JOAN B. KROC

Distinguished Lecture Series

John Paul Lederach

Compassionate Presence: Faith-based Peacebuilding in the Face of Violence
Delivered on the 16th of February, 2012 at the
JOAN B. KROC INSTITUTE FOR PEACE & JUSTICE
Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies
University of San Diego
San Diego, California

John Paul Lederach
*Compassionate Presence: Faith-based Peacebuilding in the Face of Violence*

Editors — Kaitlin Barker Davis and Emiko Noma
Senior Program Officer — Diana Kutlow
TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace &amp; Justice</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joan B. Kroc Distinguished Lecture Series</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biography</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview: Mentors and Apprentices in Peacebuilding</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting with Students: Faith and Peacebuilding</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview: Peacebuilding in Nepal</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welcome and Introduction</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecture — <em>Compassionate Presence: Faith-based Peacebuilding in the Face of Violence</em></td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions and Answers</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Related Resources</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About the University of San Diego</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The mission of the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice (IPJ) is to foster peace, cultivate justice and create a safer world. Since 2000, the IPJ has worked to build peace with justice by strengthening women peacemakers, youth leaders and human rights defenders, and developing innovative approaches to peacebuilding. In 2007, the IPJ became part of the Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies, made possible by a gift from Joan Kroc's estate.

The Institute strives, in Joan B. Kroc's words, to “not only talk about peace, but to make peace.” In its peacebuilding initiatives, the IPJ works with local partners to help strengthen their efforts to consolidate peace with justice in the communities in which they live. The Institute currently has projects with local partners in Nepal, West Africa, Guatemala and Kenya.

The Women PeaceMakers Program documents the stories and best practices of international women leaders who are involved in human rights and peacemaking efforts in their home countries. WorldLink, a year-round educational program for high school students from San Diego and Baja California, connects youth to global affairs.

Community outreach includes speakers, films, art and opportunities for discussion between community members, academics and practitioners on issues of peace and social justice, as well as dialogue with national and international leaders in government, nongovernmental organizations and the military.

In addition to the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice, the Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies includes a master's program in Peace and Justice Studies to train future leaders in the field, and the Trans-Border Institute, which promotes border-related scholarship and an active role for the university in the cross-border community. The School also partners with USD’s School of Business Administration on the Center for Peace and Commerce and with USD’s School of Leadership and Education Sciences on a Peace and Global Education Certificate.
JOAN B. KROC DISTINGUISHED LECTURE SERIES

Endowed in 2003 by a generous gift to the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice from the late Joan Kroc, the Distinguished Lecture Series is a forum for high-level national and international leaders and policymakers to share their knowledge and perspectives on issues related to peace and justice. The goal of the series is to deepen understanding of how to prevent and resolve conflict and promote peace with justice.

The Distinguished Lecture Series offers the community at large an opportunity to engage with leaders who are working to forge new dialogues with parties in conflict and who seek to answer the question of how to create an enduring peace for tomorrow. The series examines new developments in the search for effective tools to prevent and resolve conflict while protecting human rights and ensuring social justice.

DISTINGUISHED LECTURERS

April 15, 2003  Robert Edgar
General Secretary — National Council of Churches
The Role of the Church in U.S. Foreign Policy

May 8, 2003  Helen Caldicott
President — Nuclear Policy Research Institute
The New Nuclear Danger

October 15, 2003  Richard J. Goldstone
Justice of the Constitutional Court of South Africa
The Role of International Law in Preventing Deadly Conflict

January 14, 2004  Ambassador Donald K. Steinberg
U.S. Department of State
Conflict, Gender and Human Rights: Lessons Learned from the Field

April 14, 2004  General Anthony C. Zinni
United States Marine Corps (retired)
From the Battlefield to the Negotiating Table: Preventing Deadly Conflict

November 4, 2004  Hanan Ashrawi
Secretary General — Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy
Concept, Context and Process in Peacemaking: The Palestinian-Israeli Experience

November 17, 2004  Noeleen Heyzer
Executive Director — United Nations Development Fund for Women
Women, War and Peace: Mobilizing for Security and Justice in the 21st Century

February 10, 2005  The Honorable Lloyd Axworthy
President — University of Winnipeg
The Responsibility to Protect: Prescription for a Global Public Domain

March 31, 2005  Mary Robinson
Former President of Ireland
United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
Human Rights and Ethical Globalization
October 27, 2005  His Excellency Ketumile Masire  
Former President of the Republic of Botswana  
*Perspectives into the Conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Contemporary Peacebuilding Efforts*

January 27, 2006  Ambassador Christopher R. Hill  
U.S. Department of State  
*U.S. Policy in East Asia and the Pacific*

March 9, 2006  William F. Schulz  
Executive Director — Amnesty International USA  
*Tainted Legacy: 9/11 and the Ruin of Human Rights*

September 7, 2006  Shirin Ebadi  
2003 Nobel Peace Laureate  
*Iran Awakening: Human Rights, Women and Islam*

October 18, 2006  Miria Matembe, Alma Viviana Pérez, Irene Santiago  
*War and Peace: The Politics of Peacebuilding*

April 12, 2007  The Honorable Gareth Evans  
President — International Crisis Group  
*Preventing Mass Atrocities: Making “Never Again” a Reality*

September 20, 2007  Kenneth Roth  
Executive Director — Human Rights Watch  
*The Dynamics of Human Rights and the Environment*

March 4, 2008  Jan Egeland  
Former Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator for the United Nations  
*War, Peace and Climate Change: A Billion Lives in the Balance*

April 17, 2008  Jane Goodall  
Founder — Jane Goodall Institute and United Nations Messenger of Peace  
*Reason for Hope*

September 24, 2008  The Honorable Louise Arbour  
Former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights  
*Integrating Security, Development and Human Rights*

March 25, 2009  Ambassador Jan Eliasson  
Former United Nations Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Darfur and Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs  
*Armed Conflict: The Cost to Civilians*

October 8, 2009  Paul Farmer  
Co-founder — Partners In Health and United Nations Deputy Special Envoy to Haiti  
*Development: Creating Sustainable Justice*

November 18, 2009  William Ury  
Co-founder and Senior Fellow — Harvard Negotiation Project  
*From the Boardroom to the Border: Negotiating for Sustainable Agreements*

February 25, 2010  Raymond Offenheiser  
President — Oxfam America  
*Aid That Works: A 21st Century Vision for U.S. Foreign Assistance*

September 29, 2010  Monica McWilliams  
Chief Commissioner — Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission  
*From Peace Talks to Gender Justice*

December 9, 2010  Johan Galtung  
Founder — International Peace Research Institute  
*Breaking the Cycle of Violent Conflict*

February 17, 2011  Stephen J. Rapp  
U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for War Crimes Issues  
*Achieving Justice for Victims of Genocide, War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity*

May 9, 2011  Radhika Coomaraswamy  
U.N. Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict  
*Children and Armed Conflict: The International Response*

October 6, 2011  Zainab Salbi  
Founder — Women for Women International  
*Building Bridges, Rebuilding Societies*

February 16, 2012  John Paul Lederach  
Professor of International Peacebuilding — University of Notre Dame  
*Compassionate Presence: Faith-based Peacebuilding in the Face of Violence*
BIOGRAPHY OF JOHN PAUL LEDERACH

John Paul Lederach is widely known for his pioneering work on conflict transformation, mediation and conciliation, and has conducted training programs in 25 countries across five continents. He is professor of international peacebuilding at the University of Notre Dame, where the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies recently celebrated its 25th anniversary, and a distinguished scholar at Eastern Mennonite University. He is involved in practical peacebuilding in Colombia, the Philippines, Nepal and countries in East and West Africa, and has special expertise in conflicts involving interethnic, cross-cultural and religious issues.

Lederach, who holds a doctorate in sociology from the University of Colorado, is the author of dozens of articles and books, including When Blood and Bones Cry Out: Journeys Through the Soundscape of Healing and Reconciliation, The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace and Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies.
INTERVIEW: Mentors and Apprentices in Peacebuilding

The following is an edited transcript of an interview with John Paul Lederach conducted by phone by Laura Taylor on Feb. 17, 2012. Taylor is a former senior program officer at the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice and is now a Ph.D. candidate in peace studies and psychology at the University of Notre Dame. She was an apprentice of Lederach in the Peacebuilding Apprenticeship Program, funded by the Fetzer Institute.

