

PEACEBUILDING

Deliberate Action to Bring Healing to our Nations

Kent Hodge

Peacebuilding

“Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.” (Hebrews 12:14)

“If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.” (Romans 12:18)

“They must turn from evil and do good; they must seek peace and pursue it.” (1 Peter 3:11)

“And the way of peace they do not know.” (Romans 3:17)

“For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” (Romans 14:17)

“For shoes, put on the peace that comes from the Good News so that you will be fully prepared.” (Ephesians 6:15)

“Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.” (Romans 14:19)

“Now the God of peace be with you all.” (Romans 15:33)

“God has called us to live in peace.” (1 Cor 7:15)

“For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. As in all the churches of the saints.” (1 Cor 14:33)

“How I wish today that you of all people would understand the way to peace. But now it is too late, and peace is hidden from your eyes.” (Luke 19:42)

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” (Matthew 5:9)

Christian Faith Ministries

CFM operates an interdenominational Bible College with hundreds of students, at diploma, degree and masters level. It runs full-time, part-time, sandwich, correspondence and online programs.

CFM's other ministries include church planting, mission stations, evangelism, media outlets, conferences, missions development, printing, children's school, children's homes, vocational education, agricultural development, mercy help towards those from all backgrounds in need, and peace initiatives in education, community development and rehabilitation. CFM is located at different centres throughout Nigeria and in Egypt, as well as on a 30-acre permanent site in Nigeria.

Facing Evil with Good

In 2014 I was returning to the nation where we serve. I had been out of the nation for a month, and when returning I was met by a friend and colleague of some 25 years, and another team member. My friend and I had worked together for most of that time. A visitor from Australia was also accompanying me.

My friend and our team member collected us from the airport, and we began to travel north, about a 5-hour drive. At 8:30 AM we came upon what looked like an ordinary military checkpoint ahead: these are common in this nation. Then the men dressed in military gear began shooting on a car ahead of us. We knew then that it was not the army, and thought they must be armed robbers.

My colleague was driving that morning. We normally alternated the driving. He quickly reversed the car and managed to turn it around 180 degrees, and began to head off in the direction we came from. At that point another group of men appeared and began shooting on our car. We were ambushed, caught between the two armed groups.

They had powerful weapons and were shooting consistently at us. I thought then that they must not be armed robbers: they must be terrorists. It looked like their aim was to kill everyone in the car and I was just waiting to be hit by a bullet. I thought that was the end of this life for the four of us.

Then the car began to run off the road: it crashed into small trees and stopped. I was still waiting to be hit by the bullets, when the firing stopped. My friend at the wheel had been shot and had died instantly. The armed men called to us to get out of the car. First they threatened to kill us, then to kidnap me, as they searched through our luggage for about half an hour or more. Finally, they let us escape, shouting at me for interfering in the nation as a missionary. The men were Muslim Fulani people.

As we stood on the road I had no fear, anger or resentment for the attackers, just sadness at the loss of my friend. I felt compassion for our attackers. They looked afraid, scared of the fate that awaited them. You wanted to help them change.

I wondered about the evil. We saw evil. Over the years we had helped train 9,000 pastors, who had evangelised the nation and planted thousands of churches. Yet it seemed evil was still very much alive, even mocking. I wondered, "After all this, all these years, all this gospel ministry, how do you overcome evil?"

Then my thoughts went to the people in the villages around us. They slept there every night, without protection. We had tasted of their constant vulnerability; of the life they live.

I thought about missions, and asked myself, "Are we crazy taking these risks?" Then I thought about Jesus and missions. He didn't fly above us dropping leaflets of the good news. He came and lived among us, in our harsh lives. Missions is fellowship with those who live in such conditions. If it isn't equal fellowship, it isn't missions.

Later we were at the local police station near the place of attack, reporting what happened. It was a small cement block building. It was totally defenceless. The police began to lament their own situation. Their weapons were inferior to those used by the people wreaking destruction in that region. Police were often targets and this station could be wiped out at any time. We felt for them. We loved them, wept for them and appreciated what they did, thinking of their families, and what the common man passes through in our day and age.

The next morning, when I was shaving, I was shocked to see that man in the mirror. I had never experienced this feeling before. It went on for a few days. Why was I still alive?

After bringing our visitor back to the airport to go home, and making arrangements to transport the body of our dear friend, we continued on our journey the next day in another car and finally came near our home in the north.

We passed through a suburb near our Bible College, driving by a church I had spoken in once. A month afterwards it had been burnt down in an attack on the suburb in early 2010. Many buildings around it had also been destroyed by fire. I knew the house next to the church: it was owned by a Muslim. Four and a half years later, 2014, all the buildings still lay in ruins. No one had funds to restore them. That is still the case till today, 2016.

The church had asked if they could restore their building and move back into the neighbourhood. The Muslim elders, said No. As we passed by that day in the car, we received a phone call from the state leader of the fellowship of the nation's Pentecostal churches. He had heard what had happened and about the loss of our friend. He asked what they could do in response to this evil act.

The answer seemed so simple to me. I answered, "Rebuild the home of the poor Muslim woman next to the burnt down church hall and burnt down manse." I think this shocked the man and I didn't hear from him again. If the church did this for this poor Muslim widow, the Muslim elders would beg them to come back into their locality and rebuild their own hall and restart their fellowship.

Over the next few weeks, hundreds of people came to visit us in our office and lament with us. These people are very good at that, with plenty of practice. They spend time with you. They don't have answers, they just care for you and then encourage you. Friends, pastors, leaders of various groups, just kept coming.

The Muslim elders of our township also came. They mourned with us and encouraged us, just like everyone else was doing. Then I asked them, "Could you take me through your township?" They agreed, and several elders walked with myself and a pastor friend of mine. We walked in the area of the town that no Christian ever passed through.

That day we saw about 1,000 homes destroyed mostly within the Muslim community. We saw no attempt to rebuild any of them. We saw widows and children living under rusty corrugated iron on sticks, in burnt out buildings, with almost no provisions. We saw that the community had no help from anyone.

This destruction happened in the 2010 attack on the suburb. We saw the Christian homes that had been destroyed and knew about the Christians that had died. We read about it in the Christian Prayer Letters that went around the world. Our own buildings, where our Bible College is, were attacked by Christians on a number of occasions. They wanted to burn everything because we were renting the buildings off a Muslim man. But our team leaders convinced them not to, and they watched the building every day and night, at the risk of their lives.

But I had never heard about the destruction and killing in the Muslim area, less than a mile from my office, until that day. No Christian Prayer Letter I had seen had mentioned it. It was another shock to walk though that suburb, just a week after seeing the evil on the road where we were attacked.

Two weeks later, on a Sunday, a student in our Bible College told me that the church in his township was attacked by Boko Haram that morning. He said three of their church members were killed, and three of the Boko Haram members also died in the attack. We were very sad to hear the news. This

kind of news was all too common. Our own city had passed through about two years of bombings, including many churches and schools, and these often sparked rampant and random vengeance killings.

Two days later the student told me that his church members had recognized one of the dead Boko Haram members, a boy from a neighbouring Muslim village. Then, for two days, the Christians of that town went through two neighbouring Muslim villages and randomly burnt houses and killed people.

We were devastated to hear the news. Not only was this so wrong for Christians to do (and they were from mainline churches), but we knew what would happen as a result. Days afterwards, Boko Haram returned in uniform, pretending to be the army. They said they had a government announcement for the men and all the men should gather together.

When the men gathered, Boko Haram killed them all. This was a town near the border of our nation. At the time we had six students from that one town in our Bible College. They all came to my office, devastated. They had all lost fathers, uncles, other relatives and friends. Two of the students had wives and children in the township, and had no news. The women and children, and the few surviving men had fled into the mountains and nobody knew if they were alive or had also been killed.

I didn't know what to say: we just mourned together. I thought of Job's counsellors, how they sat down and said nothing for three days: they did well until they spoke. So for a week we mourned together, allowing each other to grieve.

The next week we started to slowly encourage the students. We said God had a purpose for them, and that is why he saved them from the destruction. He would use them to rebuild the township and bring peace and the gospel to the region. After some time, the two married students found their wives and children. Today, all six students are contributing to the rebuilding of their community.

We read different international prayer bulletins about that attack on that township. In not one of them did we read what the Christians had done. The murderous retaliation on Muslim communities was not mentioned in any of the bulletins.

I am not blaming those Christians for what they did. They pass through terrible things. But there was no honesty in the international Christian reporting. And when our international Christian watch groups, living at a safe distance, call us to help the suffering Christians, and don't ask us to extend any compassion to the suffering of the Muslims, it feels limp and inadequate, from our position on the ground.

The year that followed was intense. The militants became worse and worse. We, and others we know, were doing all we could to unite the Muslim and Christian communities. We heard good reports. Christians and Muslims were standing together in various places, saying no to the terrorists. This was the only sign of hope in a dark place.

Then the leader of the Christian umbrella group of the whole nation publicly called on the President to arm all Christians for a kind of Book of Esther standoff in the nation. Pastors were calling on their members to arm themselves. Soon after his public call, this Christian leader's private jet was impounded in South Africa for smuggling weapons. He claimed the jet had been hired out to another party.

But that claim didn't sit well with Muslims in our region: were the Christians deceiving them about a peaceful stand together? We, and many others, assured them, "No, we are sincere." We didn't approve of any such arms, for any Christians. We approve of friendship. Finally, this near catastrophe was averted and feelings of distrust died down somewhat.

Then in 2015, when the nation was on the brink of being overrun by the terrorists, when it looked like there was no hope, we announced that February was the month of rejoicing. We rarely do stuff like this, but we felt in our heart that God had a surprise for the nation. So that month of February we rejoiced. In March things began to change. Terrorists, being rejected soundly by the Islamic community, began to be driven back and out of the main regions they held. Since then things have continued to slowly improve, with terrorists gradually pushed further back.

Did the army help? Yes, finally it received the leadership it needed. And it had unity between its Christian and Muslim members, and the Muslim and Christian populations. Getting rid of corruption and unifying community in love and care is what pushed evil back. And all the while, our church was praying for Boko Haram, that many would be saved. And many were, including some who became students in our Bible College and who are doing so well today.

Not that is all downhill from here. There are still many rumours, and many who prefer conspiracy theories, and who prefer conflict, even on the Christian side. The walk of love doesn't end. It's a constant watch. It's the only way to defeat evil and darkness. It's our weapon of war. "Overcome evil with good." "But I say to you, do not resist evil (with evil), but if someone smites you on one cheek, turn to him the other also."

Relationships and Care

Peace is something we make; it doesn't just fall from heaven. It is something we pursue. It is something that we go after. It is something that we work diligently at. This is to be a main endeavour of the church. We don't say, "Well there is a cost involved and I don't want that cost," or, "Peace isn't easy, other people aren't very peaceful." Instead, we are to recognize that making and building peace in our communities is a main calling of the church, and of the image of God in our lives.

"For shoes, put on the peace that comes from the Good News so that you will be fully prepared."
(Ephesians 6:15)

Our minds aren't naturally geared to this peace. We will invent every excuse, and every theological excuse, not to do this, especially when it gets tough. People will call us fools for even thinking about it. But for Jesus it is clear; the Sermon on the Mount is all about how to make peace with our enemies. And in living this out, we show the gospel at its very centre; reconciliation with our enemies, which God did in Christ and which he sends us to replicate.

This book looks at some of the troubling issues in our world today, and at some of the background factors. It speaks about all our nations today, whether on Aboriginals in Australia, immigrants and refugees in different nations, or differences between Christians and Muslims. It looks at the ghettos forming within Western societies and how to build in a way that brings a peaceful future. Then it spells out in practical terms what some of our responses should be, which the gospel reveals to us about how we should live among others.

Two steps to peacebuilding are sketched. These are:

1. Getting to know people in other groups, and building relationships with those people. **This is bridge building.**
2. Getting to know problem issues in other communities and then working with those people to help solve those issues. **This is helping.**

Step one is about deliberately making the initial relationships. Step two is a commitment to serve. Without relationships, the areas in their communities where healing is needed are never made known to us. We have two options. Either we form relationships with others and help them, or we become more isolated and antagonistic towards each other. Either we acquire real knowledge of other people, or accept the propaganda that leads us to war.

What are we and our nations doing now that contributes to a lack of peace in our world? We may say we are peaceful people, but is that really true?

People often respond to talk of peace, saying it leads to a sinister one world government. Or they paint the idea in terms of the Old Testament Prophets, who said the people "healed the wound lightly saying 'peace, peace,' when there is no peace." The people Jeremiah was speaking to were self-empire builders, like most of us, not community builders.

Likewise, Rome used the logo "Peace and Safety." The Roman Empire claimed to build a world order of peace, but it did not put true caring justice for others in the citizens' hearts. Their claim, like that of all empires today, wasn't true. The peace claims of Christ and his people, who build in love, are true. The gospel of Christ's global community is still true and is still the vision of God, despite the self-centred world empires humans build.

The world's false peace claims don't mean we shouldn't seek justice on a local and global level. They don't mean we shouldn't embrace and care for others in peace on a local and global level. Christ, the Prince of Peace, is the builder of peace, through the gospel and through Christian people. Instead of sectarianism, he raises a self-giving healing community. He brings division to the empires of unjust rule, including our commercial empires of our current time. He does this by giving us new hearts, that build in a new way, by love for our neighbour, whoever that person may be.

"Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end." (Isaiah 9:7)

"May he reign from sea to sea, and from the Euphrates River to the ends of the earth." (Psalms 72:8)

This peaceful reign and spread is not carried out through war, but through peace. War isn't the means of peace; peace is the means, as well as the end. The end and the means are the same. This is what is different about Christ's kingdom.

Practical Steps for Peace

In this book we are going to focus more on the practical steps in peacebuilding in our communities. What are the things we can do to encourage relationships and peace within our societies?

It is remarkable that there are very few books about this in Christian circles. At least, in the circles I have mainly mixed in, you do not see any courses on Peacebuilding. In none of the bible colleges I have been associated with, as a student, or as one of the leaders, have I seen a single module on Peacebuilding in our communities. At least, not as I remember. This is the first we have written, after 30 years in writing college modules.

In none of the churches I have been linked to as a member over the years, have I heard, or remember hearing, any specially tailored teaching aimed at this topic. Maybe it's just that I wasn't listening. This teaching and practice does exist in other sectors of the church community, just none that I have been associated with in Evangelicalism, or Pentecostalism.

