money from it, people were often willing to help. Thanks to generous donations of time, equipment, expertise (and even some cash) we were able to produce an online video series about Peace & Jesus featuring Tony Campolo, Shane Claiborne, John Paul Lederach, Greg Boyd, Bruxy Cavey, and some other great speakers working for peace.

We discovered that the most effective way to bring about a major change in thinking would be through young people, so we reinvented ourselves and became a youth movement for peace. We continue to be very video/internet focused but now we're also running live peace events such as Guns Into Garden Tools where blacksmiths transform a rifle into a garden hoe – taking something intended to kill and turning it into something used to create life.

The big news about Peaceworks this summer is we're now a member of the MSCU Center for Peace Advancement at Conrad Grebel University College, University of Waterloo. It's a dream come true to be creating synergies with other peace groups at the center and it's the ideal place to launch Peace Day Waterloo, the first in a series of peace events for high school students. It's happening at the University of Waterloo this fall and being billed as a day of peace and music. There'll be some great bands and also some great learning experiences in personal, local and global peace with a focus on MCC peace clubs in Africa. Since we're partnering with public high school boards, all of our Peace Day events will be secular and we're hoping to expand the program to include other North American universities starting in 2015.

How does Peaceworks manifest the theme of let peace begin with me? Whatever we've accomplished so far has only been possible because everyone involved has at least tried to live what we believe about peace. We

may not always do it perfectly but we do the best we can. I sometimes receive emails from people who want to promote peace by sharing our online video materials with a group at their church but are shut down by their priest, pastor or minister because they're afraid of offending someone in the congregation who's either in the military or related to someone in the military. One particular email stands out to me from the wife of a pastor who's tried to speak about Jesus' way of peace from the pulpit on numerous occasions and been asked to stop by the church board. This family, with four young children, is torn between representing Jesus well and the fear of being fired. It's a big problem and it's happening all over America.

Our goal at Peaceworks is to empower students to become global citizens for peace by learning and talking about and living out the way of peace. That doesn't require doing monumental things. People notice the small stuff, especially when they see someone walking the walk instead of just talking the talk. Lisa Schirch, an international peacemaker

and a professor of peacebuilding at Eastern Mennonite University has these words of encouragement for anyone working for peace: "We are one small piece of a big puzzle and all we can really hope to do is be faithful to whatever our small part is." Our website, [peaceworks.tv](http://peaceworks.tv), has a list of simple activities that can help us to become more peaceful people, often by focusing less on our own needs and more on the needs of others. If small, other-centered acts really are the key to peacemaking perhaps there is no better person (other than Jesus) to show us how we can "let peace begin with me" than Mother Teresa, who said "We can do no great things. Only small things with great love." Amen.

*Stephen Jarnick is the founder of Peaceworks and serves on its board of directors. He attends The Meeting House in Kitchener, On., where he is the service producer. He also is a regular contributor to the "Red Letter Christians" blog.*

## What We Talk About When We Talk About Peace

By Zach Spidel

**THE CONVERSATION WAS** initially polite in that strained way most such conversations begin. I and my then girlfriend's mother both spoke in the tone of voice reserved for someone one generally likes but regards as being incomprehensibly and foolishly mistaken on a particular topic. Just beneath the careful, halting pace of the conversation a question was coursing through both our minds – how can you possibly think this way? As the conversation wore on, our too-polite tone never changed, but the strain beneath that tone grew until my interlocutor had to abruptly leave the room in tears – not because I had said anything unkind but because she was so bewildered by my support for such a blindingly awful falsehood. I felt similarly as I watched her go.

Our conversation was, of course, about

whether or not Christians should ever use violence. I felt strongly that Jesus calls us to nonviolence; Deb felt that the use of force was a holy calling in some people's lives. Specifically she felt that men are called by God to be protectors of both their families and their nation. A man who refused to use violence when his family or nation was threatened was, for her, either acting out of cowardice or sheer wickedness.