LT: Can you share the experiences or people that shaped your early ideas about peacebuilding? What were some of your first steps down that very long and windy path?

JPL: I imagine some of it was by osmosis growing up in a Mennonite community. My father was a pastor, so I would have heard a lot of these things extolled over the pulpit. But it became more explicit and intentional during my late high school years, when we were still facing the Vietnam War and the questions of the draft. We had front and center the issue of conscientious objection. When I got to college, I had classes that weren't embedded specifically in a peace studies program, but in peace theology in Mennonite circles. I had a number of professors that were instrumental in getting me thinking critically early on in those years.

I think my real mentors in this field would be a number of those I had in the years I was in what we in the Mennonite community call voluntary service — the alternative to military service during the period of the draft. I ended up in Spain after a three-year period in Brussels. I lived with one of our more preeminent Mennonite theologians, John Driver, who is a very dedicated pacifist. We had a lot of conversations about the roots of where the struggles were and what it meant.

That was a period I started reading whatever I could get my hands on by Adam Curle. In roughly that time period, he was taking over the peace studies program at the University of Bradford in the U.K. He was the first professor of peace studies. Even in my early writing, I pulled a number of his things into some of the frameworks that I've used. But I was particularly engaged with his writing about international conciliation work that he and other Quakers were doing.

Eventually that peaked an interest in getting more intentional about the undergraduate degree that I had to finish, and then when I came back to work on a Ph.D. I chose where I went because I was pulled by the Quakers who had been involved in this. My dissertation chair, Paul Wehr, was a Quaker. My Ph.D. was in sociology at the University of Colorado, where Kenneth and Elise Boulding had lived. Elise at the time was teaching more at Dartmouth, but I had a lot of opportunities to interact with her. Kenneth was in his emeritus status by the time I got there. These were all figures who for me were quite instrumental.

Certainly another very instrumental Mennonite theologian was John Howard Yoder. These were people who were roughly of my parent's generation, so I see them certainly as my guiding elders in a lot of ways.

Of my more immediate colleagues, one certainly would be Ron Kraybill. Ron was the first director of the Mennonite Conciliation Services, which I was also a director of at a later stage. He was in an early process of developing some of these ideas applied primarily to domestic issues in the U.S. — either congregational, community or social issues.

He was influenced, as was I, by Jim Laue. He's from a Methodist background in terms of his religious affiliation. He was quite close to Martin Luther King, Jr., and involved with the civil rights movement in its early iterations. He eventually helped develop the mediation field in the U.S. and a lot of applications that went all kinds of interesting directions. At the end of his career he was a professor at George Mason's program [School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution] when they were in the first 10 years or so of developing their degree program. He helped set up and did a lot of advising and support to what we were doing on the practical side within Mennonite circles.
The well-worn path is really a combination of things: trying to be clear about what your faith base may be, but also clear in your conceptual and skill capacity and taking it into the hard work of practice. That's what I found in a lot of these people, especially Adam, who gave that a direction. I don't know if this is just a random list of names, but these are all the witnesses who have gone before me.

Parenthetically, in the little sabbatical time that I have, I've been accumulating all the writings that I can find of Adam Curle, who I consider to be one of the formative people because of what he was doing in terms of both very concrete practice and reflection on practice, and then teaching in peace studies. I don't think that he's been given the profile that he should have in reference to important elements that have been formative in the wider field. He's a main influence, for example, in the notion of befriending, which is a descriptive way of how I've worked for many years. It's been fun to go back and read all of this, and to find a lot of little things that I never knew existed.

So the apprenticeship idea was trying to go back and lift up a concept of learning that had to do with a significant relationship in which the studying happens in part by doing — but maybe more importantly, by being with each other in ways that might be part of the pathway of developing leadership capacity and craft.

“I think what the apprenticeship program is saying is that we have to find ways to bring this more to the center — that what we do is intimately tied to who we are.”

I think what we discovered — because it's still a process of discovery for me — is that it had elements, certainly, that were about focusing on skill, concept and the actual process of trying to figure out what to do and how to approach it. The biggest surprise for me was how significant and important were the times together where people were expressing questions that were pretty deep: Who am I? Where am I going? What's my contribution? What's my voice in all this? Those things we had a lot of opportunity to explore. If you're in a shorter term training event, you have a little dose of that, but a lot of it is focused on skill or concept. Even in an educational setting, you've got all the parameters and demands of rigorous research and academic quality, and these things always seem to sit in the periphery of what we do.

I think what the apprenticeship program is saying is that we have to find ways to bring this more to the center — that what we do is intimately tied to who we are. And that's part of how we can think about learning. This notion of shoulder to shoulder, or alongsideness, is what we were experimenting with. I came out of it with a pretty strong sense that we were on to good things, even if it still may take some time to figure out how it best fits within a given organization or process.

1 For an overview of the Peacebuilding Apprenticeship Program, please see http://kroc.nd.edu/krocnews/news/peacebuilders-share-work-and-wisdom-apprentices-worldwide-485
LT: On a more personal level, you have talked about the role of your father in your early peacebuilding and you’ve written a book with your daughter Angie.² How did you find yourself as father and daughter embarking on this shared project?

JPL: Obviously when you’re a family you share a lot of experiences. The book in some ways goes back to the fact that Angie and the whole family experienced a lot together over the years; we watched the work and the people and the relationships that we had develop. She of course became keenly interested in these in terms of her own life journey and vocation, which is always a wonderful thing. She was at Notre Dame in her undergraduate years and had opportunities to do original research.

It’s kind of a long story, but there are elements to our process that had to do with something I’ve become more and more convinced about. It concerns our women colleagues — and Laura Taylor, you are among those — who will eventually face the interesting challenge of tenure. It’s not that men don’t face that too. But women often fulfill some very important functions for departments, carry a lot of things, and at times the side of writing and getting journal articles and books published doesn’t line up at the same pace. There are some intriguing difficulties off and on with tenure issues that have happened at many universities.

Angie did an ethnographic piece based on interviews she did with women, and we had a lot of discussions about writing and publishing. In my own life, I never once had to think about what stage I was in and whether that meant I could or could not publish. I was able just to start publishing. My first book was the undergraduate research project that I had done in Spain on interviewing conscientious objectors and nonviolent advocates during the Franco regime. It was all based on original interviews.

(That book, by the way, is just now going to be republished for the first time with my original oral history cassettes into digital form. The curious part of it is that we couldn’t get it published in Spanish, so it got published in Catalan. My first published book was in Catalan.)

² When Blood and Bones Cry Out: Journeys Through the Soundscape of Healing and Reconciliation.

It was a small epiphany for me to realize that in my own life I did things as they were emerging and never thought to ask anybody whether I was old enough or good enough to publish. Why is it that we think that nobody should publish a book until they finish their Ph.D.? It’s ridiculous.

So part of what I did with Angie was a trial in some ways, though of course it had a deeper experience because of a variety of things. But it was essentially the idea of working with somebody through a full publishing cycle, all the way to an academic press. Even if it fails, the experience will be of such worth for the person that it will carry on. The proposal that I was making was that there be a small cadre of professors willing to work as mentors with people at younger ages, particularly women, and help them create a full draft of a manuscript that would be submitted to an academic press.

Now that was totally parenthetic to your question. The embarking on it was that we have always had a lot of conversations at home about things we’re not only interested in, but also people we know and experiences we’re having. Angie’s were similar in some ways to my travels even at quite an early age. When she came back from Sierra Leone, Liberia, the Philippines, Colombia, she was deeply moved and reflective about them. I kept noticing that these fantastic papers she was writing for her classes always ended up where all papers do: in a dumb folder somewhere. I kept telling her we could do it.