This is remarkable because peace and reconciliation is the major part of God's movement towards man in the incarnation. It is the major aspect about who Jesus is. If we know him as Lord, then surely we should be following his peacemaking and reconciling actions in our lives towards others, and even towards our "enemies," just as he did. Jesus is the Prince of Peace. Like a friend said, "There is nothing about Jesus that isn't about peace." So why haven't we majored on this in our communities. Why haven't we shown who God is, by learning and following his ways of peace?

This book isn't meant to be about the theological aspects to peacemaking. We have covered those a little in other books, about the teachings of Jesus. But the major reason we haven't followed Jesus, is because we have developed a very fundamentalist approach to our faith, especially since the rise of uniformitarianism, from around the 1830s, saying the world formed slowly over many millions of years, then Darwinism, with evolution. The character of the church began to change more towards separatism, rather than engagement fully within the community life. The holy person was the separate person, who shunned all others, except in "evangelism."

This has to be deconstructed. It starts in our theology, but then the practical life that comes out of this new theology must develop. This book, far overdue, is just the beginning in this new practical life. It is just the first steps we can take. We hope that others among us will develop this in greater detail, bringing out far more new life skills, that will benefit many and bring change to our nations.

The greatest need we have in our modern nations is for community. The fruit of our separatism, which we, from all our different backgrounds, indulge in today, is violent and horrific in our nations. It spreads throughout the world. There is not a single place that isn't affected by this. It is the world's number one issue we must address.

Community, working together, is not only a witness to Jesus, but it also enables us to address so many common problems we face. Like human suffering. Working together would solve so much of the suffering. This is God's will. We have to realise that. Like the desertification of the sub-Sahara. We can turn this desertification around if nations work together, if we don't have an individualistic approach to life.

This is true in every part of the world. We can turn so many things around, if we can turn separatism around. And the church can lead the way, because reconciliation is what Jesus taught us. We may say, "reconciliation, only with people who repent." When the church leads reconciling lives, this

repentance spreads. This book looks at some practical steps in moving us away from individualism to serving. This is what heals our communities.

Making New Links

Some years ago we had war in our community. Christians and Muslims were fighting each other, burning houses and killing. Terrible acts were committed. We went through this for weeks. One of the things that struck us so plainly was our total separation from the other part of our community. We didn't know anyone there we could speak to about the problems, to try to solve them. We had no relationships with them.

Up until that time we probably didn't realise this, or had accepted that as part of our theology. We thought it was compromise to relate with anyone who hadn't accepted the gospel. This attitude is often strong within our Christian community. Self-appointed cult-watchers label as "antichrist" people who love Catholics, or who love Muslims. The cult-watchers have slandered many. They have slandered people like Rick Warren, bringing out all kinds of false reports about him. Many others are intimidated and dare not build community, lest they be "put out of the Synagogue."

At the height of the violence we realised we had made a mistake. We had come to the town just for our own ends. We had our vision about our church and ministry and only cared for people in regard to how they fitted into our vision and mission. Anyone outside of that was rejected as not part of our community. We had no relationships with them.

This meant that when there was need, when something was going very wrong in our community, we had no point of contact with others to discuss it and try to solve the situation. We had no bridges to cross. We hadn't built any bridges and we had also helped tear down the bridges that used to be there. Our ministry was a bridge tearing down ministry, and we hadn't realised this until the crises came. Then it was too late.

So, what happens when there are no links between us? Rumours take over. We interpret anything that happens according to our separatist school of thought. We already have a system of belief built up about separatism. We have decided in advance how the others will behave and we have established our reasoning for this very systematically. So anything that happens is interpreted through this enemy-aware perspective.

This is the most dangerous part of any crisis. That is, propaganda, prejudging people, working on rumours. And let's face it, we have many crisis situations in the world today, and are on the brink of many others. When we don't know people, rumours always take over. Rumours become the basis upon which we act. And our actions in this way always cause escalation of violence.

There is only one antidote to rumours and this is relationship with people. Bridges are the only remedy for this. When we have bridges, we can discuss every situation with our friends in community and establish the facts. Then we can act together, and not in darkness, against the problems that we both want to dissipate. Common resolve against the problems of our wider community is possible, indeed it is what both sides of the community really desire. But it is only possible when we can act together.

Build links, to dissipate rumours, and to bring about common action against the real problems in our community. Act together, not separatory.

In crises situations this is hard to do. When things are going wrong, when it really looks like the other people are the cause, when the emotions are heated, when people are suffering, it is very difficult to act the right way. All the pressure is against you. Your "own people" want you to condemn the other

group, not our own wrongs. The time when peace is needed the most, when finding the cause and acting together is needed the most, is when it looks least possible.

We all like peace when we have peace. We all believe in peace when it is peaceful. But when nobody believes in peace, when it is difficult to speak of peace and to act in ways that make peace, then this is the time to believe in peace and act in that way. This is the time peace and right actions are most needed.

Before the next crises, start making links with all parts of the community. Begin to visit the leaders and other members of the community. Make relationships with them. Be sincere about it. Start to reorientate the way you look at community. Realize the community isn't just about your own vision, for your own ministry, but it includes other people who have different types of lives. These people also need to be included in your plans. Make links with them. Get to know them, and start opening doors for caring relationships with others. Do this without ulterior motives.

Don't be put off by members of your own community who try to stop you from doing this. They will call you names. They will spread rumours about you. They will falsify your motives. This will go on throughout your whole new walk with the larger community. It will always be with you. It is just ignorant selfishness. They don't want other people to get the shared blessings. They will cover their motives with much false theology, but don't be moved by it. Hold to your new course and new way of life.

It takes courage:

1. Courage to trust the new community, especially when things don't look good.
2. Courage to stand against the reaction of some of the people in your own community, and love them also in return.
3. Courage to trust God as the one you are seeking to please, no one else.
4. Courage to keep trusting God when things go wrong and peace doesn't quickly come. Keep doing what is right.

New Community

The next step is to treat all the people in our wider community as part of the same community. This means that we stop denying that other people, near or far, are our neighbours. We start treating neighbours as neighbours, and not as theological rejects. This is putting into effect the teaching of Paul, "Rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn." When we fail to treat neighbours as neighbours it is form of injustice.

When our neighbours have special events, celebrate these events with them. Don't just ignore them, as though they are not part of our community. When they have bad things happen, mourn with them, show them concern. This should be genuine, seeing how we can comfort each other and help. And when they return this concern to us when things happen in our own lives, we should welcome it and be grateful. We should treat them as family in community, brothers and sisters in our society.

It's like Jesus saying that when you have a party, don't just invite your friends. Or when you greet people at the market, don't just greet your friends. The message is clear.

We may not be brothers and sisters in Christ, but we are in our social lives. We are called to honour humanity. Paul spoke about this in Athens, on Mars Hill, acknowledging that we are all children of God by creation, and all come from one flesh. We are all brothers and sisters somewhere in our past heritage. We should honour people in this way. If we don't, then we aren't reflecting the love of God we are supposed to.

When we shun others we are not reflecting the common grace that all religions know is true. When we exclude others we have no special grace, no gospel to share.

We can share in the religious celebrations of others. This is especially true of Muslims. We have visited Muslim homes on such occasions and their religious celebrations have always been respectful and honouring. They are not like pagan events, with wild and wrong behaviour.

This is where separatists get out verses, like from Paul, saying we cannot drink of the cup of satan and of Christ, speaking of the immoral pagan festivals. This doesn't apply to us showing common kindness to those who are sincerely offering thanks according to their valued traditions. Muslims know we are not affirming their faith in areas where we have distinctions, but merely showing human compassion.

That is, Jews in Paul's time, didn't believe in Christ. In fact, they killed Christians. But Christians still went to synagogues and celebrated the things they had in common. We have a lot in common with Muslims, just as we do with Jews, though there are very important differences. It is hypocritical to acknowledge what we have in common with Jews, but to deny it with Muslims, whose faith, in some ways, comes from the same root. It is good to establish relations with both groups, rather than use our distinctions to promote hostility.

There are a lot of things we have in common between Islam and Christianity, like godliness, in normal moral behaviour. The Muslim events we have been to advocate many of the behavioural teachings that we hold in common from the New Testament. It is a good thing for us to visit and share the joy with Muslims at such times. It is common neighbourliness and courtesy to do so. Again, it doesn't mean we are sharing their faith, and Muslims know this. It means we are honouring them as neighbours.

One of our problems is that we get caught up in a lot of details. We often can't even fellowship between ourselves as Christians, because our customs are different. Paul spoke about this in

Romans and Corinthians, saying that our different traditions shouldn't get in our way of our love for each other. We should focus on our common values of godliness.

This doesn't just apply to us only in the church, but also with our neighbours in society. Though we have many different beliefs, we can still recognize and honour things that are good in other people's lives. We don't reject those celebrating the things we have in common, just because we disagree with them in certain key points. We build bridges on the things we have in common.

Over the years we have built up a theology of rejection. I remember the World Religion courses we did at Bible College. We learned all the differences between us and other faiths, and each difference became a wall. By the time we finished the course, we had built a hundred walls between us and everyone else. Maybe that was my fault; how I saw the course. Courses like this should examine the areas where we can build bridges. Largely the same content, different motive.

This is how we treat other people in our society. We honour other people who are good car mechanics, even if we question their football team allegiance, and we honour other skills in people, even if they aren't Christians. We need to do the same with Muslims. If there is something good in their life, something we agree with, we should honour that. It is only competition and fear that stops us from doing this. We need to forget these negatives and treat them as people like ourselves, who should be treated well.

The key we are expressing in this section is to get involved in the lives of all our neighbours, not just our Christian neighbours. Break down the walls in our communities by showing care for our neighbours at special events in their lives. This is where we start.

If they have a baby, celebrate it. If they get married, celebrate it. We don't influence people by staying away. We can influence people if we are involved in their lives and are showing love to them. Being "holier than thou" doesn't help anyone and it even gives us a Pharisaical heart, which is harmful to us as well. So positive involvement in the lives of our neighbours heals us – reorientates our heart the right way – when we celebrate with other people when they celebrate.

This is only step two in our better relationships in our community. Step one was making acquaintance, making links, and getting to know others. Step two, is beginning to establish that relationship more, by showing concern at some of the more significant events of their lives. There is no community if we don't live it out with neighbour. We can't love someone in our heart, if we don't do it in practice.

This is one of the things we don't do in the West. We have immigrants coming into our nations and mostly they don't get to establish relationships with local people. Locals don't visit them on their important occasions. They don't get to know them and make links. They don't build the relationships. The immigrants then move close to themselves, so they can get their relationship needs met. And the result is that separation-ghettoes develop in the nations, with all of us living detached lives. Then we blame the immigrants for not merging with the society.

Immigrants need these links with their own people in our societies. They often come in with disrupted lives. I am not referring to the rich ones whom our nations want, but the refugees our governments and communities normally exclude, who make it to our nation only after facing extreme hardship and overcoming almost insurmountable barriers. They are often starting afresh in a new nation, with no family inheritance; no build-up of assets and resources. They must live in their ghettoes to get help and support. This is not good for a nation to allow this exclusion to happen.

We have to be deliberate in actively forming relationships with others outside our groups, if our nations are going to have a healthy future. Helping refugees in a way that helps them and also builds them into our nation in a peaceful way takes deliberate policy. We shouldn't blame them, but think about it.

We elect governments mainly for their promises about economic strength. We aren't thinking about these more important aspects of our communities and the actual people. We can't reject these people in need. They are a rich human and cultural resource for our nations. Neither can we ignore them once they enter. We can't just throw aid money at them, like governments have to the Aboriginal community, with little care or personal involvement: this has been spectacularly unsuccessful. This is about relationships. This honours people and build a nation of peace.

Relationships may not be easy at first, not just because of cultural differences, but sometimes also because of what we have done to others in the past. This is where Jesus' teaching comes in: "When you come to worship at the temple, and you remember someone has something against you, first go and put that right with them." Our national policy should be as much about putting these things right, as about our economic policies.

Ghettos always produce danger in the long run. When we don't value each other, misunderstandings, miscommunications, and bitterness are always the result. This is a human outcome, not a reflection on our different faiths.

We can't ignore other parts of our community and think we are heading for peace. The peace of our own community is in the peace of our wider community. Seek the peace of our wider community, by seeking the welfare of its people, and we will have peace of our own community. This is what Jeremiah (29:7) said to Israel when they went captive to Babylon: "Don't live sanctimonious, self-centred lives."

Learning to rejoice and mourn with all our neighbours is just the beginning in our new relationships. After this we start to get to know others, and as relationships deepen, so many other doors begin to open. Doors of real sharing and real care start to change people's lives. This is where community involvement starts, and from here it spreads to thousands of others who copy us and start to participate.

If you dare to start you will begin a new perspective, even in the hearts of many Christians. This can change the world.

Serving Others

A church isn't in a community just for its own ends. We aren't here just to evangelise, grow and meet our own goals. A church is part of the whole community and should share in the goals and aspirations of others, not just in its own aspirations. We might have thought that our only purpose is to share the gospel. That is partly true, but this gospel is lived out. This is how it is shared. If we don't care for all in our community, then how are we living the values of the gospel? God didn't choose who he would die for. He died for all. And he sends rain on the just and the unjust.

This means the church is here for the welfare of the whole community. And this whole community doesn't just include people who are of certain faith or race. A problem in the Muslim community is a problem in our community. Not that we pry into other peoples' business, but we offer our help and if people trust us they will appreciate us working together with us. A problem in the Muslim youth community, for example, is a problem in our community. If we say that that is none of our concern, we are very wrong. It matters to us all. These problems grow and impact all of us. We may like to live in isolation, but isolation is a myth.

We can't say the Muslim youth are not our youth. An African proverb says "children are for all of us." We all have the responsibility of care. If youth grow up badly, whether from our community, or from a neighbouring community, it affects all of us. We are all in this together. We can't just lock our door and watch a movie and hope it will go away. We only have one world to live in together. So we are made to help each other.

This section is about finding needs in our wider community and seeking to work with that community in addressing these needs. This both helps solve the problems and at the same time deepens our relationships with the people of the community. It gives opportunities to know each other more, and to make those relationships meaningful through growing service.

If youth lack education, seek to help the community in that way. If they lack vocational training, seek to help them in that way. If there is a youth unemployment problem, try to work with the community in finding solutions. We have these problems in our own community, and the same problems also exist in other communities, often times much more.

This is especially so when there has been a lack of opportunities there for many reasons. Instead of blaming them, we should help them. We shouldn't just treat our own problems, with our own youth, and ignore others. If we are going to be one, in our social development, and we must be, then we live it out by caring for each other. And if we are Christ's, then we lead the way in this.