Only in hindsight have I come to better understand my conversation with her that day. While I had approached the conversation as a mostly cerebral exercise, it had been a deeply personal affair for her. As she talked about the duty men have to protect, I'm sure she was thinking of her daughter, with whom I was in a serious relationship at the time, and of her husband, a military contractor supporting the fighting forces his work aided. I,

quite foolishly, spoke only from the left side of my brain that day, never angrily or unkindly, but also never acknowledging the very real personal stakes involved.

That experience, and the realization of my unintentional insensitivity surrounding the deeply personal nature of this question for my conversation partner, led me to re-evaluate the way I had been engaging in such conversations all along. I was convinced that, when it comes to this question, there are deeply personal stakes for all of us, stakes which can stir up significant, even primal emotions. For this reason, I believe all such conversations must be approached with empathetic, cruciform love.

Rather than attempting by the sheer force



of exegetical and theological argument to prove to my brothers and sisters in Christ the validity of the peace position, I now enter into conversations with Christians who disagree with me with the goal of demonstrating the kind of universal love that lies at the heart of Jesus' call to love our enemies. Only communicating such love can lower the very real mental self-defenses that are automatically erected when people enter these conversations.

Those defenses spring up because, inevitably, when a peace-Christian speaks with a more conventional Christian, the possibility and fear of being judged arises on both sides. There are many areas of Christian life and thought that brothers and sisters can happily agree to disagree, but this is one area that matters greatly. If Jesus is really calling us to abandon violence, then obedience to this call is one of the central and most distinctive elements of the Christian's countercultural witness. If he is not, then the universal instinct to protect those near you, by force if necessary, is God-honoring, and a failure to fight in defense of those entrusted to you by God is cowardly at best and treacherous at worst.

In discussing these matters, a pacifist and non-pacifist Christian know that it is not re-

ally an exaggeration to say that one of them is calling the light darkness and the darkness light. And because both Christians know that there is such serious moral weight in their conversation there is a natural fear of being judged by the other person. They think I'm calling what's evil good and what's good evil – they must think I'm evil. I've had many conversations on this topic with Christians who've not shared my peace-position and this is a fear I've recognized in myself far too often and I've learned to recognize it in others. When one is afraid of judgment, one's mind and heart close down. No open and honest dialogue is possible and the conversation descends into a contest in which each person is trying to "win." Such conversations never change any minds, though they do embitter many hearts.

Another way is possible, however, and it begins with acknowledging what we're talking about when we talk about peace. We're talking about ourselves. It begins by naming the stakes involved and the fears that emerge from those stakes. Most importantly, it begins by affirming, in the face of those stakes that even though you believe your brother or sister is wrong, you believe they are wrong for all the right reasons (desire to follow Jesus, defeat evil, and defend the good) and

that if you are wrong you hope your brother or sister can help you see that. It begins, and runs its course, and ends successfully only in love. If your brother or sister does not end a conversation on this topic with you and walk away convinced of your love for him or her, even in the face of your morally weighty disagreement, then I don't believe you can count your conversation a success.

I was won to the peace position because I was convinced it was right, but I was only open to that truth because I was well-loved by those who shared it with me. When we talk about peace with others, we must remember that we are talking not just with our brothers and sisters, but about them – the content of our conversation has deep, personal ramifications for them and us. For a person to change their mind on this topic is not a minor shift in belief, but a transformation of their very worldview and thus, inevitably, a change in their perception of themselves. Such radical change does not occur under the threat of judgment, but comes about as a response to love. May we not shrink from talking about peace, but when we do, may we speak of peace in love.

*Zach Spidel is the pastor of The Shepherd's Table in Dayton, Oh.*

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counseled and tested.

The project is carefully designed to work through mobilizing children and women's groups. The groups form task forces/teams (HIV care and prevention, child labour, education, loans and savings) that provide leadership and monitor respective activities. The project implements its goals through groups because of the positive benefits of group activities, including unity of purpose, confidence building, information sharing and awareness raising.