That was when I was starting my own process of going deeper into non-linear aspects of healing and reconciliation. That was very close to what she was experiencing, especially working with a poet in Sierra Leone, with child soldiers — she had these things that just fit. We drafted an outline and decided we would do some chapters together, and we would each retain a voice individually for the things we were working on more individually. About that time I got a request from Queensland University Press; they wanted something cutting edge and different. I had the proposal and they said sure. Then we were particularly thrilled that Oxford decided to pick it up, since it hasn’t been easy to get it from Australia.
LT: Can you discuss this idea you have mentioned of “truth endlessly unfolding”?

JPL: One of the difficulties I think we face — and that I feel coming from a small denomination that can be somewhat protective if not a bit closed — is that quite often we have a sense of truth being threatened by things that may provide a totally different or new way of understanding, or that question in a fundamental way something that we think is a key tenet. The way that we often handle that is to close ourselves to that and only spend time with those who believe very much like we do. That creates a strong in-group, and the in-group knows who they are by being able to define their out-group.

“I have become increasingly convinced of how absolutely expansive (in the sense of broad) and deep (in the sense of profound) truth really is.”

This sets up the notion that truth is something that we have but others don’t. We are to be good in the world from the standpoint that we go out and try to convince people of our truth. In religious traditions this is about exclusivity, it’s about conversion and proselytization — there are all kinds of things that come out of this. I have become increasingly convinced of how absolutely expansive (in the sense of broad) and deep (in the sense of profound) truth really is. I have such a tiny, tiny understanding of something so big that the only thing it creates in me is the understanding that it may be totally impossible to understand this exclusively from one narrow lens.

Some people, though not all, in my home church, the Mennonite church, are quite nervous about the fact that I’m interacting and actually drawing from and getting inspiration from other religions and other ways of understanding truth that may not be religiously based.

When they ask me to speak about this interreligious work, I always start by having everyone in the room sing this nice little song, “Deep and wide, deep and wide, there’s a fountain flowing deep and wide.” This song is one I’ve known since I was 4 or 5. If I start to sing that, the whole congregation sings with me within 15 seconds. Everybody’s smiling, everybody’s singing. Then I stop and say, “Everything I know about interreligious peacebuilding is found in that song. No one ever taught me this song: Shallow and narrow, shallow and narrow. It’s only for us and nobody else.” It creates a very interesting conversation.

What I’m saying when I say truth unfolds endlessly is that I believe that you can have a firm conviction of things that you want to hold true in your life and you try to align your life by those. I believe at the same time that you continuously learn deeper and wider things about what that might mean and how it might be, and those can come from extraordinarily unexpected sources.

Say, for example, I’m with my Islamic friends and I’m in a deep conversation about how they view something. Rather than seeing what they’re saying as a threat, that I have to choose between one or the other, feeling the depth that they feel about a ritual they do or an approach they use helps me deepen my own sense of who I am in my faith. I don’t feel a threat to who I am or what I believe.

You could call it an appreciative approach that says I am inspired to be deeper and better in what I understand by sources that come from outside of what I understand. Those don’t have to be a threat and there isn’t a choice to be made. In the worst case scenario, that threat can cause us to feel a need to construct an image of somebody who wishes us harm, and that we have to protect ourselves from that and even have to destroy that in order to keep our truth safe.
In the academic world, in our efforts to be good sociologists or good historians or good psychologists, I think we have always understood knowledge as building on what people have understood before us, but we’re always expanding to that next thing. Sometimes things come along that completely widen or open our ideas that had always been there, but we hadn’t quite understood them. In other words, the whole notion is that we’re endlessly unfolding. These things have a way that they can come together.

The bottom line is that to some degree it is about feeling secure that uncertainty is OK, because uncertainty leads you to keep looking. I connect that to humility. I think it has a lot to do with humility.

“It is about feeling secure that uncertainty is OK, because uncertainty leads you to keep looking. I connect that to humility.”

LT: You have talked about that link of insecurity and threat and the counteracting forces of trust and friendship, and how time is an essential component. Can you go a little more in depth about those connections and how they tie into your idea of patience?

JPL: This has some intriguing layers to it. Professionally in the field of mediation, people make the case that mediators will need trust. The professional role of the mediator is a form of providing service to a client. So when trust is discussed in that context, there is a small layer of friendship and trust that develops, but it’s often a function of providing the service. The ethical standards of mediation would say that you really shouldn’t have much relationship outside of providing this service. If you’re meeting for coffee as a friend outside of the mediation, your professional role will be undermined.

Some of the places where I have worked there is enormous social division, division around identities. Those identities form very tightknit boundaries of in-group and out-group, or the “other” if you will, and there is a lot of pain that comes with that. That boundary creation comes with an enormous amount of distrust and suspicion, and it often comes with an almost generational level of bitterness that transcends generations. It is transferred down and they carry this sense of the wrongs that have happened. In those contexts, which are the ones I’ve had quite a bit of exposure to, I’ve come to believe in the need to think about much longer term relationships. Trust develops over time with regularity of contact and commitment to being in relationships with people.

This has meant that a lot of places I’ve worked I’ve made a commitment for decades. At one point I started saying that I wasn’t going to start in a new area unless people were willing to make a decade of commitment. But it also meant that I needed to narrow a bit more where I could make those kinds of commitments. Rather than going many places for a shorter time, I began to go fewer places for a longer time. The mainstays of that have been Colombia, the Philippines and Nepal. Colombia and the Philippines are somewhere around 25 years; Nepal was a 10-year commitment. My African friends are giving me grief because I haven’t been back for quite a while. A lot of places in Africa I was there six, eight years or more.

For example, the work I’ve been doing in the Philippines, primarily with the government OPAPP [Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process] and the counterpart negotiation panel that is constituted in Utrecht for the NDFP [National Democratic Front of the Philippines], that dates back to the early ‘90s. I’ve had more than 20 years of continuous support with people that I’ve known for that length of time, but I’m not tasked with being a mediator.

It translates more into being supportive to people on the inside who may be playing the roles of conciliation, or to be more on the conciliation-support side to people who are involved on different sides of a conflict
over long periods of time, without assuming the role of a mediator. At times that may have a mediative function: message carrying, support of ideas and conversation. But at a deeper level it is this concept of befriending, developing friendships for the sake of being a friend with somebody who is in a situation of considerable pain or conflict. That may go on for a much more extended period of time.

LT: In terms of decade-thinking or decade approaches, I think of the importance of increasing the capacity or the participation of young people in peacebuilding processes. How would involving young people address the generational bitterness that you mentioned earlier?

JPL: Increasingly I’ve become aware of how critical it is. One of the difficulties you have if you are working at the political levels is that quite often youth are excluded, as are women. It’s one of the complications we constantly have: how to increase the range of people that are participating in the more formal peace process. On the other hand, the work at the community level includes far more robust participation of youth and women; in fact, sometimes they are the mainstay.

The notion that I’ve been developing over the years of creating platforms has a relationship to the idea of the infrastructure for peace. Platforms can be much more gauged toward how to be inclusive of rising generations. I think the early but small pilot experiment we did with the apprenticeship holds a lot of promise for this. One of our conclusions was that while we started with the notion of it being an apprenticeship in peacebuilding, I think we were discovering it really was a kind of an apprenticeship in leadership development — how to grow into being not only a better but a “whole person” leader, not just a leader with cognitive capacity or skill capacity.

In the most recent publication we did with Ph.D. students at Notre Dame, one of these ideas jumped out. Take a complex challenge like al-Shabab in Somalia. One of the difficulties is that if your strategy is to isolate them as terrorists, trying to narrow their ability to move and shape things, you have the particular challenge that they are especially appealing to a younger generation. They’ve had capacity to mobilize youth. So if you want to think about longer term change in those settings, the question becomes, how do you engage younger and rising leadership if you are not finding ways to have forms of direct relationship and engage with their realities and worldviews? You need to provide at least enough relationship that it provides a conversation to open a range of alternatives.

“How do we open up our systems so that they’re much more responsive and participatory for the vast majority of people who are under 30?”

This I think is one of the big issues that we face globally: How do we open up our systems so that they’re much more responsive and participatory for the vast majority of people who are under 30? This is especially true in settings of violent conflict, because most of those settings have a two-fold phenomenon. The preponderance of the population is under 30; they’re the majority. And people who are drawn most into committing violence are often under 30. The question then becomes a very interesting one for us about what we’re doing about youth engagement.