In our town, we asked to speak with the Muslim elders and we all met together. Our relationship developed when one of my friends saved the life of a Muslim elder, when Christians came to kill him, during one of the local wars. We mightn't call those attackers Christians, just pretenders, or nominal, but such aggression is common, even among mainline church groups. On the other hand, Muslims often wouldn't call the aggressors on their side "real" Muslims: just wild youth. Many of the aggressors don't go to mosques or take the teachings of godliness at all seriously, and are drunkards and drug addicts, just like the corresponding people in our own communities.

We said to the Muslim elders that since we are part of the community, we would like to serve the community youth. And we said we don't care which youth these are, Christian or Muslim, so long as they are youth in our wider community. Despite relationships being tense at that time in our township, the elders were very encouraged and open. We have had a very good working relationship since, with not the slightest problem. We have found them to be very responsible, as we opened a

computer centre for youth. So far 120 students have graduated from this centre, and Muslim and Christian youth have forged good relationships there, where previously these groups never talked together. Fifty new students just started, and hundreds more are waiting to join.

When this computer centre was opened, the people of the district came out to the ceremony, with the Muslim elders and leaders, including royal leaders and mosque leaders. One week before, Boko Haram had tried to set off a suicide bomb a few streets away from where our ceremony was to hold. The suicide bomber was killed before the bomb could go off.

I was almost hoping the Muslim community would postpone the opening, for our safety, especially since this kind of education was exactly what Boko Haram was trying to stamp out, especially against Muslims. But the Muslim elders did not want to postpone and said they were committed to this path for their youth and community and would go ahead with the opening. So we did. The path is clear. If terrorists don't want your neighbours educated, then work with your neighbours and help educate them. Help them to make a stand. Isolate the terrorists, not the community.

Needs may be different in your own place, or you may not be able to start a computer centre. But this is only one example of the kind of thing that you can start to bring communities together for mutual support and growth in relationships. You could open up tuition lessons, for after school learning to help those youth falling behind in their school work. If we pray about our local area, we can come up with some activity that would be very suitable to the people there.

Don't wait for the church to do this. Churches often have their own problems or areas of concern. They may not embark on these types of activities. But the activities are nevertheless essential. In Jesus' time, the religious Jews had no concern, or even connections, with their enemies. They would not even talk with them. And anyone who did connect with their enemies was, at the very least, castigated. Jesus had to be the one who started the movement of God to bridge gaps between communities.

In another district near us, there was fighting over years between Fulani and Christians. Our ministries 30-acre land block is located in between these two communities. At one-point last year things became so bad that the military had to move with tanks to enforce peace. As tension rose between our two communities, there was a Fulani neighbour of ours whose life was under threat, with his small community of about 40 people. His fellow Fulani has threatened him because he wouldn't join them against the enemy, us.

My friend found him and his small community wandering the streets, looking for safety. Here was a neighbour, whom our people treat as an enemy, but who needed help. Jesus said love your neighbour. This man was our neighbour and we had a choice of whether to obey the Lord or not. We invited his small community onto our land and said we would help protect them. In the end he declined and moved his community to another state, fleeing that same day.

We spoke to the Muslim/Fulani community near our 30-acre site and presented the same suggestion of a computer centre for their youth. They were thrilled and have been 100% cooperative and diligent in the running of this centre, with our joint Muslim/Christian staff. They gave us a mosque in their township for the computer centre, at the time when Boko Haram, the terrorist group against any such form of education, was at its height in the nation. The Muslims clearly rebelled against this terrorism, and did not believe in it. Since this computer centre opened, hostilities in that township began to die down and have now ceased.

While speaking about the Fulani, it is important for us to think about their situation, rather than just scapegoat them. They can no longer graze their cattle on the land we bought. How can we think of their needs in our areas and treat them like neighbours, rather than like enemies? How can we be proactive in good?

This is the type of thinking we need. If we are going to get our cities and nations back to peace and back to community values again, then we have to act on the teachings of Jesus. He didn't say, love your neighbour after they pass a theology check list test. He just said, "Love your neighbour." This means, think about them and include them and their needs in your plans. Don't pretend they don't exist, until they bring you trouble, and then hate them.

I have heard Christians speak about the "Fulani agenda" so much, but these Christians do not try to look at the situation from the Fulani perspective and don't suggest ways to help them. How can we be Christians, when we so plainly neglect the way Jesus told us to treat our enemies? We need proactive thinking, not reactionary violence, stirring people up to aggressive attitudes, rather than to love.

The reason people need "agendas" and only think in that self-centred way, is because no one cares for the others, and no one is showing them a better way. We need to launch a new way of thinking upon our world.

Those of you reading this will live in different nations, and the situation in each place will be unique. But the overall need is the same. We have communities, which include different kinds of people, and we must do things that draw us together to serve each other. This is the way of Christ's teachings, "Love God with all your heart, and your neighbour as yourself." This is the solution to our local and global problems. It isn't easy, but it is simple.

Find a practical activity to draw the communities together into working relationships, which in turn begins to develop into personal relationships. It is a very simple step in beginning the healing of our societies. It is a step we must take, to live together peacefully.

In our place, where people hated each other, now they spend time with each other as friends. They do things in each other's houses. They form groups together, to reach their whole city and nation with the news of transforming community. They are training the youth of tomorrow, by the thousands. This is what starting small can do.

One thing is sure, is that the youth of today are the future. If we include them in our lives and show love to them, our nations have hope. If we don't bother, but just get on with our own lives, then don't expect a bright future.

A Village Dam

As I said, our permanent site is a 30-acre block located between two communities, one Christian and the other mainly Muslim. Recently we were thinking of water supply to our land. We have a lot of children who need water, and agriculture that needs irrigation in the dry seasons. This include 1,500 fruit trees, and several kinds of crops and farm annals. Our two bore holes don't quite put out enough water for the growing needs.

Recently we were thinking about the possibility of damming a nearby stream, that would fill up during the wet season. We looked around and our local chief showed us a place on the stream close by that was once dammed. A foreign mining company had taken down the dam wall to get at tin mines where the water once was. Eventually the company left, but did not rebuild the earthen wall. But to rebuild this would be relatively inexpensive and it would help the local community significantly.

We spoke to the town chief and he was very favourable towards the project. Presently we are raising funds for it. This is the community principle. When looking for water for your own needs, don't be like the mining company. Think beyond your aims, and include the community needs. Always build this way and we will have peace. This is justice.

I found myself thinking, "This location is good. It is nearer the Christian community and the water supply there would be safer for us. If we build the dam further downstream, nearer the Muslim/Fulani community, it would not be in our best interest." This is where our thinking often trips us up, and this is the beginning of a process that leads us to war.

This is how it works. We say we want to stay close to the Christian community to keep us safe. So the things that we build and the things that we provide are all for the Christians. This begins to isolate us more and more from the others communities around us.

Over time we have all the good things and the communities near us are lacking. This is dangerous. This is a self-fulfilling prophecy. We start by saying it isn't safe. So we build further separation into our lives. The injustice makes our lives and communities unsafe.

This is a microcosm of what we have done on an international level. As we build alliances to keep us "safe," to pursue our own interest and economic plans for the future, we further isolate other nations, people groups, religious groups and communities. We do this because we don't know them, or have a bad history with them, and we feel comfortable in shunning them. We have all the justifications for this. We can recite all the harm that has happened in the past, all their bad behavioural practices and beliefs (forgetting our own). But this is surely building for war.

The Fulani have needs too. They have cattle. The cattle need water. If we dam the upstream, there will be no water downstream, until the dam is full. If they get angry at this, we can't pretend it is because they are Muslim: it is because we haven't treated them as neighbours.

We have to include every person in our discussion and plans. Meet all the communities. Talk together. Act in such a way that they begin to trust. Earnestly endeavour not to break that trust. These practical steps in peace are worth more than a hundred sermons in our divided communities.

Caring for Others

When there are culture clashes a lot of people get hurt. This may include physical hurt through violence, or it may be hurt from economic exclusion. These kinds of clashes are going on in many places in the world today, as nations struggle for position in different regions. The fallout is damaged lives.

Today this has been escalated, forcing millions of people to become refugees. There are more refugees at the present time than have ever been recorded before, more than from World War I, more than from World War II. These are refugees caused by conflicts of different kinds, not because people like to travel with their children in storms on the sea in open boats, or on foot across mountains in the middle of winter. Travel has become extremely dangerous for all involved, so it isn't undertaken lightly.

In many regions, when one racial or religious group gets into power, the other groups are denied benefits or jobs. In so many ways there is fallout: personal injury and heartache, due to our different kinds of conflicts.

This is where the church is supposed to be active, as a healing agent. And the only way we can heal is to care for others, as well as for ourselves. If we only care for Christians for example, then even our "healing" adds more hurt to the community. In fact, the Christian call in particular is to care for the others.

People have needs and these needs don't change because of what "side" they are on. They still have families, with children, and, like us, want to meet their needs for education, health and hygiene. They love their families just like we do. It's not their fault that they are on "the other side". They are born there. We need to have compassion on any person not because of what side they are on, but just because they are a person who feels pain.

Healing hurts doesn't only help individual people, it helps their families and heals community. Clashes leave a trail of damage in the community, and this leads to bitterness and further fuels future clashes. It just keeps getting worse. What is needed is for other people to come into this community with healing care. Healing the hurts of the people heals the bitterness, which heals the community, which reduces conflict.

After a clash, it is normal for us to come and say, "Who are our people? Which side do we back? We need to help them!" Much of the time, even this isn't done. We know of so many clashes, where Christians have been so greatly harmed, and no one, from near or from far, has come to their aid after the clash, to help restore. So the first step for us is to remember that we are one international Christian family, and that suffering in one place is also our suffering. We are one body, and pain in any part is pain to the whole body.

But this is only the starting point. It isn't right to come into a community after clashes and just help our own people. There is a distinct mark of self-centeredness about this. It isn't righteous, it isn't just, from the perspective of mercy. Often times, the people on the other side has suffered much more. Aren't they people too? If we only help our own, then we are definitely sowing the seeds for future clashes.

But often we don't have a mind for peace, even when "helping." We still do it with a hostile, "us and them," mindset. We so often sow the seeds of future clashes, while calling ourselves the good ones.

But all people, whether of our faith or not, have enough knowledge of truth to know that biased mercy isn't fully mercy. Its good, but not complete.

Do we want education for other people, like we value it for ourselves? Do we seek to see children who haven't been in school for years due to conflicts and due to the killings in their families, back in school again, with hope for a future? If yes, then do we desire this for any child? Isn't any child worthy, just by being human, made in the image of God, of having others care for them? Even if people don't return appreciation, like we didn't when Jesus died for us, are we still ready to extend compassion to others?

Caring for others, for others from any groups, brings healing to a community. Conflict comes because groups say the other side doesn't care for them. When we care for others we prove this to be wrong. This is just the simple "second mile" stuff Jesus taught. This type of care is against our human instincts, and sometimes against what looks like our personal interest, but it is what is necessary to bring lasting peace.

In our region, we had local community conflict that left people dead on both sides. It left widows and orphans, and others in poverty, with no way of paying for their family needs. Businesses were destroyed, homes were burnt down.

Christians reported of the losses on the Christian side, but no Christians knew of the losses on the other side, which were substantial, perhaps greater. It was as if these other losses didn't happen. In fact, that is what the Christians believed. They didn't believe there were any losses on the other side, or any suffering. They didn't believe that Christians, church going believers, would do that kind of thing. This is true locally and internationally. No Christian prayer broadcast we saw ever carried the full story, because nobody wanted to know.

When we prayed about this, we believed the Lord wanted us to set up a fund to help. We called the fund Healing Justice. By justice, we didn't mean the legal justice of retribution, but mercy. We meant showing mercy to those who needed it. We said, "If there are people in need, whatever faith, only if you need help, then come and we will pray and try to get some help."

The Lord really blessed this fund, which was able to help thousands of people in different ways. Because it helped people on both sides, it began to draw the community together. Other people began to see also that we Christians help others, and not just our own group. And this new way of living began to catch on and spread.

Unless people see this "caring for anybody" way of life and then copy it themselves, and start loving those on every side, it is impossible to heal a community and bring peace. We have to be people who stop to help anyone on the road in need, no matter who they are. This is the only thing that can bring peace.

This has been one of things that has brought healing and peace to our community. It is peacebuilding at the grassroots level. Often we seek to do peacebuilding at higher levels, discussions between power brokers. This can help, but it isn't enough. If the help doesn't get down to the people, if hurts aren't healed in the people's lives, in their homes and families, if help isn't given to the poorest among us, there will be no healing at all in the community. Healing works by reconciling relationships at the grassroots level. This is where lasting peace is made.

This is why Jesus is called the Prince of Peace: he brings good news to the poor. The poorest of the society being helped is what brings justice to the community. And the fruit of justice is lasting peace. There is no other way for peace to come.

If we see hurt in the world, whether close to us or far, and we continue living well, not helping those suffering, then there is nothing surer: we are heading for worse conflict down the road. If we go on building better houses and driving better cars while we ignore those damaged by conflict, then that isn't just. And when injustice reigns, war is coming.

Our Healing Justice fund continues to this day. People come to our office from all walks of life. We get to know them and how they are going and this builds relationships and bridges in our town with people we never knew of before. Instead of living our own excluded lives, we are now all living together, caring for each other. Everybody starts to get involved and starts picking up this caring attitude for neighbour. This is what starts a revolution of change. It becomes the "new cool" to care for others.

We send out people to check the stories, to make sure we get the real story, to meet real needs, and that the right action is being taken. **We now have connections and links through our wider community that never existed before. And these connections continue to grow. Those who were once "enemies" are now part of our social group.**

We can all do this. Churches in any township can start to realise that we aren't there in that township just for ourselves and our own vision. We are there for each other. These churches can start a fund. It doesn't have to be big. And this fund can begin to help the wider community. We mightn't have much, but we can begin to show that we care for others, even those among other groups that are struggling.

People often use the text "help others, especially those of the household of faith" as an excuse not to serve other groups. God never meant the text to be taken this way. Jesus never limited our "neighbour" to our own group. We have no excuse for thinking the wrong way about this.

Sometimes, in the midst of great clash and trouble, churches can go on building great edifices, with expensive materials, while thousands around them are suffering: parents barely able to give children one meal a day, not able to pay school fees or treat the youngest with very serious medical needs or give them proper nutrition to keep them healthy. This is a crime against humanity, when we serve our selves this way, and not our wider family. At least in the flesh, we are all one family, if not in faith.