Taine is another person who has benefited from BICC/CCDP's efforts. She tells her story:

"Life was unbearable after my divorce in 2005 when my former husband left me with eight children and no assets. I had to involve my children in selling cobs of maize and groundnuts in order to generate enough in-

come to meet our family's needs. One day when my children were selling on the streets the BIC/CCDP task force on child labour tracked them. We had a lengthy discussion about the dangers of children selling on the streets and why I felt like I had to send my children to sell on the streets.

"I became a member of Chipego women's club, where I learned business management, the value of saving, effects of child labour, HIV and AIDS and much more. After eight weeks, I was granted a loan and started a business of buying tobacco in the farms and selling it in Lusaka. This proved to be a very viable business and generated a lot of profits within a short period of time. From the first loan, I bought a plot in Mwaona compound. From 2005-2009 I received four different loans, and I was able to construct a three-bedroom house, and two smaller houses.

"I have rented out my houses and I am

able to generate income from them and also from my other business. I am now able to send my eight children to school, with the first born doing a trade at Choma trades training institute. I thank the BICC/CCDP for turning my dark situation into light again. I have been empowered!"

*Cornwell Hademu is the project director for BICC/CCDP and a member of the Compassionate Ministry Committee for the Zambian Brethren in Christ Church.*

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## Protecting Children in Zambia

By Cornwell Hademu

**JAPHET IS 22 YEARS** old and lives in the Chandamali compound in the Choma District in southern Zambia. He tells his story: “In 2005, I dropped out of school in grade 8 because I couldn’t afford the school fees. Due to a lack of adequate food at home, I worked in stone-crushing and sand-mining. Although this was bringing me a bit of income, it was a hard and difficult thing for me to do. Sometimes, I suffered injuries, but I had no option.

In 2006, I was withdrawn from child labour by a task force on child labour under the Choma Children Development Project of the Brethren in Christ Church. My parents and I had counselling. My mother was encouraged to join Lusumpuko women’s club and I joined the Chandamali youth club and the drama club. We went from one school to another and one compound to another sensitizing fellow children on HIV/AIDS, child labour, and child rights. In 2007, I was able to go back to school and now am in grade 12 at Chuundu high school, performing very well.”

The Zambian Brethren in Christ Church Choma Children Development Project (BICC/CCDP) is a programme of the church’s compassionate ministry in Zambia. It was established in 2002 to help eliminate

child labour, promote of self-help initiatives, HIV prevention and child participation in Choma District of the southern province of Zambia.

BICC/CCDP is guided by a project coordinator and five other project officers who oversee the implementation of project activities in targeted areas. The vision is to create an environment where children are respected, valued and listened to. Our mission is to work with children, parents and other stakeholders for good welfare of children and their families.

Our goal is to improve the quality of life of the children involved in the worst forms of child labour to realize their full potential through:

- Facilitating and promoting community participation in programmes aimed at meeting the needs of these children in order to ensure their sustainability.
- Facilitating and providing for basic needs to children in order to alleviate their suffering.
- Advocating and lobbying for the rights of child labourers in order to raise awareness and mobilize support of Government and other agencies.
- Promoting and providing psychosocial support to child labourers, parents and

guardians and caregivers to enable them cope with stress.

- Collaborating and networking with relevant organizations in order to enhance support to child labourers.

We have successfully removed 1,191 children from stone-crushing, sand mining, street vending, scavenging and prostitution. Almost 1,000 of these children were sent to mainstream education, 90 were sent for skills training, 157 were sent to pre-school, and 155 women were trained in functional literacy. Twenty-five women’s clubs and 14 children’s groups were formed. Two hundred and fifty parents and guardians underwent parenting education, 48 parents were trained in peace and reconciliation in the family, three community literacy centers were built, and 475 women and youth benefited from micro credit. Seventy-eight self-help groups formed with a membership of 1,360; their main activities include savings mobilization, credit management, social issues discussion and economic empowerment. Under the HIV prevention initiatives, the project has formed five parent-to-child transmission support groups, five alcohol and other drug support groups, five gender-based violence support groups, and 5,672 people have been

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