LT: This is a question that some students may be struggling with. They read your work, they get inspired and then think, OK, now what? How do I do this? How do you advise your students to help them begin their own windy, well-worn path?

JPL: I think the main thing is to take one step at a time, but take that step with the capacity for reflection. I would encourage people that if you have access to an internship, even if it’s three months in the summer, do it. Then
reflect on whether it turned your crank or whether it bored you to death. Sometimes I think people end up doing these things but they don't fully take the time to ask if this is what they want to be doing. Did you find yourself happy? Did you find a sense of joy in this? If you are doing something where you find that it's numbing your joy, your life is telling you something.

I didn't just fall into all the things that I'm doing. It was always one little thing here and there, and some of them I didn't even know were going to go anywhere. But once they did, I could look back and see how this opened. Part of it was that I had opportunity, I took opportunity. But I also paid attention to what it felt like and where it was leading me.
MEETING WITH STUDENTS: Faith and Peacebuilding

The following is an edited transcript of a meeting John Paul Lederach held with students and alumni from the master's program in peace and justice studies at the Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies. The meeting was held on Feb. 17, 2012, and consisted mostly of a discussion on faith and peacebuilding.

Q: Can you give us some insight into what has touched you and what ignited the passion to lead you down this path?

A: More than one thing. I often trace formative events in my life to these kinds of passions. I grew up a ways north of here in a rural area outside of Portland, Ore. I’m a Northwesterner. If you’re with an Oregonian they’ll tell you it’s paradise. Somewhere between fourth and fifth grade, we started a series of moves that took us back and forth from Oregon and then eventually to Winston-Salem, N.C. I went from the idyllic location of a rural area at the foot of Mt. Hood into a large city the year I was going into junior high. I went into a school population four times the size of the town I had come from.

It was the year of the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. My parents were actively involved in a range of civil rights activities in different locations that we had been. It was one of the most extraordinary and dramatic years that we lived as a family. For me, it was extremely formative at a very early age to experience things that I had never seen up close before, the kind of divisions that people had.

I’ll give you a small detail. The school shut down for three days after the assassination because the town exploded. Streets got shut down and the city was more or less paralyzed for a few days. They closed the public school system.

My very first class the day I returned was social studies. The teacher opened with a question to the class of what we thought of the recent events. I was so stunned to hear what my classmates said because I had not heard them express anything like this in such a direct way before: that he was a rabble-rouser, that he deserved it, that the time had come. The teacher made no qualms that she herself was very much in favor of that. I remember raising my hand and saying that I thought he was a great leader. I lost all my friends. It was so stunning to me. I could not believe that that was what I was hearing.

I can remember listening to Martin Luther King’s speeches on the radio and then blurbs that came on the TV in those years — and those things ring always with me.

Of course, I have a long line of things that drew me into this work. I went to a small junior college, a Mennonite one in central Kansas. I had a number of professors, one of which was Robert Hostetter. There were people who were formative in helping me begin to think critically. I was in a stage of my life where I wasn’t sure what was next, and to be very honest I had no idea what to declare as a major. I think we make a big mistake in undergraduate programs asking people to declare majors, as if they know what they want to end up or where they want to go.

I was a conscientious objector to the Vietnam War, and I did an alternative service of three years in Brussels, Belgium. By the time I came back to school, I wanted to find a degree program in peace studies.

My assignment in Brussels was as a volunteer in a student housing project. Belgium is of course one of the colonial powers. The colonies that Belgium had were Burundi, Rwanda, Congo (at the time they called it Zaire) — Central African countries.

When the liberation period came, the education system under colonization had only more or less reached high school. People who were seeking
university degrees would often come north to Europe, and in the case of Belgium a lot of people would come to the universities in and around Brussels. I lived in a house with between 30 and 45 students from Burundi, Rwanda, Congo, other French-speaking African countries, the northern part of Africa and into the Middle East, and a whole bunch of Colombians and Argentinians. It was the time period when waves of people were seeking refuge during the disappearances in Argentina, etc.

In French they call these people, like I was myself, les étrangers, strangers in a foreign land. So we had a house full of strangers. My day job was to mop floors, clean rooms, paint rooms, serve food and sit at reception. My night job was to sit with these people and talk until four in the morning. We had a lot of arguments because a lot of people going to the universities from those locations had two things that were fairly consistent.

The first was that they were discontent with the leadership in their own countries, and a lot of people were arguing for forms of revolution. That was one of our big topics: revolution. We're going to throw the world over and make everything perfect. Our argument was whether you do that with weapons or without weapons. Just like in the seventh grade, I discovered I was the only one who thought that maybe we should do it without weapons.

The second was that in Belgium they were experiencing a lot of racism on a daily basis. Sometimes it was subtle and many times it was not. The house would be the place that they could unload. So I was often the only white person in all these conversations. All of this was a tremendous experience because it taught me so much about the depth of the things that we face in this world in order to reach a sense of our mutual humanity.

One last piece on this because it is key for me, my mother grew up on the Texas-Mexican border, in Brownsville, Tex. From an early age she was bilingual. In Oregon a lot of seasonal workers come through. My first job was strawberry picking and most of the people we would be picking with were from Mexico. They would come in and out of our classes at school. Because my mother had grown up along the border, she was always inviting people in, even when all of our fellow congregants in our church and neighbors tended to see them as people apart.

From a very early age I had these influences. I think that’s where a bit of this passion comes from.

Q: What chance has the Mennonite church offered you to be a fruitful peace practitioner?

A: This is a small history lesson now, the history of religion that is never taught in the history of religion — we call it the underside of religion. We are a small minority and usually minority groups are left out of the big picture. We’re emergent in the 16th century around the Protestant Reformation.

We were sometimes referred to as the radical wing of the Reformation. That meant that we ended up irritating Protestants and Catholics alike. They chased us around and burned us at the stake. I have a big book called...
Martyrs Mirror, which is all the stories of our collective trauma of the 16th century. I'll give you my view of the basic ethic that was present at that time and then how that translates to a gem or two.

The first was that you don't approach the Bible as a big flat book where everything is literal and the same across the whole of it. You approach it from the angle that Jesus and his life and his teaching were the best example of who we are to be. You go first to his core teachings and what he did in order to understand the Old Testament (or the Hebrew Bible). And you look through Jesus in reference to Pauline scriptures that follow or what came out of the early church.

For example, you would believe that the Sermon on the Mount wasn't something that was projected for a future when we all land in heaven, but you're supposed to do those things now. He said, “Love your enemies." This is not an easy thing to do. That in some ways is the starting point. And that led to us often defined as one of the historic peace churches. You're supposed to do good to those who wish you harm, you love your enemies, you love God with all your heart, you love your neighbor as yourself. That's the core of it. That led to a strong belief in pacifism, which has stayed with the church for more than 500 years.

The second is that you have a concern for people who are more vulnerable and less well off than you are. The movement itself became quite attractive to a rural peasant set of people, people at the underbelly of the European scene at the time, because it offered several things. One was not only that you reached out and tried to offer care for them in a variety of ways, but there was a focus on what we refer to as community.

In the various branches of our history, you have the Hutterites, the Bruderhof, the Amish — these are sets of people who still practice, very directly, forms of the common good. Some have everything held in common; they have collective possession rather than an individual one.

But there were two ideas that got us in the most trouble. The first was the view that the choice to follow this faith is not an easy one and that you make it as an adult. Therefore, baptism should not happen when you're an infant. The choice of coming into this is something you do as an adult. The movement was called the Anabaptist movement, the people who re-baptized themselves. What they were saying was, while I may have been baptized as an infant in the Catholic tradition, I'm publically saying that I now choose to follow these tenets.

That was done for religious reasons, but it had a political ramification. It was not well appreciated. Neither the Protestants nor the Catholics liked that very much at the time because they were carving up Europe into places that became either Protestant or Catholic. This leads to the second thing that was advocated during that time period that was not well liked. We made the case that we should separate church and state. States should not be Protestant or Catholic. Those became the things that made us perceived as heretical.