Caring for others brings peace. Caring exclusively for ourselves and for our own group brings war.

Youth

A lot of urban conflict is started and carried on by youth. We mean youth on both sides. They may use religion as an excuse, but it is youth with no future, who have angry hearts and use religion as an excuse to do violent things. These violent things cannot be justified by any religion. It's the heart of man that is the problem here.

And when insurgent groups arise, they attract youth, who become the main force. And these youths are attracted because of their anger and their lack of a better alternative for life. They don't have jobs; they don't have governments interested in their welfare; they don't have Christians interested in their welfare. They don't have foreign governments interested in the wellbeing of the region, except for its resources. This is the stark reality so many large population groups are facing.

This is a youth problem. A youth problem, in any sector of society, is our youth problem. We can't say that is their problem and doesn't concern us. Even without this pragmatic reason to care for other youth, we should do it just because they are people and we care for their future.

There are many youth, in many nations, that have poor educational opportunities. Sometimes there are structural reasons for this, that are built into the communities where these youths were born and grow up. Without these opportunities, youth grow bitter because of the injustice they see. Other people have the opportunities which they see they lack.

We can say that these youths should have the right attitude and should pull themselves up by their shoe straps and train themselves. Some are able to do this, but many others cannot. So much is stacked against them. But it is our attitude here we are taking about. And that is what Jesus spoke about. Even if others have fault, we are still to try to reach them in that fault and help them recover from it. This is what God did for us.

Youth problems include not only a lack of education, but also a lack of employment opportunities. The economic conditions for jobs just don't exist. Not only that, but the conditions make it very difficult for youth to train themselves in their own skills and start their own businesses. Though they work hard, local conditions keep ruining attempts at enterprise. In other nations, people have support in these endeavours, while in many places setbacks are continual, without support.

This isn't an excuse for violence, or for wrong thinking on the part of youth. These are just the real conditions they face. We are not talking about whether people have a justifiable reason for violence. We are talking about the conditions people face, for many complex local and international reasons, and showing that these conditions contribute towards unrest. Working for peace must start at this grassroots level addressing the conditions. Our compassion must also start here. People's conditions may not be an excuse for their violence, but neither do we have an excuse not to care about their conditions.

So what can we do about this? People can elect officials who will work for the wellbeing of youth, allowing them opportunities at education and employment. People can change their mind on what is important when electing others to office. It is common to elect people who say they "are on our side," and then become corrupt in office. Instead, we want to elect people who work against corruption, and who will work for all people, not just for our group. We want to think about the common good in politics, not just the good of our group.

This requires a huge shift in our thinking and behaviour in politics. It's a politics of cooperation, rather than of demonization. To move from tribe to trust and to the common good is a very large

step, a bigger step than stepping onto the moon. Electing people who will serve all youth, on both sides, is a significant step towards peace.

So let's change our attitude about the way we vote. Let's vote for people who work for the whole community, and who do it without corruption. Let's not let our race or faith divide us in politics for the common good. We can cooperate in politics when we know that politics is not our saviour, Jesus is. And Jesus saves our community as we learn to care for our neighbour.

We can also seek to educate youth ourselves. We have the buildings. Our church buildings are often empty during the week. We can bring in youth, or widows, or young women in danger of exploitation, and train them in literacy or in vocational skills. This is another way of making relationships with other people we didn't talk to before, and showing that we care about them as people.

It's when we begin to work together that things in our community can start to change. It takes cooperation for things to head in the right direction. When we oppose each other, we are always pulling down the good things that people are achieving. By working together, progress can be made.

So we need this new attitude of working together, and this attitude can start with us. We need to be the ones who begin this new way of community, by starting to live it with others different to ourselves. Then people begin to copy our way of life, because we are not a competitive threat to them. This is what the church is in the world for; not to complain that things aren't fair for us, but to take up our cross and serve others. This is what Jesus did for us, and calls us to do for others.

Our churches need to find a way of serving youth in our community. If we pray about this, we can receive God's guidance on some way of beginning. We can find a way for serving youth, whether or not they are part of our church community. This is will go a long way towards repairing the relationships and attitudes in our area.

And this will also teach our church members to have the same helpful attitudes towards their different neighbours, and not to treat their neighbour according to the group they belong to. Our church members need to see an example in their church leadership. If the members catch this attitude of caring for those around them, of different faiths and races, then hatred will greatly reduce in our communities.

This has to start with us. We need to pray, to ask God for the hatred in us to reduce, and then ask him to show us ways in which we can serve other groups in our society. God will surely show us a way. This is better than judging the youth for their wrong. Instead, we are showing them an example of a better way to treat others. Some will catch this and change. Others will stay angry. But at least we are doing the right thing and that is good for our community.

We may not know what we can do to help others yet, but we can start with changing our own attitude towards them. Moving from fear of youth to compassion. This is a huge shift for us. It is the beginning. From here, God will start to show us things we can do. When we start with those things we begin on a new journey that will grow and develop. Soon we will have many new relationships and many new ideas that will make us very busy in building a new township with everyone else.

We have started computer training centres and vocational centres. We are using our church building as one of the centres for this. It's a waste to build a building and then use it only on Sundays. It should be used to serve the whole community, people of all faiths. It should be used to serve all people. Sometimes we treat the building as a holy sanctuary. This is wrong. It is people who are the

potential sanctuary and dwelling place of God, not buildings. We are to treat people, all people, as most precious, not our buildings.

This is giving the youth skills, and also qualifications that start them on a journey to more future education and personal development. With qualifications from us, they can go on to higher education. Doors that were shut to them before, are now open. Then they can start to develop their community as well. And they will always remember who did this for them. This is peace.

These computer centres are bringing people of different faiths together. It was difficult at first, but now many people from different faiths are enjoying learning in a new environment of cooperation and getting to know each other.

Now we have added other vocational learning opportunities for our community's youth. Things like farming, tiling, sewing, electrical work and carpentry, opening new horizons for people who were once angry. Now they are too busy to be angry. Now their mind is on other things, and is filled with the opportunities they have, goals for the future.

Youth from different backgrounds are coming together more and more, meeting at these different centres, and after that in their homes. They are starting businesses when they finish. In these businesses they have more chances to meet and know their neighbours. The result is strengthening community relationships, while at the same time, giving youth hope for their future. When violence speaks to them, they will answer, "No, I now have a better calling and future for my life: I will not throw that away."

We are also working on setting up microfinancing that is genuine, and not profit orientated, which can help graduates from vocational school get a start in business. These peace building steps at grassroots levels help. They are cheaper than war; much cheaper in dollars and much cheaper in lives taken and damaged.

Drop schools, and hospitals, not bombs! There are more economical. They build peace and they build community.

It is simply a new way of thinking for us all, which must take root in our hearts: together, not separate. Their problem is our problem. We are in this world together. We must help each other. We must show this way of life, to get this new idea catching on and spreading.

The Log

Peacebuilding efforts aren't carried out with a sense of personal elevation over others. One of the main ingredients to peacemaking, which Jesus spoke of, was about the log in our own eye. Remember, Jesus said this in the context of peacemaking "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God."

That is, in peacebuilding we are all recovering. We may be recovering from different things. Some are recovering from aggression. Others are recovering from detachment and lack of care. But we all have fallen human issues we are dealing with. These issues are dealt with in the context of relationships. We can't be healed on our own. As we move into relationships with people we have previously been alienated from, we all have a chance to recover a true spirituality. We cannot recover this in isolation.

And it's our witness of removing the log from our eye that speaks the most of the gospel we profess. This is active justice, which others can see and then know we are genuine.

One of our graduates from bible college recently moved into a very dangerous region, during the period in which a terrorist organisation in the nation was near its height. The graduate and his wife organised a joint meeting with Christian and Muslim leaders. Such an event was previously unheard of in the area.

About 200 leaders came. Mosque leaders, former terrorists, youth leaders, a leading Sheik, and pastors of churches. The graduate and his wife shared about the kingdom of God from Isaiah and from the Gospels. They were speaking about the kind of kingdom Jesus came to set up. All were convicted by this. The Muslims began to stand and apologize to the Christians for their aggression and violence.

After this, pastors also began to stand and apologize. They said that they too hadn't followed Jesus. They hadn't forgiven the Muslims. They hadn't loved them. They had withdrawn from them and were shunning them. They had also often retaliated and brought harm to others. By the end of the meeting, everyone was apologizing for their own contributions to the problems, rather than pointing fingers at the others. This was a remarkable event that none of the people present had ever experienced before.

The Muslims at the meeting said they had never heard of this kind of Christianity before. They meant both the kingdom message and the way the pastors had behaved. They had never heard the gospel in terms of the kingdom message, that calls believers to repentance, not just outsiders to repent. And they had never heard Christians stand in public and apologize for their own sins towards them. This was a first.

They all resolved to meet together more often, and to hear more about the kingdom of God. After this, the idea of calling religious leaders together and having discussions into how to bring peace to the community began to spread. Meetings were held in other places, which once were powder kegs of violence and now have become peaceful. People were coming together where there was an environment of mutual apology and putting things right with each other. This opened doors of communication and trust between leaders of different groups, who then began to stem violence in their townships.

Once the youth saw this happen at the level of their elders, they began to copy it in their own relationships. People began doing good to their neighbours, rather than evil. The more good done, the more trust and peace spread.

Another student once stood in class, and with tears said, "I had forgiven them, but I would have nothing to do with them." He was a Muslim and when he came to Christ he was persecuted. He became bitter, and followed the common Christian view of shunning their enemy. This hatred can grow in the hearts of many converts, and it can be learned from the Christian community.

Our student changed. He began to visit the Muslims and help them. As a carpenter, he knew a few things he could do to help the aged in their homes. Over some time, the Muslims became very warm towards him. Some came to know Jesus. It was the Christians, in that very hostile township, that wouldn't accept his message. They continued to hate the Muslims. Eventually the Muslim elders of persuaded our student to hold town hall meetings with Muslims and Christians together, to become a reconciler between them to bring peace. These meetings had a very good impact in bringing peace to a town that is well known in this nation for deadly conflict.

One reason it is good to preach the kingdom of God is that it puts all our own kingdoms in their proper places. The kingdom of God critiques all our kingdoms, and so the gospel isn't presented anymore from the perspective of our cultures and the conflicts we have experienced over centuries. A message that calls both sides to repentance, and that calls us to lay down our quest for cultural or political dominance, is a gospel that opens the door to God in all our lives together.

The conversation is about Jesus alone, and not the cultural and religious packages we identify with and which cause resentment between us. The believers in Acts took care not to cross the cultural sensitivities of others in their communities, but to share the gospel with respect for them instead. It is not Islamic culture, politics, worship, or communities we are out to change, for we have many of our own problems in all these areas. There is much about Islamic culture that is of God, and God doesn't need us to think our form of Christianity or church is better.

Here is peacebuilding in the context of trying to be aware of and then confessing our own faults to those we seek to serve. This is a needed ingredient for building a peaceful joint community, and for sharing the truth of the gospel. In this gospel we are called to repent together. Living this way is one of our greatest witnesses to the gospel and pointer to who Jesus is.

This is one reason why peacebuilding is so important. Instead of alienation, the things we do to bring us together demonstrate the gospel. The humbling of ourselves to build bridges is what God did in the incarnation. When we do it, we are showing what God did and we are preaching the kingdom of God through the Lord Jesus Christ.

When we reach out and serve refugees we are not serving a group who are solely to be blamed for their own situation. We are reaching out as those who come from religious and nationalist structures which have contributed to the global disease as we find it today. We are not above these people. Before Christ, we are equally in need of help and transformation. Reconciliation with others through peacebuilding is what brings our own reconciliation with God into deeper reality. It makes us more like him.

The practical point we are making here, is that when we reach out to others, try to see what the gospel we are declaring to others is saying to us first. Are we living that out before the people we are wishing to reconcile with? If not, then reconciliation will not happen.

Another way of putting it is, how do we look in the eyes of the people we are reaching out to? How do they see us? Are we aware of our faults, as we build bridges with others? If we are not, then we won't be taken seriously. Reconciliation happens as people who wronged each other put things right with each other. This must start with us first.

When Trouble Hits

When terrorism was at its height we had several graduates in the regions where the worst was taking place. They remained there to help those populations who weren't able to flee when mass displacement of people was happening.

We were able to help a little, by sending in food supplies, or fire wood for cooking, or to help with medical bills. Other times, it was help with suicide bomb victims who were in hospital. In all these cases we tried to help those suffering, either Christian or Muslim people.

Being involved like this at the height of the trouble is vital. Getting to know those people "behind the line" and working with them in relief efforts, goes a long way to helping with the suffering. But it is also one of the things that reduces the level of terrorism overall. Peace works in bringing down violence. It is a major contributor to a better outcome in the time of terrorism.

This positive impact happens in several ways. First, one of the main goals of terrorists is to divide the community. This has already happened for them, by virtue of separatist views and divided life styles before terrorism started. But terrorism seeks to make this division even more extreme. It is one of the main things that helps their cause.

So if we take on ideas that further divide us, we are actually helping terrorism. Terrorists are trying to divide Muslim and Christian communities. This division feeds into animosity and provides the temperament for the recruitment of further embittered people into terrorist ranks.

This division and growing resentment is an absolute necessity for terrorism to grow. This is why military action, especially if it is seen to be unfair, often escalates terrorism, rather than reduces it. The global terrorism we are experiencing today has grown out of the Russian occupation of Afghanistan many years ago, and CIA financing the opposition groups, and out of other similar aggravations.

The opposite of aggrieving and dividing a population is to work to build cooperation between the different groups within a community, especially when terrorism is growing. In our nation this has succeeded. One of the major reasons why the deadliest terrorist group in the world (as described by the UN) failed was because the Christian/Muslim community wouldn't divide. It was very close at times. Many wanted to divide the groups. They almost fractured.

But in the end, both groups, on the whole, said no to terrorism, and yes to working together, to build a new society. This doesn't mean it's all easy from now on. There are many difficulties in doing this on a continued basis, but if people are aware that not to do this is worse, then we can stay on the right path.

When terrorism is increasing, whether in the Middle East, or in European nations, get involved in a positive way. Work to build up relationships between the communities. Work together to heal relationships, by helping solve each other's community problems. Shun those things that bring further anger and division to these groups. Work for cohesion, and work against fractioning. This has a huge impact on undermining terrorism. It is the most helpful way of doing it.