“You don't do things as a lone ranger. 
You do things as part of a small community of support. 
I'm a big fan in our field of working in teams.”

There are several gems that I will mention. The sense of community that we have is very powerful. For me, that gem translates into the notion that you don't do things as a lone ranger. You do things as part of a small community of support. I'm a big fan in our field of working in teams. That's informed in part by my own upbringing that said that alone you may be a hero, but this is not what's needed for sustaining the change needed in the difficulties we face. A very strong sense of community sometimes can be a little overwhelming when you're in the middle of it, but for the most part it is a gem. It translates to a lot of different ways that we work.
Second gem: We have a very strong sense of service that gets inculcated in our ethos. We started many, many years ago something called Mennonite Disaster Service. If any of you have ever been in a hurricane or a tornado or a flood here in the U.S., you'll suddenly notice out of the blue a combination of odd-looking Amish men and Mennonites showing up and starting to clean up. People will drop everything they're doing and take three weeks to go to a place to help people recuperate.

For most of my upbringing it was just common that you give two to four years of an early part of your life and a late part of your life to service. It often came between the ages of 25 and 30, and often between 55 and 65. You would give that in service not renumerated but supported by the wider denomination. It could be anything: hospitals, development work, agriculture. My time in Belgium was three years; my salary was $15 a month. I got a plane ticket over, housing and food. And of course my education. I learned more in those three years than I have probably in the sum total of the rest.

My parents retired at 64 and then spent eight years in Ireland. They went to Belfast, it was just ahead of the signing of the Good Friday Agreement. They were both high-level academics and went to be of service to Mediation Northern Ireland, in which they came in at the lowest end of that and did whatever people would find helpful for them to do in support of their work.

So the gem that I've always taken from that is the sense of service to the other. It's about lifting the other in the sense that you are with people, alongside of people, in ways that are of service to the dilemmas they may have.

The third one comes more from an image. The book I referred to, Martyrs Mirror, had some lithographs that were done many, many years ago. There's a story of one of our 16th century heroes. All of our heroes did bizarre things, so we have an odd sense of heroism. This is a description of a hero from our perspective.

His name was Dirk Willems and because he had chosen to re-baptize himself, he was captured, placed in prison and was to be executed. It was winter time. For unknown reasons, his cell door was left open and he escaped. He ran across a small field and then across a pond that was iced over. His jailer, seeing that he had escaped, began to run after him. As he crossed the ice, he heard the ice crack. Dirk Willems turned and looked behind him and saw that one of his jailers had fallen into the water. He turned back and pulled his persecutor out of the water. In the act of doing that, he was arrested. The following week he was burned at the stake.

That's our hero. The lithograph is the picture of him kneeling at the edge of the ice extending his hand to his enemy. That's what I grew up with. We try to envision what is meant by “love your enemy”; it is not an easy thing to fully understand unless you experience people who want to do you harm. But that's what we would aspire to.

It's a gem for me because I have found myself, to be honest, more comfortable in doing what I do in places where people have deep senses of enemy, and for very good reasons. I think that's where you have an opportunity to see how and in what ways we make sense of that.

Q: Faith requires a practice or discipline that can sustain you in what you're doing. What is that discipline that sustains you over the long haul?

A: Very good question. I imagine all of us have things that we find meaningful. For some years in my earlier stages of work in this field, I think I under-attended to the replenishing of the wells. Maybe it just comes with the life phase that we're in. You're busy, you're trying to find where it is you're going to land and what you're going to do, and that begins to occupy you.

I had to find things that were meaningful for me. Quite often people look for what's meaningful to them by finding out what somebody else did. That may open an idea or two, but I think what's key is what's meaningful for you. What I found helpful was to ask consistently about the things that gave me great joy. Joy is when you are engaged in something and you don't notice the passing of time because it has brought the fullness of who you are into that particular thing. For me, that had to do with recuperating a sense of play.
Another was walking and trying to find ways that it brought me into engagement with nature. I think that we’ve lost some capacities by the fact that we don’t appreciate the fullness of the creation, so even in small doses it was good for me to find ways to do that.

"Joy is when you are engaged in something and you don’t notice the passing of time because it has brought the fullness of who you are into that particular thing."

I started, far more consistently, to have moments of stillness. Those can come in very different forms. I have practiced for some time meditation, my own versions of it. I like in particular what I call walking meditation: walking more slowly and letting a meditative state emerge that takes greater notice of what’s around you.

Poetry was useful for me because I could play with words. When I’m teaching this with people, I tell them to play with it. I think playing is helpful. There’s no scientific evidence that being more serious provides greater insight into conflict than being playful. In teaching, if I have the possibility to do it I will construct some of my classes with a lot of playful elements. When people are having fun, when they are engaged in a way that’s joyful, they don’t notice that multiple things may be happening for them at the same time. I think that’s renewing.

Music is very big for me. I come from a religious tradition that sings; we sing four-part harmony. While I’m not a brilliant singer, I began to notice how renewing it could be in terms of letting it be a part of life.

I’ve had difficulty with the notion of prayer. I have been taught ways of praying that I did not find particularly profound. This is how I say it sometimes: In religion, we get shoulded on a lot in life. You should do this. You should do that. All those shoulds accumulate, and prayer was one of those shoulds. You should do it, and here’s the way you should do it. Because it was a should, I had a hard time with it.

One of the things that was very powerful for me was that I began to notice that my most sacred moments — what I call prayerful state — are moments when I am able to hold the face of a person. For this recent book I published with my daughter, I began to read neurologists’ studies about the collective mind. Neurology is suggesting that we have a collective sense of self, that is, that our brains or maybe even our full bodies emanate things that we aren’t fully cognizant of.

The neurologists study this through a range of odd and extraordinary experiments. They might stick people in MRI machines, for example. Several studies that I read about blew my mind because it came close to what I’m trying to describe here. They would take two musicians who had played together for a long time. They would put one musician in an MRI machine in a room away from the other musician. And in a room far away, the other musician would start to play a song that the two of them had often played together. In that MRI machine, when that song would start, parts of that other person’s brain would start to light up.

They took people who had been married for a long time, put the husband in one room and the wife in the MRI machine. At a certain point, undesignated and unknown, they would ask the husband to just sit and think good thoughts about his wife, to think what he liked about her or what he cared about her. In the MRI machine, part of the wife’s frontal lobe of the brain would start to change. Daniel Siegel has written a lot about this.

This idea of holding the face of a person in a sacred moment, there’s a trace of this that goes back to the holy scriptures that we have as Christians. One of the most powerful stories of reconciliation for believers came out of the story of Jacob and Esau, in which one brother betrayed another and they were separated for years. Jacob makes his way back to meet his brother, his sworn enemy.
For me, the most powerful part of that story is the night before he’s to meet his brother. All night long he has a fight with what he refers to as a figure or an angel. When he comes out of that fight, he builds an altar to remember the place. He said, “I want to remember that it is here that I saw the face of God, and I survived.”

“What I carry with me are the faces of people. I feel like whenever one of those faces comes into my conscience, that’s prayer.”

The story unfolds that he sees his brother coming his direction, and for the first time without fear Jacob gets on his knees, bowing seven times to meet his brother. His brother Esau comes off his horse and down to the field, picks him up and they embrace — an extraordinary story of encounter. They have a conversation, and in the midst of it, Jacob says to his brother Esau, “To see your face is to see the face of God.”

What I carry with me are the faces of people. I feel like whenever one of those faces comes into my conscience, that’s prayer.

Q: You have encountered people who may not think the way you do in terms of faith, in terms of the values that you stand for. How do you handle that? How do you cultivate relationships for reconciliation without using your faith? How do you keep faith from becoming a stumbling block?

A: In most places and situations, I would not talk about faith in the intimate terms I have just done now. I would do it if asked. I get a lot of criticism in my own tradition for this. In fact, one of the hardest times that I had was in a gathering of people from my tradition and I made a statement. I said that with my Muslim brothers and sisters in Somalia, I felt that the most Christian thing I could do was to say, “Go and be a good Muslim.” I would say the same to a Buddhist colleague or Hindu or my dear Navajo friends. For me, faith is not about saying that you have to take what I believe in order to find the way. It’s about you being true to your deepest sense of who you are. I have come to believe that words have got us in a lot of trouble. I don’t believe much in words. I very much believe in what St. Francis indicated, that you should speak always to the love of God and use words if you must.

I am very cautious about how and when and in what ways I express personal belief, unless there is inquiry and interest and, in my own preference, a relationship of trust — that is, there is an authentic friendship. Then we can say a lot of words because we know that they will not hurt or destroy the friendship. That’s what friendship is: You can be yourself.

In many settings where religion is that obstacle or cloak, I think the way we get past that is to take it off. Take it off, because it won’t matter what you say. Focus on what is available to you, be who you are, and when the time is right it may be that we can together talk about a particular belief.

“We have expended so much energy on getting all the words right that we miss the essence and the heart of what it means.”

The only thing I can offer to others I also try to do for myself, and that is to offer an authentic journey. Be yourself. Start there. Encourage others to do the same. But know that being is rarely fully understood through the speaking. We have expended so much energy on getting all the words right that we miss the essence and the heart of what it means.

I come from a tradition that never had a strong creedal background until we became a church and then we needed it. Then the creeds became more important than who we were supposed to be as people. That’s the part I want to peel off. I’d rather be a person first and a believer second, because if I’m a person the other thing follows.
In situations where you may not share the same faith as those you are working with, this expresses itself in how you are with people, how you ask questions, how you encourage them to think, how you encourage them to bring forward what they understand of something, what they worry about, what they're fearful of. These are all parts that are not religious per se. But when you enter that you begin to touch a more holistic component of who we are as human beings.

I have very little trouble focusing on a particular element of who I am to be useful to people. But I also try just to be who I am even in those moments. That, of course, can be challenging because sometimes you get nervous and there are other things that are happening. But I think that this work has so many avenues that are useful to pursue and none of them are exhausted.

At the University of Notre Dame we have a thing called the Peace Accords Matrix. It looks at 36 comprehensive peace agreements and 65 or so themes that have been dealt with over the last 20 years. I can sit with politicians and exclusively look at the questions of how peace agreements were established, what made them fail, what made them work. And never once in that whole conversation does anything remotely close to religion or spirituality emerge.

But there are times that we then go to lunches and those same people start to talk about how difficult it is to be on this negotiation panel or how much pressure they feel or how they worry they won't have what they need. And again, without talking about religion or spirituality, it becomes a spiritual moment.

**Q:** You have mentioned being certain at a certain point, and then questioning your own certainties. Can you talk more about that? How do you continue with the work when you're questioning your own certainties? What keeps you going?

**A:** It's a very good question. One could call this schizophrenia I suppose. Dual personalities. I'll give you several examples. One is in terms of faith, of a particular denomination. In my case, our denomination has a lot of good to it that I greatly appreciate. It also has a bit of an enclave mentality to it; we can very easily create certain boundaries about exclusivity.

One thing I have become less and less certain about is the demands that religion sometimes makes, that you have to follow a particular creedal way that creates the boundary of who's in, who's out, and that determines where you may or may not find truth. But because I'm less certain does not mean I have less faith. This is a deep paradox that I often struggle with.

I'm less certain of — in fact I'm so less certain of it that I'm certain of it — the notion of exclusivity, that there's only one way by which we understand and arrive at truth. It contributes to my own sense of faith because I believe that what I may see or hear from Islamic brothers and sisters, from a Buddhist perspective or a Jewish perspective, etc., helps me understand my own Christian background better.

"I have come to believe that when people arrive at the choice to take up weapons, to choose arms, they feel that they have exhausted all the alternatives that are available to them."

Rather than seeing those perspectives as threatening, that I have to argue or defend my own background, I see them as ways to come to a greater appreciation of what I had not fully understood in my own faith tradition. It is a way to understand truth as an appreciative process rather than a threatening process. I've come to appreciate how big and extraordinary truth really is, and how small a piece that I understand, much less live by. It can be a little daunting.

I'm a deeply convinced pacifist, a nonviolent strategist. I argue that the only good place for a pacifist is in the middle of a lot of violent conflict. Pacifists are of very little good in places where there's no conflict. After a lot of conversations with a lot of people, I have come to believe that when people arrive at the choice to take up weapons, to choose arms, they feel that they have exhausted all the alternatives that are available to them. I have come
to understand and respect in a much deeper way that this is never an easy choice, and that they do it not only with enormous conviction but also with the sense that there is nothing else.

So what I’ve become less certain of is not my belief in pacifism or nonviolence. That has grown, but with a much deeper level of respect for the difficulty people face and the choices they make. In a much earlier phase of my life I would have judged them. There was a kind of righteousness that accompanied it, as in I'm right and you're wrong, a justification that a higher ground had been reached. I’m now less certain of that higher ground.

It’s easy to have a conviction, and that conviction leads to a form of judging. I have very little need to judge. Earlier in my life that would be one of the ways that I formed my opinions — you pick sides of right and wrong, what’s good and bad. That’s a lot more blurry for me now. What I have to rise to in my vocation is to find ways to make sure that we never get to the place where violence is the only remaining alternative. How do we keep pushing that further and further and further away so that we have more and more alternatives available? That’s where I feel obligated. That’s where I feel a sense of call.

I’ve learned to live with a pretty high level of cognitive dissonance, when alternative ideas have to co-inhabit your head at the same time. You have a choice, and one of the choices is to ignore something completely so you can just concentrate on the piece that you like; you try to do away with anything that competes with that. The other alternative is that you learn to be healthy while holding very competing ideas of what may be right or wrong or how things are. I call that a tolerance for ambiguity. I think that a lot of our work is to raise people’s capacity for a tolerance for ambiguity. It’s a big piece of that puzzle.

Q: This task of peacebuilding is so difficult and complex. In a post-conflict setting, there is still underlying resentment and fear, mistrust, even hatred, anger, that haven’t been resolved. There might be a small group of people who really aren’t looking for peace because they profit from the conflict. There is this volatile mixture that’s very fragile and subject to trigger events. How do you deal with those trigger events that can plunge people back into conflict?

A: I’m going to start with something in the book that my daughter and I worked on. A lot of the book deals with language. One of the things that we said was that the word “post-conflict” is a construct that's useful to academics and policymakers, but it doesn’t exist. We would be wiser to find ways to describe more accurately what we were referring to by “post-conflict,” which is that some form of a peace agreement is in place and that the open, escalated armed conflict has begun to descend.

What you describe in your question is the cauldron of conflict continuing, the cauldron of relationships and difficulties that people face. There are a lot of approaches and theories. (When I make these cases it’s probably wise to use a both/and approach generally. Sometimes I can be misunderstood as making a case for only one part of a complex reality. I have to be true to what it is I have both witnessed and feel to be true.)

When we approach this from the standpoint of policy and institution, it relies fairly heavily on a policy-down approach, which is what I’ve referred to in that book and have over the years as a top-down understanding of change. I think there is a very significant role for that. I also have come to believe that those things often don’t address the changes that they are hoping to address.

What is most significantly needed in these settings, especially in local communities, is knowledge and awareness of how people begin to engage actively in their relationships and in reframing and redefining those in the context of historic division. What is it that bolsters the change process? While it’s very important to have policy and institution, the process starts with how people in communities are engaging in this, how they feel that their voices are attended to and how they are involved. This requires a whole range of activities and networks of people that have a capacity to move very constructively at those levels. This is not easy.
Let's take the example of Northern Ireland because it's an intriguing little pocket of the world. Northern Ireland has the distinction that it's fairly small but it's had the largest financial investment per capita for a protracted conflict of anywhere in the world. The Good Friday Agreement dates back to the '90s.

Let's take a small component of the changes since then: policing. This is critical at the level of the community. During the Troubles, the police were something like 85 percent Protestant and a very low percentage Catholic. So it was viewed by the Catholic community, in particular the Republican community — that is the Irish Catholic nationalist community — as very oppressive. They were completely opposed to it; policing to them was armed oppression, like an invasion.

"While it's very important to have policy and institution, the process starts with how people in communities are engaging in this, how they feel that their voices are attended to and how they are involved."