When we are facing terrorism, that is the time for the church to be involved at a grassroots level, helping. We are to be present in the region, working with people we know and trust, because we have built up relationships with them before. Through these people, we can serve the needs of those who are suffering. Our active presence this way, helping people on both sides, helps reduce the level of isolation and violence.

The church has the ability to do this. Often we have been separate from the suffering regions, spending only on our own visions. We may be dialoguing for peace at higher levels, but this is unlikely to succeed unless we are helping everyday people at the grassroots level. This is where terrorist groups operate, at the grassroots levels. This is where we need to go into the communities and get involved.

In Western nations, a common response to an act of terrorism is to clamp down on the Muslim community, with harsh surveillance and security measures, on the whole Muslim community. This makes life tough for all of them, and separates them because of the population group they are part of, rather than according to whether or not they have done wrong. It makes suspects of the whole group, which drives a wedge between them and the rest of the nation. Often their lives are hard already, and these measures just make life harder for them.

While security is necessary, these increased security measures are often carried out in a way that further isolates the community. It isn't done with a working cooperation with the Muslim community. It is done "to them," rather than "with them." We still don't know this part of our community, even though they live in our nations, and we have not been able to successfully work with them when we need to, because we don't know them well enough.

The community is in effect cordoned off from the rest of society and hemmed in. The healing effects brought about by the wider community mixing and loving each other, and drawing the whole community together into a unified society, doesn't occur. The increased security measures serve to make the society worse off.

What needs to be encouraged is interaction of community sectors, not the targeting of one sector and isolating it. Isolating sectors heightens hurt and anger and destroys nations. We can't go on ignoring whole sectors of our society and send in the forces whenever they give us trouble. This is exactly what feeds into terrorist recruitments.

Doing good in a terrorist region means working to overcome evil with good. It isolates people from the terrorists, from joining them. It isolates the whole community from radicalism. It stifles further radicalism of more people.

But doing good in terrorist regions is also good for another reason. It brings down the violent edge of the terrorist groups themselves. Doing good in response to evil softens evil. "A gentle answer turns away wrath." Doing good promotes better behaviour among all. It causes more people to compete by doing good, rather than to compete by doing evil. This can even bring down the rage among terrorists.

This is not to cancel out the military protection of people, but it means the Christians should be making opportunities to serve and do good in violent regions, especially in terrorist regions, as this brings down the level of evil significantly overall.

When we look at the cost of liberating one city in Iraq today from terrorists, it is horrific. As government troops approach the city, the terrorists use the civilians of the city as human shields. But this doesn't stop or even slow down the military advance. Those citizens who try to escape are murdered by the terrorists. The cost in civilian lives of a military takeover of the city is huge, and this cost is rarely reported on in the press.

One press report is titled, "Why the loss of Fallujah may be a win for ISIS." The civilian loss is just what they want, to promote their future cause and recruitment. ISIS claimed to be the saviour of the people of Fallujah. Now that government forces are approaching many of the people are dying. This

just supports the propaganda of ISIS, which could work against the government once again in the future.

And if Fallujah is retaken by the government, then why? What will be rebuilt in the place of ISIS? Will the government and its allies further divide the region, building coalitions with some of the groups and punishing other sectors.?

What is needed for healing is working towards genuine cohesion, with policies that serve all the people, that restores all injustices, heals all wounds, no matter the group. What is needed are genuine intentions towards all the people, not political alliances that destroy some of them. We can't go on building our economic alliances and depending on the military to solve the problems these alliances cause.

This is why serving both sides in the midst of the conflict, when the conflict is at its worst, and serving all sides when the conflict is over, is the only way of peace. When conflict is at its height, our role, and the role of peaceful nations, is to move in with aid, with health care, with water, with portable education in safe sites, and with any other good act of care.

Rebuilding

In our region we had horrific terrorism. One year, 2014, it claimed more lives than any other terrorist group in the world, at a period when terrorism has been its worst worldwide. When the terrorism began to subside, it left a wake of destruction and sorrow behind. Survivors lost vital members of their families: fathers, sons, mothers, daughters, and all their possessions. Towns and villages lost all their facilities: church buildings, schools, clinics, water wells, some mosques. Livestock and grain-stores were stolen, oxen and ploughs and all the tools of farming. People are still facing starvation in camps. Those whose villages are safe to return to find the burnt-out shells of the homes and nothing left but devastation.

This is a critical period for any population, not only because of the help that people need so desperately, but also for the future of us all. So many children are left in need, and so many youth: into the millions. If they are left to themselves, without education, without any form of care and love, what will they become when they grow up? When our team last visited a displaced persons camp, they asked the Christian children what they wanted to do when they grew up. They said they wanted guns so they could kill those who made them suffer.

For a period of one year we stopped all building projects. Not one brick was laid. The human needs around us were too great. There were displaced people's camps that needed help. There are still many further north-east that are in desperate condition, with many people suffering who are still unable to go home and rebuild.

In an attempt to rebuild other people, we focused on a few of the decimated areas. We helped provide seed and fertilizer to restart farms, for those who were able to return. If they could get farms going, even without houses, the region could begin to maintain a population again and begin to regrow. Its starts with having enough food for people to live there.

Then we were able to go into a township and provide a little funding for widows. We found so many widows, in just one small region we visited. It didn't help much, but it was an act that showed that people from outside cared about them and knew what they had gone through. They had experienced such horrific events, etched in their minds, and they need care.

Love is what rebuilds communities on the right track. Without the love, the communities may have an even worse future. Love heals the wounds, and spreads forgiveness. This is the most important thing our acts are sowing into the community.

Next we were able to help some of the children. We took out 80 of the most needy children to our ministry base, where they are recuperating and are receiving care and education. Many of these have witnessed terrible things. They have lost so many family members, and have deep trauma. They have been out of school for years, because of the crisis. Some have never been to school. Some were kidnapped and used in terrorism. Now they are recovering. They still have extended family, but we are able to step in and help these families recover by caring for some of the children, helping them carry some of the burden, and help build their future.

In all, we now have almost 300 children in our three homes, and a fully equipped and staffed junior and secondary schools attached to each home, to give these children love, care and education without cost. The children come from desperate circumstances. We are currently working with the Muslim community in one city, to allow us to care for their beggar boys and take them off the streets. The Muslim community there are learning to trust us. We also have children of mission workers, who really need help, because of the terrible conditions their parents work in.

These children's homes are helping to rebuild community, communities from all the different backgrounds the children come from. We see these projects as not just helping the children, but helping to bring justice to their communities. But our homes can't look after many children, and there are millions more. So we are looking for ways to help children within their communities as well, when we can't help them in our own homes and schools.

The next thing we did was to try to promote redevelopment in an area where schools have been shut for more than three years due to terrorism. We have very limited funds, but we tried to encourage schools to start again, though most of the buildings had been destroyed. We are presently trying to get funds to put in toilets for the children, so they can go back to school, and to reopen wells that have been destroyed.

All of these acts are done on a community level. They are done by drawing the populations together, people who wouldn't speak to each other because of previous hostilities. There are divisions between religions and even divisions within religions. But we say that we are helping them as one group. So we call their leaders together and speak to them as one. We say this help must be carried out in the context of forgiveness of each other and of their working together.

This works. It is slow at first. No one is pushed. We just hold hands. The main point about this support isn't the little help we can bring, but the reconciliation that happens as we help. The reconciliation is the main ingredient of a better tomorrow. It is more important than any infrastructure we can provide, though the infrastructure is very much needed.

The idea is to rebuild a future different to the past. The past was built on divisions, on people not helping those of other groups but only looking after their own. This division festered like a wound and grew worse and worse. When terrorism started, the region was ripe, like dried wood ready to burn. What makes the wood green and unable to burn when a crisis comes is loving support for one another within the community. This is what must be encouraged at all levels. It can happen. It has happened in years past. It is happening now in many places.

Especially Christians need to be trained to build a better future. We can't build with a separatist vision, which is what has been so much in us, even bequeathed from missionaries, who have come with their different political baggage. We have all taught a wall building form of Christianity, to a certain degree.

It may have been done with a desire to protect fledging churches, but it didn't equip us to deal with massive divisions that developed. We really need a Christianity that is firmly based on the teachings of Jesus, rather than our distinctions from, for example, our different views on Pauline theology. We have got to move to community, love and acceptance of each other within the one church community, and show how Christlike people lead the way to that kind of future.

We are also working on getting tractors into the region. This will help with farming, while helping people to come together. Co-ops will be set up, and micro finance loans can be repaid, until the tractors are fully owned by the communities. These repayments will allow further tractors to be purchased for new communities.

The basis upon which these co-ops work is that Christians and Muslims are required to join together in the use and sharing of the tractors for the whole community. And especially the women, many of whom are widows, will be at the front of the co-ops, to ensure they are empowered to reinstate the regions farming districts. Co-op members will also be required (and helped, where needed, to have their children in school, even girls. The tractor co-ops are not just to improve the farms, but to

improve the interactions between all levels of the communities, ensuring people work and rebuild together as one group.

This is important, not just for our region, but for so many regions of the world. Often rebuilding is done on the basis of divisions and alliances. Those on the West's side rebuild, with not much support, based on their alliances with the West. Those of another side rebuild with those alliances. Community is doomed from the beginning.

This shows us the real importance of our involvement, even if we think this doesn't relate to people in Western nations. It does relate. Western nations are looking for answers to a threatened influx of refugee people. These are the answers. Their problems are all of our problems. When they become overwhelmed by the problems and are forced to flee, arriving on our doorstep, they become very much our problem. We must help others out of love, to rebuild, not on the basis of our political or religious alliances, but on a community basis, that acknowledges the humanity of each person. We support the people as a whole to rebuild, without demanding economic allegiance to our group, without prejudices that bring suffering and further injustices.

People love their nations and don't want to flee. When we stop tearing those nations down with our international affairs, and help them rebuild genuine community, the refugee crisis will end.

This shows us what is important in Western nations. We may not have much terrorism, but we still have community factions. If our nations are to be healthy in the future, we must build relationships across these divides, and support one another in these relationships. The problems of others in our nations are the problems of everyone in our nations. If not, then the problems we see in other places will very soon come to our own shores.

Weapons, Banks & Business

Where did these terrorist groups get their weapons from? They use weapons made in foreign nations, often of very high quality and new. It is the same with their vehicles. In Western nations weapons trade fairs are held, with buyers coming from around the world.

Some of these weapons are among those that filter down into the hands of terrorists. Terrorists many times have been so well armed, that conventional forces have not been able to face them. One smaller nation in Europe recently apologised for weapons it had made that came into the hands of Boko Haram. But as far I know, they didn't offer to use the money from the sale of these weapons to rebuild homes that were destroyed, or to help widows who lost their husbands.

I haven't heard any nation take due responsibility for these weapons. Nor have I heard of any nation take responsibility for the weak, failed attempts of the United Nations to prevent the high level of funding to these terrorists. The world is able to stop these, but it hasn't been expedient for Western nations to do so, despite the huge cost in human life.

Weapons sales is very large business. It is wrong. Yet we all profit from it. This money flows into Western nations, propping up our economies. And it is the people who are unprotected that suffer and die because of this. And yet we in Western nations hardly blink an eyelid, and we carry on as though we had no part in the problem. The deaths and poverty of others are contributing to our personal wealth. We should stop this. In a democracy we are all culpable for this. We can stop our governments from allowing this to happen.

The banking industry contributes to massive poverty. Over the years, money has been loaned to other nations, and that money has been stolen and returned to Western nations as private bank deposits. We all know this. It is massive amounts of money. The money is accepted by Western banks, with no questions asked, knowing that it has been stolen.

Yet the money sits in our Western economies propping up our bank liquidity, keeping down interest rates, and making housing and car purchase loans cheaper for us all. We know this goes on, yet we say nothing about it. Again, we live in a democracy, where we are culpable.

In addition to these corrupt deposits the banks hold, the West also receives interest rate payment for the original loans. These are massive payments, which contribute to the crippling of foreign economies. In these foreign economies, domestic interest rates and inflation are very high, making it impossible for millions upon millions of people to get credit. There are no housing and car purchase loans for most of the world. These nations are still economic colonies of the West.

We can't have peace in the world with this level of injustice.

Another area is business deals. Rich nations will make business deals with leaders of other nations, who give the rich nations access to their resources and markets. The leaders of these other nations may hold their own populations, or their neighbours, under an unjust rule, and yet the powerful nations say nothing. In fact, the powerful nations may support these leaders in corrupt rule over millions of people, because of the business deals they have.

This is our history. The strong benefit and the weak suffer. This is injustice. Again, we in democracies all share in the responsibility for this, because we can tell our governments to act justly, and to make businesses act justly, or we will vote them out.

It is difficult to be a peacemaker, and to be a witness for anti-corruption and care for the weak, when our own nations are involved in exploitation. When we speak about peace and justice to others, they say we should get our own house in order. This is why peacemaking starts with the log in our eye. Before we speak of the error of Islamic regions, why don't we talk to our governments about liberating millions from exploitation through interest payments?

All this injustice contributes to terrorism. If we wish to deal with terrorism, our response isn't just a military one, which feeds more injustice and more resentment. Our response must be at the root causes.

Before we say the root causes are in someone else's culture or faith, we should start with the causes that are in our own. If we don't admit our faults, we don't fool those in other nations. They know. They see. And when the terrorists tell them they have been unjustly treated and that the terrorists have a better future for them, they may very well believe them.

Peace starts with genuine care for others, by not using them for the wealth of our own nations, but instead building a community together that cares for every person. Our nationalism has crippled many people, and brought the world into great division as a result. Nationalism says that we are better than others, that it is others who are at fault, and we are the good people. This sentiment is behind every nationalist movement, and we believe it and that is why we divide.

Peace only has a chance when we deconstruct this world view, and the false theology that supports it, and begin to construct a new world view of care for our neighbour, both locally and internationally. Peace only comes when we stop thinking about ourselves and start to think about how our lives affect others, even if they live very far away.

This is the beginning of peace. Then we won't be going from one military conflict to the next, where we each deny our responsibility regarding the root problems. But instead we will begin to work together for the common good. We will take down our alliances (i.e. our West vs. Russian alliances) that bring regions into conflict where we hope to profit, and work together for the wellbeing of the people in those regions instead, making sure there is no harm to those people; like in Syria for example, or in Ukraine.

Presently, we see harm to people as the unfortunate but necessary collateral damage for the "greater good" (our global control). We should instead look at the common good of every person and the safety of the people in the region. This former perspective was how Rome ruled. They claimed that their brutality, the collateral damage, was for the greater good, the "peace and safety" they brought to the world.

It's our empire and the wellbeing of our economies that is being fought over in Syria today. It has killed many people and made many millions of refugees. And though we contribute to their suffering, we don't want the desperate people to come to our nations for shelter.

We can never have peace this way.

Peace comes by showing love to our neighbour in need. It doesn't come by military force. People may argue that doing the right thing will make us vulnerable. Never mind that this is how Jesus told us to live. Never mind that Jesus accepted this vulnerability himself. His message was, that if we don't follow him in this, the world will never change. It will never have a hope. We will just follow the same darkness as everyone else.

A practical point for peacebuilding here is this. We should become knowledgeable about the sufferings of others, even those of the other side, of the other political or faith side, and begin to try to help those people. This is practical peacebuilding. If we don't do it, then we are not peacemakers. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God."

It isn't enough for nations to give aid to the poor. The poor need justice. Aid is cheap for us. We make far more money from them than we give back. The Jubilee is to set the prisoner free, to forgive their debts, not merely to give him a free lunch.

This Jubilee, enacted through our lives to our neighbour, is the foundation of the kingdom of peace, the kingdom of Jesus: justice. You might say, no, the foundation is the new birth. Yes, but the purpose of the new birth is to change our hearts, so that we sow justice into the world, for a new future. This is the hope of righteousness, this harvest of justice and peace in the nations that Paul said we all wait for, through the power of the transforming Spirit. (Galatians 5:5)

Peace is justice. "The result of justice shall be peace, its effect will be quietness and confidence forever." (Isaiah 32:17) Our mistake here has been to see this verse as speaking of an imputed righteousness. Isaiah was first speaking of the work of genuine faith and transformation in our lives. He was speaking to Israel in the midst of their neighbours, about how they could stop wars by caring for their neighbours, instead of exploiting them.

This is the kind of community that Isaiah said is fulfilled through the genuine gospel. This is what Isaiah said the Messiah has come to do in our hearts and nations. Part of this new life is about our local and international businesses and how they treat people. Businesses should be designed to build community at in these regions, not designed for super profits for a few people.

We have a say in how our corporations produce, how they exploit workers in other nations, to give us cheap clothes. Peace means we don't just think of ourselves, but of others. It is moving from individualism to thinking about how our choices effects other people. If we don't think this way, we can't have peace.

Our traditional concerns have been for sexual morality and abortion and these are genuine concerns, but these should be expressed in the context of care for others and for our environment. These are all issues to lift wellbeing (shalom or wholeness) over individualism. It's being consistent. As someone said, it isn't a matter of being left-wing, or right-wing. A bird needs both wings to fly.

Retracing Our Steps

Sixty years ago we didn't have the problems we face today with relationships between Christians and Muslims. This is true in our region, and in many other regions of the world. Fundamentalism has grown on all sides since then. This is partly so because of reasons outlined above. Political and economic aspirations have divided nations and cultures into blocks. It's also due in part to corruption. Corruption leads to race and faith divisions, as we try to keep the money for ourselves.

There are things that have happened in the Middle East that have led to change in our relationships. An election in Iran led to a leader who wanted to free Iran from British control of its resources. This led to a Western backed coup which installed the Shah in Iran. Corruption then led to mass suffering among the Iranian people. It was this corruption and suffering that led to the Islamic revolution in Iran, which was the only hope the people at large in Iran could then see.

Iran has backed terrorist actions in Israel, to alleviate the sufferings of the Palestinian people. Israel previously carried out these same kind of terrorist actions to get their state established. The purpose of the Iranian backed terrorism wasn't to export an Islamic agenda. Iran worked through Lebanon and the PLO, led by Yasser Arafat. The PLO was more secular in nature. It wished for human rights for the Palestinian people, more along the lines of European and French secular humanism. It wasn't a religious crusade.

It has been the Sunni actions, which began in Saudi Arabia, that have exported Islamic imperialism to the nations. This movement gathered steam due to the Saudi royal family's relationship with the West, especially with the USA. It was felt the family was selling out too many local values, to go along with American wishes. The Saudi royals had to appease Sunni fundamentalist movements with cash, which has been used to export a fundamentalist form of Islam, and build terror groups to establish Sunni interests.

On the Christian side, divided groups have built up, all insensitive to the sufferings of others, whether for economic gain, or because of religious views. Many have sided with Zionism, further confusing the factions in the Israel/Palestinian feud. All of us have contributed to the divisions, and this has contributed to a fallout in relationships between our groups around the world.

All of the above grew out of national imperialism, politics, land grabbing, and economic manoeuvrings. Our current struggles didn't grow out of genuine faith issues, but from political issues. None of this has anything to do with our real faith, even though we often think it does, and, perhaps ignorantly, we "baptise" our human ambitions in religious justification.

Our justification is shown up as untrue when we look at Jesus, whose simplicity of faith was, "Love the Lord with all your heart, and your neighbour as yourself." This is the sum of the whole matter, as Paul said, "The whole law is summed up by this one word, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." We have done much outside of this.

Sixty years ago Christians and Muslims went to school with each other. They shared meals together in each other's houses, and went to each other's special events. They worked together and people weren't denied jobs because of the faith they came from. In short, we had our different religions, but lived happily side by side in one community. This where we have to get back to.

Many of us have a fundamentalist nature. We don't believe it is good to go back to these peaceful days. Many believe to do so is the doctrine of the antichrist. Christians are equally guilty of promoting injustice towards others due to our religious views as Muslims are. We just don't see it

from the point of view of others. We don't accept that our policies have caused much of the suffering to great numbers of people.

Many also believe that our current terrible relationships are due to "end-times" and are the will of God. These are very unfortunate beliefs, that contribute to our divisions. These must be laid aside, as we look for those things that will lead us back to the teaching and lifestyle of Jesus, and the kind of community we once enjoyed.

Many of us see the problem as due to the intolerance of Islam. While this does exist with many of the worshippers, it is only one of the factors. If we can lay aside those things where we are at fault, and ally with the great number of Muslims who are not intolerant, then we can build together in the right direction.

This just means laying down our self-interest for the common good. By self-interest, I don't mean we lay down our true faith interest. True faith interest is lived out with respect for others. This is what all the early apostle taught.

"Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honour the emperor." 1 Peter 2:7

"But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect." (1 Peter 3:15)

Early believers were told not to eat certain things, if eating them would offend their Jewish neighbours. This is the way we are to live in community with others, by respecting them. And this counts for Muslims, equally as it does for our respect for Jews, and respect for all people.

"For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and PEACE and joy in the Holy Spirit." (Romans 14:17)

Recently one of our schools celebrated African Child day. I sat next to the man who had been invited to speak. He was from our state university. He said to me, "This is the real world. Children with shoes going to school with children with no shoes." I knew what he meant. The children have been given shoes. He meant that the haves (relative to our locality) and the have nots, school together.

Isolation is being actively worked against. Children with homes, with children with no homes, who have now found a new home and family with us. This is how the world should be, not with our separated suburban living. A neighbour orientated world! People growing up learning about their neighbour, not just about themselves.

This African Child day is one vital part of the children's education. They all danced in their cultural dress, and recited poetry that meant something to them in their cultural identity. This is all part of their human identity, which matters to all people. They need to know who they are. They danced with skill. It was beautiful. They each danced in their different groups, from the part of the nation they came from. Many came from very hostile sectors of the nation, those who passed through the worst of the terrorism.

The second aspect of this education was to celebrate each other's group. They didn't just learn their own identity, but learned to love and honour the identity of the other children, from their different backgrounds. This type of education is so important for children. It produces love and maturity in the spirit. This is the type of education and love that builds a new nation.

Discipling in Peace

Righteousness doesn't come by sowing seed in contention. It is the fruit of peacemaking. Peacemaking is making attempts to get to know others, mixing with them, treating them as people, loving them, hearing them, learning from them, and learning to bring healing to our community. Seed must be sown in the right soil.

"And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace." James 3:18

This means that while we make disciples, we do it in the climate of making peace at the same time. We serve with both hands, disciplining on one hand, and peacemaking on the other. Be ambidextrous. We don't make disciples in the context of our own hostility, or alienation from others.

At our place we have many new believers from a Muslim background coming in, who live among us and are disciples. One of these became discontented and broke away from us and went to our nearby community to try to raise trouble against us. He came back around to our site with some young men and it looked as though they were threatening trouble. Later he reported us to the nearby military and also the police.

We were also told that we had been reported to the local chapter of a major Islamic organisation. If this had happened a few years back, we would have thought the worst about it. We didn't know the local people some years ago, and we would have had no way of confirming rumours, and of speaking to the people concerned. This is why people often act, or react, in fear and do wrong things. When we don't know our neighbours, we fear when we hear rumours, and often as a result we act in very counterproductive and foolish ways.

The police asked us down to the station to hear from our accuser. Several of us went down. We met the disciple who reported us and the young men he had rallied against us. They laid before the police all kinds of accusations. The disciple told many lies that were designed to cause a lot of enmity and aggression in the community.

Our people were about to speak in our defence, but before they had a chance to, the leader of the Muslim organisation arrived along with other Muslim elders. They rigorously, and angrily, defended us, for hours. We didn't have to say a word. They recited all the good we had done, named the children of their community whose school fees we paid, and the widows we helped. They vigorously declared that every accusation against us was fabricated. They said, if we wanted to train disciples then that was our business and people no right to interfere. They strenuously defended freedom of religion.

In the end, they told us to have their young men, who were against us, arrested. They wanted no part with those who disturb the peace. But our own leaders didn't want to have the young men arrested. They could see that the Lord was giving us an opening into the youth of that community. So instead, relationships were made with the youth leaders, and dates were set for us to have meeting together in the future.

We could then begin to see the problems that exist among the youth. There is waywardness, drugs and other issues, and these are the things that generally lead to the promotion of trouble within the society. This often happens in any community. The problems here are the same as in any place in our nations. So our leaders decided to help.

Not only could they help with the youth, but they could also try to help reconcile these youth groups with the elders within their community. Youth often don't listen to elders. This happens in all our

communities. A third party can help. Someone that cares for both sides can come in the middle and serve to bring them together in healing and for change.

This is where peacemaking can be so fruitful. It can only happen if we draw close. Distancing ourselves from others only leads to misunderstandings, rumours, fear, and acts of violence. Drawing close opens doors of relationships. It also allows us insight into some of the real problems that the community are experiencing.

It's a matter of seeing people as people, with problems just as we have in our communities. Instead of seeing others as demons, we look in compassion and see the things they struggle with. This means we can begin to help, instead of standing afar and criticising. It makes a huge difference.

It is wonderful to get the chance to get to know others. It enriches our whole life. Instead of being afraid of things that happen, we can see them as opportunities to build bridges. Bridge building means taking up our cross. It means taking the risk to serve. This is what Jesus did.

The local community were shocked. They saw that our leaders, instead of asking for those who wronged us to be arrested, saw a chance to draw those people close and serve them, to see their needs and try to help them. They also saw our leaders using the bad situation as a good opportunity to work within their own community to reconcile the elders and the youth. Our leaders love their community and want to serve them. Overcome bad with good. Seeing the good in the bad and then using it.

This shows the lies we so often buy into, spread and contribute to, by our own actions. Here was a Muslim community defending Christians against their own people. People will say this isn't possible. It is very possible. We just choose to think wrongly about others, and not with generosity. We haven't treated others the right way, with neighbourliness and we reap the results. How people treat us can be as much a testimony about ourselves as it is about them.

This shows that we can help, instead of protesting. We can act positively towards our neighbours, instead of acting in sanction against others. Take the risk, try to help those who come against you. Try to see their needs. Try to act towards them the way the Priest acted towards the thief in the "Les Miserables" story. The thief wasn't a Muslim. He was "Christian." We have the same problems within our own societies.

The priest looked and saw the man's need, and acted in risk and faith to help him. It worked. This is redemption. This is how God calls us to act in our relationships with others. Not to add to what the world throws at people, but to be healers and reconcilers. It's an art and way of life we need to learn. We haven't been brought up this way. We prefer the ways of aggression and alienation from those people we don't like. God is calling us to learn the ways of Christ.

Integrated Living

When we started a computer centre in an Islamic township, the area was a no go zone for Christians. Christians would never venture on those streets. It was the same in the Christian areas. Muslims would never dare walk in those areas.

When we started the centre, no Christian would attend. All our students were Muslim, men and women. We wanted to call the Centre *Salama*, meaning peace. But the Muslim elders refused. They said they didn't want an Arabic word to be used, in case it scared Christians away. They wanted the centre to attract both Muslims and Christians, to bring us together. You don't always meet this attitude in communities. Often, the people want things for themselves, and don't want to include others. This is the same in Christian communities.

At first, no Christian would come. Then slowly, a few came. Now many Christians come as students. Now Christians walk freely in Muslim areas, and Muslims also walk freely in Christian areas. It has taken about two years to come to this point. The people mix, with their different customs and way of dressing, and with their different beliefs. They strike up genuine friendships together. They are happy, learning skills and then getting jobs afterwards.

Then out of this group came another initiative. Christian and Muslim leaders of this computer centred joined together in a peacemaking initiative, as part of another NGO, where they go around to schools in our city, sharing the principles of friendship across barriers of faith with children. They are reaching most of the schools and thousands of children. If children grow up with these community building ideas, then we have a good future.

They have also recently formed a group that brings Muslim and Christians youth together in discussion groups. Here we can focus on the things that we have in common and how we can live these things out together. Muslims and Christians have a lot in common, often far more in common than we each have with secular society.

In recent decades we have emphasised our differences in hostility. Now we are looking at what we have in common and learning how to share those things in mixed community. This is the purpose of our new groups now starting among the youth. If churches won't do this, we can do it as youth. Who knows, whether different, culturally appropriate churches, will develop from this and spread though non-Western style religious communities. As friendships develop, we begin to share our faith, in a context of respect and without fear.

We believe God is a God of peace and of love. Doing God's will primarily means living this way of peace together. God wants us to live together in love, rather than to fight each other over our beliefs. God loves his neighbour and if we are following him we also will learn to do this. If we are his children, we will learn to look like him, to be peacemakers.

We don't often think this is God's will. We think doing God's will means breaking up relationships because of disagreements and then this leads to strife. How can this be God's will? God isn't like that. Jesus said many would live in this way, even killing others, thinking they were doing the will of God. These things are not the will of God. God wants us to love each other in word and in deed.

Islam and Christianity were once far closer together than they are today. There are many people on both sides who don't want this closeness. They don't want peace. They want division and strife. They say it is antichrist to draw close in peace. This hostility is not what Jesus taught: it's a million miles from it. He wants us to be a witness of his love to others.