Everybody knew that policing had to change. On the institutional policy side, systematically there was an effort to shift, which was very important. Among other things, they needed to bring the numbers more in line so that the police were more or less equally from both communities. And that's a question of policy, recruitment, preparation.

But the shift that had to happen at the level of the community was that the communities had to envision the police differently. How is this going to happen? It took almost 12 years until the Sinn Fein political party was willing to agree to the changes happening in policing. They're still in a process of getting their numbers aligned. There was a great investment to develop a model of community policing. It's not just a nice policy — "We are for and with the protection of the community" — but that people actually interact with them and see the police not as something to be feared, but as something that is part of their community. Twenty years later, this is still very much underway.

Two years back I went to a meeting. We're sitting at a table and people are talking about the fact that things are changing in Northern Ireland, they're making progress in a variety of ways. But they have not touched the deeper level of genuine reconciliation between the communities that often co-inhabit contiguous spaces, neighborhoods — Loyalist and Republican strongholds in places like Belfast.

I listen for poetry when people talk. I listen for haiku. If somebody says something to me that seems to touch an authentic sense of their truth, I find that they often say it in very few words, not a big long explanation. It's kind of an a-ha moment. Sometimes they make a 15-minute talk, and then all of a sudden at the end there's this one little tiny phrase that just says it all. That's the one I jot down. At a later time I go back and take that phrase and I place it in haiku form and see how close it comes to five-seven-five in syllables. It's my ongoing life experiment. I think when we speak real truth we speak it very close to haiku.

So we're sitting there and this guy has just rambled on about his frustrations. He looks over at me. "Maybe," he says, "this is as good as it will get. Peaceful bigotry."

This is where conflict is generative. It keeps kicking up expressions of that which has emerged over a long history of combinations of fear, bitterness, even hatred, loss, unattended loss. One of the real tragedies of extended periods of conflict is that to survive people have to control what's happening inside of them and even in their collective.

If you look at Northern Ireland and one or two years following the Good Friday Agreement, there was a sharp increase in psychiatric counseling, breakdowns. There were 32 years of people not being in a place where
they could attend to the weight of what was happening. That then becomes emergent. But at the same time you have those who have perpetrated your worst experiences of loss living right next to you.

In the United States, we’ve had such a notion of luxury that our worst enemy images are of people who are a long ways off, that somehow our enemies are out there. Sometimes this gets framed politically as “We’ll take the war there in order that it not be here.” I grew up during the Cold War, and if you go back and watch the black-and-white films from the late ‘50s, early ‘60s, of the incursions of the communists, it’s amazing. But they were nowhere to be found. They were to be feared because they were coming. It wasn’t until I went to Europe that I actually met a communist.

But most of the places where I work, the enemy is never half a world away. It is in the next neighborhood, the next valley, the next group over — or in fact it is cohabitating and you’re guessing all the time, Is this it? That is precisely what I’m talking about, this notion of how important it is to find ways to engage constructively at the level of the quality of relationships that we have with people that we know and meet with that are accessible.

“That’s the part we have difficulty finding ways to do. It’s easier for us to know how to reduce violence than it is to build relationships of justice, of equality, of care in our midst. That’s something that is not easily mandated by policy. What it requires is forms of engagement at multiple levels, but especially engagement where people have actual relationships. We’ve made progress but we’re a long ways to go. This is one of the areas I’m deeply convicted about.

This is one of the principles that I try to encourage people to think about. It’s a principle of accessibility — that is, that you find ways to reach out to a certain level if you think about the points of contact that you have. And that is an element that is among the most difficult but the most needed, to create something that is not just a transition but a transformation — that it starts to engage in a series of change processes that move us from what might be a negative peace to a positive peace.
INTERVIEW: Peacebuilding in Nepal

The following is an edited transcript of an interview with John Paul Lederach, conducted by IPJ Deputy Director Dee Aker and Program Officer Chris Groth on Feb. 15, 2012. Aker and Groth work on the IPJ’s Nepal Peacebuilding Initiative, and Lederach has worked in the country for a decade.

CG: When you first went to Nepal for the mediation project you work on, what were your first impressions?

JPL: I had not had a lot of exposure to south-central Asia. When I first went to Kathmandu it was late 2002. Even in the last eight years or so it’s gotten much more chaotic and crowded. That was one of the very first things that you felt: that the big city was overwhelming, compacted humanity. As you went out into the rural areas, it was extraordinarily unpopulated. It was just unbelievable how different the two were.

In the first number of visits we were attempting to do broader surveys, because the request had come from people who had been informally moving between the palace and the Maoist leadership and the political parties who were more or less in the street at the time. There is a parallel feel that you get from one location to the next when you move in that elite political world, sometimes to a point where you struggle with it because it seems to replicate a certain type of behavior and discourse.

The advantage we had in the earliest visits was that the political party people were not in parliament; they weren’t in power, so they had a lot of time. A few of them were under house arrest by the king. Typically at the political level in other places, you request a meeting and then you wait and you only get a precious few minutes. They’re just overwhelmingly busy with too many meetings. But during that period, these guys were looking for conversation, so there was a part of it that was much more relaxed.

I’ve worked in Nicaragua, one of the poorest countries in our hemisphere, and I’ve worked in parts of Africa, so I’ve been close to poverty. But I think Nepal probably is the poorest country that I’ve had this significant of a connection to. When you get close to people’s real lives, you understand how significant that is, but also how a spirit of generosity seems to prevail that doesn’t always prevail where there is more access.

It’s an interesting question. Those are the first impressions.

CG: One thing that is really interesting in your mediation work in Nepal is the issue of language. You talk about the tendency of outside organizations to use very technical terms that don’t always translate well, especially at the local level, the village level. Can you talk more about that, the importance of language and terminology, and the strategies that you’ve found successful to overcome that challenge?

JPL: This dates back to the very early part of my work and career. My Ph.D. dissertation, for example, was an ethno-linguistic approach to understand how people in local communities in parts of Central America understood conflict. I wanted to understand their everyday language, the ways that they describe things that are happening, the way they describe their notions of what forms of response or remedy are required.

“A lot of meaning is embedded less in the formal definition of something than in the metaphoric structure that people create, images by which they understand things that are happening.”

The language itself is like a window. I’m very keen on metaphor. A lot of meaning is embedded less in the formal definition of something than in the metaphoric structure that people create, images by which they understand things that are happening. In Central America those became formative in much of what I was doing. All of my publications prior to Preparing for Peace were in Spanish or Catalan. I had seven or eight books in Spanish before I had one.
aren’t experienced at all in what it is you’re after. I was particularly struck by how much was being lost. But to get to a place where you could understand how they talk about it or convey it, it required getting colleagues on board with the idea that they should listen to themselves.

The notion is that if we’re listening to ourselves, we’re not listening to expertise. For me, this was out of my own background. I’m very much out of the Paulo Friere school of education, that knowledge comes fully embedded in what’s been gained in an individual and collective context. You don’t have expertise that is disembodied.

“Knowledge comes fully embedded in what’s been gained in an individual and collective context. You don’t have expertise that is disembodied.”

Language for me has always been a big key. In fact, if you look at my books, you’ll see this idea of metaphor. The last one I did with my daughter, we spent almost the entire book trying to explore metaphors of healing that aren’t linear.

When I wrote my first approach to this, I had a title to a book that had a much more formalistic component to it, something like management of conflict. After spending a block of about three years and working through, among other things, the dissertation, it shifted entirely to words that were much more everyday. In Spanish it was Enredos, Pleetos y Problemas, three words that are windows of sorts.

Enredos is a metaphor of a fishing net that gets all tangled up. It’s a very common word for conflict in Latin America, especially Central America. If you’ve ever seen a fisherman untangle a net, when the untangling is finished it remains a holistic set of knots. You’re not untying and separating it all, you’re unraveling it so the relationships can be restored to a balance.

For me, that particular metaphor was very powerful. It had to do with the notion that our concept of interpersonal conflict assumes autonomous decision makers negotiating and being able to decide for themselves. What I found rather consistently is that it’s always embedded in a more holistic understanding of the group or collective or community. The word itself illustrated that. Even in the titles of my books, you can see an evolution of how that began to shift.