Islam speaks of godly behaviour. There are many different views in Islam, just as there are in Christianity. We can't say this or that is Islam. At different times in our history, Christians and Muslims have been very close in beliefs. It is also possible to interpret the Quran in less hostile ways. The Quran doesn't say Jesus didn't die. It speaks about the Jews' plot to kill him being vain, but other parts of the Quran say he died and rose.

It's a matter of interpretation. It's the same about the atonement in the Quran and also about the divinity of Christ. The Quran is said to deny the atonement of Christ. The Islamic reasoning is like that of Ezekiel, who claimed that each person is responsible for their own sins. Background to this notion may have been the nominal life of many believers, who often claimed, at least in practice, that they could continue in sin while grace abounded.

Their claim's about Christ may have been held in a creedal or political sense, while they signed up to persecute their enemies. An atonement without a transforming power is indeed vain. It's possible that early notions expressed in the Quran had links to this kind of a background. At the very least we could acknowledge this often vain use of the atonement doctrine in our Christian circles. Acknowledging this would help us to reach out to Muslim people, many of whom aren't entirely ignorant of these finer points of faith.

Muslims also believe that God can forgive sins without a legal payment. He just forgives. This notion is also portrayed in passages like the Prodigal Son, where the father simply forgives the son. Many early church fathers also agreed with this idea, claiming that the atonement was more to satisfy the law and the Satan, the accuser, rather than to satisfy a legalistic God. My point is that there are many areas of profitable discussion with Muslim people, rather than blanket rejection of all they say, just because they say it. When we judge ourselves first, we can lead others to Christ.

The Quran says Christ is the word, spirit and image of God. This is New Testament incarnational theology, more precise than many Greek portrayals in the church. Their "denial of Son of God" could have been more to do with the Mary worship prevalent around 600 AD. This brought in a Greek mythological concept of the Trinity and sonship, where there is a multiple polytheist set of gods who have sex and sons. The early Muslim weren't the only ones confused by this in those days. They were against the polytheistic idolatry, in many places. They reacted to this in different degrees.

It is possible that some of these passages in the Quran, especially the ones that spoke about Christ's incarnational divinity in proper biblical terms, came from earlier teaching and evangelical tracts in the Arabia region. The Christian monasteries there at that time were the places of education and writing. The issue is this, in how we treat the Quran and the relationships that we have with Muslims - the glass is either half empty, or half full. We can see the best or the worst in what we find. It depends of how we look at this and how we respond missionally in presenting Christ.

When politics on both Muslim and Christian sides took over, our relationships became more and more hostile. The way we interpret our differences became more and more entrenched. It's time to work back. It's time to work hard on working back out of this entrenched hostility, and to work forward to new relationships and new understandings with those who want to build them. This gives us far more opportunity to share the gospel, a gospel that has to first be lived among them by our own cross-bearing.

"Blessed are the peacemakers..." It takes work. You have to make peace. It doesn't just happen. Many Muslims want this new understanding. Do Christians want it also? The idea is not to despise a faith, not to despise a people, not to despise their traditions or culture, but honour and respect them, and find Christ together in our new relationships. Trust God. Trust the Holy Spirit. Trust Jesus.

Most converts from Islam have been told to drop their Islamic and national cultures, and to embrace Western themes in dress, names, politics and global relationships. This kind of denial of personal identity is wrong. It dislocates people from community and asks them to deny their own personhood. Evangelism of early Gentiles was never carried out this way, except by Judaizers, whom Paul rebuked. It is bad for personal development, to deny our identity roots.

This includes our view of Israel and so many other things. We have worshipped in some churches, in Islamic areas, and the churches had American, British, Australian and Israeli flags behind the pulpit. Jesus would shudder at this. This is presenting politics, and unpalatable politics to anyone who walks in off the street. It is not presenting the true Jesus.

There is a lot of scope for working together, for building relationships, for sharing our faith, for coming to new understandings. We can stand back and condemn, or we can love and heal, and give birth, by the Spirit's power, to a true revelation of Jesus Christ within Islamic culture and community. It can happen. This is incarnational theology and missions.

God didn't despise us. He came to us in our race and in our culture, as rotten as it was. He started where we were. He didn't expect us to become like him straight away. And besides this, our own cultures are corrupt, so they aren't the basis of our relationships with others, and should not be a foundation we insist upon for a church's culture.

Integrated living! It starts with something like a computer centre. Then groups start meeting together and speaking in schools. Our groups also organised sports events. One sports event went for several months, with different field, track and board game events at various times. Christians and Muslims were playing football together on the same field where a few years before people were killing each other.

The point is that we have a common enemy. The Christian or Muslim isn't our enemy. Violence is our enemy. Hatred, anger and self-centeredness are our enemies. These things work in all our hearts. We overcome our common enemy together, not in isolation. In the first century, to overcome meant to overcome the greed of Rome in our hearts, not to overcome the Roman person.

We have football games where one team is a group of converted Muslims being discipled and the other team is a group of Muslims from our nearby community. And they all enjoy the game and their time together. They have great fun. They play in a great spirit of love and joy. People say this can't be done. That is just what people say. It depends how we look at other people, with generosity, or without it.

All these things are building relationships. When we have relationships we can share together. Violence reduces because we know each other to be people of peace. We have trust and communication, instead of rumours and fear. When we have problems we talk together, instead of imagining all sorts of wrong things and then acting on them.

And when we have relationships and communications, faith begins to spread. We start to have communication about real things that affect our hearts and lives, because we become friends. We do this in trust with each other, in patience, in respect for each other, and not to do anything to harm the other, or to harm their culture or community. Evangelism is done out of love, not out of a competitive spirit.

"They must turn from evil and do good; they must seek peace and pursue it." (1 Peter 33:11)

Drugs

Many, if not most, of the religious violence we see today, is drug related. Much of it is started and carried out by youth, who have drug, anger and violence issues in their lives. We see this in gangs in many different nations. We also see it in our Christian and Muslim communities. It is hatred based, drug fuelled crime, not religious crime.

All terrorists we have heard of in our regions operate with drugs. They are heavily drugged before they go into killing sprees. Otherwise, they couldn't commit the atrocities. They shout Allah Akbar, but it is drugs that are filling their mind and body. There is nothing Islamic about this, in terms of the moral norms of every day Muslim culture. This, and the immorality these people display and live by, is a rebuttal of the Islamic culture that prevails amongst most Muslim people.

We don't want to see that the crimes are hate based rather than religion based, because that makes things complex for us. Often we mix religion with hate: it's much easier to think in the "us and them" way. It's easier to say that another whole group is wrong. However, life is far more complex than this. That is why Jesus calls us to get to know others and to seek to help. Only this way of living can begin to bring peace to the places in which we live.

We would prefer just to ban immigrants or refugees, rather than to deal with the real issues of need in their lives and help. It's too much bother. We want to get on with our own lives in simplicity. Well, life isn't like that. If we choose our own lives, we can't have peace in the end.

When we begin to integrate with other communities, the next step is that we find out what the real issues of need in that community are. This is where the journey really begins to take on genuine meaning.

At the start, we are just making new relationships. Then we open a computer centre, or find some other way of coming to know and serve each other. It could be sports, through which relationships grow. It could begin by inviting our neighbour in for a cup of tea, then forming a homework club, to help the children with their homework when their parents can't read English well enough to help. But when we do this we slowly begin to know the community. We begin to see the problems they are facing. We begin to see the struggles they are dealing with in their day to day lives.

We have two options here. We can say they need to repent and walk away, or we can try to help them. Its far better to take the log out of our own eye, when we speak of repentance, than the speck out of the eye of others. When they see us taking our own log out, then they look at their own speck. This works.

So many of us today are trying to take the speck out of the eye of others. This is our major world behaviour issue that we all have. Everyone is out to say what they think about what is wrong with others. This eventually leads to hate and even to terrorism.

This is why Jesus gave us another way of dealing with our problems, a way leading to peace. He didn't tell off Rome, but called the disciples to a cruciform life. This makes peace. This makes a witness of what helps. Other people see us treating our log and then they begin to follow. When we correct others, it just leads to anger, because it is unjust. It is unjust to correct others when we don't correct ourselves. We may not see the log in our eye, but those we correct see it like an elephant in the room.

Through our relationships with our nearby community we have come to recognize some of the problems going on. We don't see these things from a distance. This is the "problem" with

relationships. When you know what people are really struggling with you then need to do something about it. If we have the light, then we need to turn that light on and shine it by doing something to help. This is the light, helping those in need, not just saying, "Be warmed and filled, know the truth and repent."

Drugs are a problem that a community finds hard to deal with. They produce all kinds of behavioural problems that divide elders from youth. Once this happens, a community has real problems. Outsiders will see it as religious trouble, or categorize it some other way, so we can pass by on the other side of the road.

But as an outsider with relationships inside we are in a special position to help. We are a neutral party. We are trusted. The issue of being a neutral outsider is so beneficial in being a peace catalyst in so many ways. When they see over time that you love their community and you are not trying to win political or religious points, they will trust you.

At present, we are contacting drug rehabilitation groups and training some our people in how to work with youth in rehab. We have connections with youth organisation in our community and we are getting ready to start to help.

When you work with drug users, it isn't just treating the symptoms, the addictions, but also the underlying issues. There is often no education or no job opportunities: hopelessness leads to drug abuse. The people need help in these areas. How can we bring in vocational education, at a price people can afford given their community situation? So when people are being rehabilitated, it is happening in the context of a new life style of learning and working. The people have an alternative.

We can walk away and condemn the community for not being able to find answers to these things, in the extreme difficulties they face, many of which have very complex causes. We can decide to put the whole problem down to their faith and write them off as the enemy. We can sanction all the people of that faith group and keep them out of our nations. Or we can help. This second approach is what Jesus calls us to. It is the answer for our nations today. If we want an answer, this is it.

It costs us something. But that is what Jesus said. Helping people does cost. A terrorist will give up his home and all he owns for his cause of hatred and destruction. But a believer will often give up none of these things, though they have the light of the world. Jesus called us to a radical discipleship of love, in giving up our lives to serve.

Once we begin to integrate in relationships, we see underlying issues we can help with. We begin to discover the real problems of the community, and we see beyond the group propaganda we have grown up with. When we begin to help with these issues, we see their causes and the response that is needed to help address them. This takes commitment. It means treating "the them" like our own family, like we would own sons and daughters. This is a lot better than condemning others. It is living out the gospel as a true witness.

This is not a social gospel. This is a new heart gospel. We call other people to repentance by repenting first ourselves. We repent from the self-life, and this calls other people from their own self-life. Jesus is the one who calls us all to lay down our lives for each other. This is his command. Our lives are witnesses of his kingdom.

We come up with many excuses against this self-giving life-style. We say things like, "Jesus told his disciples to wipe the dust off their feet, if someone doesn't receive the gospel." The problem with that today is that the gospel has been tainted with cultural battles over the years. The cross went ahead of our armies into the battles. The Spanish armies of the church slew the original central-

Americans to steal their gold. The evangelical armies of USA killed the original North Americans to steal their land. The armies and the citizens of Anglican Britain killed the original Australians to steal their land. The victimised people groups still suffer today as a result. We could go on and on with speaking of such “gospel” atrocities.

Today, we may say, “We told them once about the gospel and they didn’t hear.” And we say we are people of peace. Many of us have not shared the gospel with them, but maybe our grandfathers did. So we say, “They rejected the gospel in former days and they are now being cursed to the tenth generation.” All this is said so we can hate rather than love, so we can live our own lives in comfort and kill those who threaten it.

And the trump cards are, “They are of Ishmael and are cursed,” or, “This way of reaching Muslims is Chrislam.” These are all the things they said of Jesus, when he treated the cursed Romans with love, or the cursed Samaritans. They accused him exactly the same way.

It is useless teaching about the parable of a Good Samaritan today. It teaches no one. Better to teach about the parable of the Good Muslim instead. If we don’t update in context what Jesus taught, then we are not teaching what Jesus taught. And you know what they did to him for teaching this!

I am done with a gospel of individualism, which hides ones face from the needs of others, which uses the sword against others, instead of leading us to take up our cross. I have decided to rebel, to rebel by loving those the church has hated. Join us!

Aware of Scapegoating

Scapegoating means blaming a group for our collective problems, rather than helping the group with their problems. It is possibly one of the most common behavioural patterns within humanity. It always goes along with propaganda, which means the selective acquisition of data of the other group's crimes, and highlighting those crimes or immoral acts. At the same time the crimes of our own group are forgotten.

Propaganda is very common, especially when people are gearing up towards conflict, or neglect of those who are suffering, whom we should be helping. There is often intense pressure for us to join in with our group in condemning the other. This pressure was applied to Jesus. It was applied to the Anabaptists, who refused to fight the wars of the European powers. It was applied to genuine conscientious objectors in our major wars. You join the gang on the school playground against the victim, or you also become a victim.

Leaders often use the scapegoating tendency in our human characters to build their own platform and popularity. A church leader often does this. When Christians are in danger, the leader will say they are the only one coming out strongly against the other group. They claim to be our saviour from that group. They use the conflict as a platform to build their "ministry."

Because people like this scapegoating message – we like a message that points to others as the problem – people gravitate towards the ministry with this tone. It is very successful on television and in book sales. People who question the message are said to be soft, cowards, for the enemy, or compromisers.

This is even more common in politics. The way to get votes in politics is to create or amplify a problem in people's minds. Then you identify a group as responsible for that problem. Then you say that you will save us from that group. This way of dividing the population is always undertaken to win votes. That is how democracy works.

This is especially true with religion and politics, when they are mixed. A leader will claim to be a Christian and other Christians rally behind that person and vote for him, to save them from those who hate Christians. When we do this we are allowing politicians to divide our communities, to intensify differences even more, which brings about more isolation, anger, hostility and suffering.

In short, people divide us for their own purposes. This has happened throughout history, where the ruling family uses the masses against their enemies, so the rulers can expand their influence and markets. The leaders appeal to nationalism, and this usually gets people on their side. The people die in the war; the leaders gain.

These leaders say they will come out on our side. They say they will stop us from being harmed by those who are against us. They say they will even save the kingdom of God from extinction, and save churches from perishing from the world.

God doesn't need people to save his kingdom. He will secure and advance his kingdom, through our love for one another, and through our love for our enemy. We don't need to bring out politicians against them. Otherwise, what we save is just ourselves and not God's kingdom. His kingdom was started in his defeat, not in his victory; the cross! This is his sure victory and always will be.

The early church had no surety expect for God. When they took Constantine as their surety and protection, when they tired of God's care, and when they tired of persecution, then the church became like the world. It took up the sword like the kingdoms around us.

When they say, "I will stand for you and this will be our victory," it is actually our loss. When we have a champion to go before the church like this, against our enemies, it is a huge loss for all of us. When we deal with enemies like this, it closes them to the gospel, because they haven't seen the gospel. It makes enemies for the future. When we destroy lives, we can never win. That is the loss for future generations, when the cycle of violence continues again and again.

This is why the church lost so much ground in Arab and Persian areas. And because they know our past, it's hard to get us all back to the real gospel.

Our call is to follow our leader Jesus. What does Jesus command of us? To love our neighbour. He doesn't command us to divide from our neighbour. He didn't say we are to give the man on the road to Jericho a theology test before we help him. He said we are to love our neighbour. This is our commandment.

It's a bit like a marriage, "What God has joined together, let no man put asunder." About the one God has commanded us to love, which is every one of our neighbours, let no man say otherwise; let no man put us asunder by dividing us for their own gain. Let our communities build peace, not division. We must insist upon this in our societies. All destruction comes from division, and all division comes from greed and wanting our own advantage. This is the entire message of the letter of James.

This isn't easy to do. When trouble comes, when people suffer, when things look like that scapegoating is the most plausible answer, it is sometimes very hard to resist. We sometimes find it very hard to answer. People come out with their arguments and they can be very compelling. This is why we need such a commitment to love our neighbour. This is why relationships with the people in the "other group" need to be active and up-to-date. This is why we need to pull down the "two-group" idea in our society, and form one group, not through laws, but through genuine caring relationships.

We aren't saying one religious group. We are saying one social group. Those who live together in a society must live together socially, caring for each other. We cannot allow ourselves to become two groups, or three, or worse. This has gone on in our nations and in our world for long enough. It's time to work at turning this around.

We need to become again the kind of society that when we see someone walking on the road we stop to offer them a lift. When we are driving and we see someone in need, we stop and help them out. When we are driving around in our community we wave "hello" to people and when we speak with others we seek to genuinely find out how they are.

As a good friend said, "Ask how they are, their family, the pets... mean it and find out how things are really going with them." This is peacemaking. This brings down bitterness and anger in our society and heals hurts. This is treating people like real neighbours, no matter who they are. This is overcoming fear with obeying Jesus' command to love one another.

This is the opposite to scapegoating. When our insular community tells us to scapegoat another community, answer with "No." Answer with opening your doors to those people. Answer division, isolation, anger, fear, ignorance, lies, with love for our neighbour, expressed in practical terms, with real, active initiative on a daily basis.

The wider region, where we are, was saved from destruction because the terrorists could not divide us. They tried. Some politicians tried. Some religious leaders tried. Many people in the religions tried. But in the end, they all failed. Muslims and Christians began to love each other, care for and

protect each other. The Muslims paid heavily for this from the terrorists. In the end, far more Muslims died than Christians.

The hatred of the terrorists couldn't spread to the wider community. The terrorists don't have enough hatred to spoil a nation. They need to spread their hatred to the wider community. They need other people to hate with them. It doesn't matter to them what side we are on, so long as we hate: that is what the terrorists want. It's a strategy that usually works, because scapegoating is human nature. We must fight against this nature, not against another group. To fight this nature, not to fight people, is our jihad, or as Jude said, "contending earnestly for the faith once delivered."

But in our region, thanks to God, the terrorists were isolated. They were defeated. An army can't do this alone. If hatred takes over, all is lost. The weapon of our war is building community against hatred. It can be done. It is the way we fight against evil. We fight evil with good.

Peace Outside the Camp

When the British came to Australia they came with convicts. Many of these had been wrongly convicted. The British society was inequitable, so that the laws favoured the higher classes. When the poor had no food to give to their families, they were often forced to steal a loaf of bread. The laws of private property said this was stealing. How is it stealing when someone takes something for food from someone who has more than enough, to feed his children when they are crying every day with hunger?

Some of these “thieves” were shipped out to Australia as labourers for their crimes. Some of those who survived eventually gained their freedom in Australia. In the new land they operated the same way. They took land from the Aboriginals and made it their private property. When the Aboriginals took food from the farms, farms stolen from them, where they used to gather their own food, they were labelled breakers of the law, and made criminals. This meant they could be hunted down as outlaws and many times killed, or rounded up into camps. All their land was taken.

Until this day in Australia we sleep in houses that have been built on land brutally taken for nothing from the Aboriginal people. This wasn't only done by the British. This has been the human way since the beginning. No people group is innocent of this crime. But in Christ we speak of justice. This means we care for the scapegoat and for the one from whom society takes things. In earlier times, when churchmen stood up for Aboriginals, many were thrown out of their denominations.

This shows us that today we need to stand with those groups that our society condemns. If the Jews are being persecuted, we try to save them. If the Palestinians are being trodden down, we try to help them. Love means we help people who are in need, regardless of the justifications for keeping those people down.

Peace means we work for those in other groups that are in need of help. It means we mix with other people and we have each other as friends, so we know their situation in life and are able to serve. Peace means, that when society shuts people out as “the enemy”, that we keep them “in” our own circles of relationships. Peace is built through relationships.

If we continue on by the wisdom of our world, by the ways that our society does the same things, over and over again against other groups of people, we will never have peace. If we go by the logic of our self-serving human hearts, which desire to gain ascendancy over other groups of people, then we are bound to continue to believe the propaganda we are fed. The alternative to propaganda is to serve, and it is service that brings peace.

Peace means we seek to restore the damage that unjust laws have made. Most injustice in the world is legal. Slavery of Africans was legal. Apartheid in South Africa was legal. Australia locking up genuine refugees on islands is legal. It is legal by Australian law, but not by international laws, which Australia has signed. Allowing 700 refugees just in one week to drown in the Mediterranean Sea is legal. Neglecting our Syrian neighbour in need is legal, even when they are driven out of their nation by wars and other conditions that we have a hand in. Neglecting any neighbour in our societies today is legal. These are all legal, but they are not godly.

It is legal in our societies for some to get very rich, while so many continue to get poorer. It is legal for our banks to be given money when they can't pay their debts, yet other poorer people in our nations and all the poorer nations are made to pay their debts, crippling millions of people. It is legal for our banks to keep corruptly deposited money, impoverishing millions of people in other nations.

It is legal to put poorer nations out of world markets, so they cannot participate in fair trade. The inequity in our world today is all very legal. Who makes these laws?

Peace means we look past what is “legal” in a society and we become communities who bring in the people whom the world leaves out. A peaceful community is one that is deliberately and actively building bridges to those the world has cast adrift in the sea.

These practical acts of inclusion and help, this intentional vision, is what brings peace to our world. Peace is built on genuine care for others in need. Ignoring the people and the problems they face, marches our world towards certain war. As we said before, either we care for our neighbour or we go to war against them. These are the only two options we have in the end.

The practical point here for us as the people of God, is that we are not to take on board the status quo of our society against the weak. We are to be like the tabernacle in the Old Testament, where the guilty, those the society, and even the church today, rejects, can come running into and grab hold on the horns of the altar for mercy.

The tabernacle was the sanctuary for those whom the law of the land had condemned. It was the sanctuary for those looking for mercy from their harsh society and legal systems. God provided sanctuary. The people demanded law and retribution, but God’s love desires sanctuary and mercy.

This is why he sent Jesus, to give us sanctuary and mercy in him. The church today is not to take the narrative of our societies, or our religions, of our races, or of our economic classes, but instead we are to step outside these things and bring in the people, into our groups and circles of care.

Remember, Jesus was crucified outside the camp. Don’t be deceived. He represents every person outside our camps, whether political or religious camps. His question to us today is, “Do you love me?” Then if we do, we help others that are outside the camps that we have set up. They may be Samaritans or Muslims, or even economic refugees. So long as they are outside the camp, forsaken by the empire, to die on a cross on a hill far away, then they are the focus of the real church for care.

The focus of the church is toward one who died, one whom the empire crushed under its ruthless legal feet. The focus of the church is toward one who suffered, one who was rejected by the people of the day. He, Jesus Christ, is our focus. He exposes the injustice of our hearts, of our societies, and of our legal systems against others, and calls us to repentance. He calls us to the path of peace, which is to go outside the camp and love those left there to perish.

This is the path of peace. “Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore.” (Hebrews 13:13) We bear the disgrace. Jesus bore the disgrace in loving the enemies of the religion and of the state. He bore the disgrace of showing the love of God to us all. He bore the disgrace of loving the outcast of the society, and for that he was made to be the outcast.

God calls us to this same path of peace in an unjust world. He calls us out of our own world, and into the wider society, to pick up people of all faiths and nations, and help bring them into shelter and warmth. The practical path of peace is for us to come out of our house, our neighbourhood, and look for those in need and serve them. When called to nationalism, we say no. When called by Jesus to the people of the world, we follow.

The practicality of peace is that we turn, to live inclusive lives of service, rather than divided and isolated lives of self-service. As we retreat on our journey into our own group and lives, we see God travelling in the opposite direction, outward towards the other, towards the neighbour. Repentance

is that we turn around to follow God. We turn from our journey into our own group, to follow God out, to meet and to heal our world.

This is what Israel couldn't understand about God. He was always travelling the other way. He was travelling outward, towards their neighbour and towards others. They thought he should be travelling to them. He was travelling to them, but to take their hand, for them to join him in his love and travel towards the world.

Become followers of God, and of the Prince of Peace.

From Jihad to Missions

Boko Haram declared a jihad on our city. For two years they relentlessly pursued this policy, of driving all Christians out of our city. This was in the militant group's earlier days, before they realised the Muslim population would not join their cause. The militants made a national announcement that our city would fall, that it would cease to be a gospel and missionary centre in the north of our nation.

When peace began to be restored to our region in 2015 we decided to hold a missions conference in our city. The purpose was to draw mission workers from the interior regions of the north of our nation, and from neighbouring nations.

We knew how tough it was for these mission workers. They are largely unsupported by the churches, even by the wealthier churches in the south of the nation. We have some of their children in our children's' homes, to take care of them and provide education unavailable in interior rural areas, to allow their parents to concentrate on their missions work. Without support, many children have suffered with their parents.

We greatly respect these people and we wanted to make a plain announcement that we believe their work is valuable and important, to encourage them. Such mission workers rarely get to go to conferences where they can receive teaching, fellowship, encouragement and support for their work. There aren't any conferences held in the faraway places where they work, and they can't afford the transports costs, or even the registration fee, to attend a conference in a city.

We have seen many city conferences over the years, and have held several of them ourselves. Typically, you need to give the city pastors money to help organise the people who will attend. Most conference themes are about self-advancement, not about serving in the true identity of the church. Overall, the events are rather distasteful.

Kampala is a small enough city to see how this works. I was there visiting some of our graduates in Kampala once. A foreign visitor flies in and holds a conference at a centre in the city. This is led by a local pastor, who uses the conference to gather the people of the city to his ministry. When the conference is complete, and the foreigner is leaving, the next foreigner is landing at the airport. He or she is holding a conference in a different section of the city. They have a different local pastor organising the event. That pastor gathers the same people who attended the first conference to his ministry. Its highly competitive. And the messages are tailored to win the people to that ministry.

The cycle never ended. One after the other, foreigners landed and left. The people outside Kampala, the pastors and missionaries in the interior, were not helped. The poor weren't cared for. The enemies weren't loved, but generally were cursed. This is part of the reason why the north of that nation, and ours, went into war and terrorism. It is sad that this is the lowest common denominator that ministry is often reduced to, so we can fly in and get our mission photos. We are all guilty of this.

There is distinct hatred for enemies in our mainline churches. In almost every church you get prayer against enemies. For example, a "prophet" will stand and pronounce curses and death to the enemies. The crowd will roar an "amen." He will go to announce madness to the enemy's children. He will proclaim that generations to follow will "beg on the streets." The "presence of the anointing" is thick in the atmosphere. The response from the crowd is thunderous.

Then the people are told that, to activate the curses, they must give an offering. They rush to the front of the hall and empty their pockets. Great amounts of money are raised. None of it is used the

help the poor, or the sick or enemies in need. It all goes to the life style of the leaders. There is nothing Christian about this.

This is said to explain our motivation: we wanted a conference that served those who normally miss out. We wanted a conference that celebrated God's faithfulness during jihad, showing our city had come through and was back as a missions centre to this part of the world. We wanted a conference that stimulated mission in far and difficult to reach areas, and supported those people working there.

And most of all, we wanted a conference where people were loved, and where they were encouraged to love others and serve their enemies in their location. We wanted a conference that said that missions was back, after years of terrorism all through their regions, and that this time we were building on a new foundation; of love and service to our whole community, of drawing in our enemy through the love of God, of building one new community of care.

And God was faithful. He gave us the best conference committee you could imagine. They came from other ministries. They treated the conference as their own. They served day and night working for its success. They all worked for free, for the joy of serving the Lord and serving his people. They asked for nothing. Our staff family and Bible College students did the same. They served the missionaries day and night without stopping and with a lot of happiness.

And the missionaries came. 2,000 attended, from all over the north, and from several neighbouring nations. We had no money when it started, but all was provided. The conference ran for seven days. Registration was free. Meals every day were free. Conference material and books were given out free. Gifts to help in practical ways on the mission field were given out; things like bicycles, generators, grinding machines, and other useful items to help their work. And transport was paid to the conference, and back to their work stations, for every delegate. All this was faithfully, and miraculously, provided to by the Lord through our friends who helped.

The meetings that week were great. People came with resentment because of all they passed through. Many even came with hatred for the Muslims and for their enemies. That week, all that was dismantled. Forgiveness was shared, and community and love for our enemies filled the hearts of those who came. They went back to so many different mission fields with a refreshed and a new vision for the work. They would carry on their mission work with hope, with encouragement from others and with love for all.

Many of the people had suffered so much. Now the economy was taking a further toll on everybody. A child in one of our homes sang a song in church last Sunday: "Though you suffered. And they made us cry. They burnt down our churches and killed our Pastors. Don't worry. Jesus is coming again and he'll wipe our tears." Healing from trauma is coming. A new action of love towards our enemies is birthing.

Jihad had been defeated through community between Muslims and Christians, and now missions is rebooted through a community vision of the love of God, through the gospel of Jesus Christ, who gave his life for us all, and who loved his enemies and laid down his life for them.

This is our vision for community. This is our vision for love in our churches. This is our vision for missions. This is our vision for a new nation and a new region of nations.