When we came to Nepal, there were two components that struck me. The more common strategy for training is a professional tier of Nepali trainers and you hire them to help you. They are often cultural translators as well as actual translators, but they’re called trainers. If I came up with a package on how to start an internet facility, I would hire the same guy if I had come with a package on how to do good listening. That person would take the concepts and try to place them in the cultural context.

What begins to come through is that they’re trying to be true to the terminology they’ve heard and they’re trying to convey it well. But they aren’t experienced at all in what it is you’re after. I was particularly struck by how much was being lost. But to get to a place where you could understand how they talk about it or convey it, it required getting colleagues on board with the idea that they should listen to themselves.

The notion is that if we’re listening to ourselves, we’re not listening to expertise. For me, this was out of my own background. I’m very much out of the Paulo Friere school of education, that knowledge comes fully embedded in what’s been gained in an individual and collective context. You don’t have expertise that is disembodied.

“Knowledge comes fully embedded in what’s been gained in an individual and collective context. You don’t have expertise that is disembodied.”

Language for me has always been a big key. In fact, if you look at my books, you’ll see this idea of metaphor. The last one I did with my daughter, we spent almost the entire book trying to explore metaphors of healing that aren’t linear.

CG: As I read more about the work you’ve done in Nepal, if you look just at the statistics there’s this amazing success rate. Out of all the disputes that were brought to mediation, 86 percent have been settled successfully. If you look at the data alone, it’s clear the program has been quite successful. But has the program gone beyond just settling disputes? What has been the impact on a wider community level?

JPL: In this action research process, that was one of the main things that we set out to figure out. For the purposes of reporting for donors, you have to show how many cases, how many agreements. Everyone would say that it was having a big impact, but no one quite knew how to show or get at that. The conflict
transformation notion or framework — looking at change processes and what kinds of changes are happening — is a useful one.

Once we had a group that was very close to what was happening on the ground, they were able to look for things that they hadn’t thought to look for before in a more structured way. For example, they could describe the kinds of personal changes that mediators and people who were disputants say they’ve come through, and look for ways in which that is evident. What is the evidence that some of that is happening? Have relationships changed?

For me, it was so evident the very first time I saw it. The very first mediation I saw, just outside of Chitwan, the three-person panel of mediators was two men and one woman. The man was the former chief of police of that ward. He came from more of a high caste background. The woman was Dalit. So I’m thinking, this is unbelievable that you can be here sitting together, mediating together a discussion between, in that particular case, those with different ethnic backgrounds.

What was interesting is that the woman participated as an equal: She had an equal amount of responsibility, she talked an equal amount with the two men who were there. There have to be ways that you can show this is having a significant impact on relational differences. They began to really move through that more carefully.

The structural change was a little more complicated but quite interesting. The mediation program locally, very much embedded at the ward level, began to have relationships with various kinds of district officers and local leadership. There was a whole set of things that were beginning to happen across institutions.

One of the keys was that it was helpful to have some specificity of types of changes, but then have people who were close and could begin to make the case for how they actually saw it happening and then bring back what they were doing. We set them out with journals and asked them to observe cases on a regular basis. They always had to observe cases, but they never observed it with research in mind.

So I said, for example, “I really want you to draw me pictures. I want to see pictures of where the mediators live and where the disputants live.” They would come back with a drawing of a street and sometimes the mediators would be two houses down. Not all the time, but you could really get a sense that these were people who had relationships that were embedded in that community.

DA: You mentioned the woman in Nepal. When you come home, how do you explain the role women are playing and the potential for them playing even greater roles?

JPL: Nepal is extraordinarily instructive. The main commitment that I have is with the McConnell Foundation, in Redding in Northern California. Over the years we’ve had three initiatives, and one is the mediation one. The second one is around communities handling natural resource conflicts over forest, land and water. We’re working with the forest user groups and the water user groups, and the Kamaiya who are ex-bond laborers and mostly landless.

The FECOFUN [Federation of Community Forestry Users], which is an extraordinary phenomenon in itself, initiated a commitment to always having a group that’s half men and half women. All the way up through their structure, they have to replicate half men, half women. This was the only large-scale network or organization that we found in Nepal that had that extensive of a commitment to shared leadership. It’s extraordinary.

The third area that we work with is a women’s initiative. It started with people we had worked in Nepal with from day one who said that they wanted to focus on engaging and promoting the participation of women in the public sphere, from local to national — but with a primary focus on rural women who often have less direct participation. They are often recipients of things, but less directly engaged in a range of activities.
In particular districts, they started to identify women who were seen as local leaders, but who were respected as local leaders against the odds. That is, they came from a low caste position, had lost their husbands or had HIV and were struggling with the ramifications of that. Their whole approach was that those 12 to 18 women identified would choose a younger woman from their community and they would come to a first set of conversations. The only thing that would really happen in those conversations was that the older women would tell their life stories, and for the younger women, that was often the first time any of them had heard those stories.

The big challenge they discovered — and this comes directly to the question — was that nobody knew what a life story was. First it was, What is it? And then it was, You mean I have one? You mean somebody wants to listen to something I have to say? But once they caught on to the idea, it was like you couldn’t stop it. This is one of the most significant aspects of empowerment, that it is about gaining a sense of voice.

“The most significant aspects of empowerment, that it is about gaining a sense of voice.”

They published a book and are probably going to do a second one because they’ve done it in a lot of locations. That kind of thing I find so compelling and it’s easy to convey. If you add to it a bit of the broader context: There was a war period where there were a lot of people who lost family members, and in particular a lot of women who lost men. It has created in some districts a significant number of single women (they prefer that term to widows), some of whom lost their husbands due to army action, and some of whom lost their husbands due to Maoist action. Those are the women who are coming together to tell their life story.

If you add a second piece: a lot of displacement happened. Young men were pulled out of villages, men often left, some of them leaving the country for economic reasons. In a lot of these areas in the aftermath of the war period, what was left was women who had to figure out how to survive. So that’s where the focus is. The stories themselves are just absolutely compelling. I find they often resonate in ways that you might otherwise struggle to convey if you were making an argument from the standpoint of simply a rights-based approach. This is rising up much more organically in Nepal.

DA: The first time I worked in rural Nepal was in Gorkha District in 2003, and women were working together, Maoists and non-Maoists, to form savings groups. Women were already crossing those lines to save their livelihoods.

JPL: One of the things this group is involved in now is to identify the 10 most effective women’s co-ops and pull those groups together to ask, what did you do? How did you do it? What’s the key? They’re very different kinds of co-ops obviously, but the idea is how to create platforms that can help others learn.

CG: There’s a tendency for mediators to offer advice immediately on a problem. How have you been able to get mediators to suspend their own judgment and resist the temptation to jump in and give a solution, and instead have a solution come from the disputants?

JPL: This has two distinct layers. I also work in support of the national transition to peace, which is a high-level mediation. The higher you go the more people want you to give them very immediate and concrete expertise and advice, even though you know that once you say it they’re going to reject it. You almost can’t escape from the idea they have that if you don’t have something to offer, why are you even sitting here? It’s an interesting thing to find a way to bring in advice, but create it in a way that it circles so that it isn’t like a one-way street.
That was not an equal kind of capacity that everyone had in hand. If they were giving advice it would be, “Calm down,” “Don’t lose your family” — that would often be to the woman. But they wouldn’t always have the same kind of level of saying that something is radically wrong here with the whole structure.

When they were using a lot of words that they tried to convey in English as neutrality, the main thing that they learned to do was not to give immediate solutions. The discipline that they had learned was to open up more and give the responsibility to the people to give that. They were, if you will, suspending judgment for longer than they would have normally. I did not see that as neutrality; I saw that as a different kind of a discipline. But it was one that the program had been able to inculcate.

CG: Almost 10 years after you started work in Nepal, what are some of the biggest changes you’ve seen across the country, especially at the local level?

JPL: There’s a big debate right now in Nepal about the form of state restructuring, which is a form of federalism or local to national power that may be emergent. But because of who I work with, I have a keen sense that the long-standing traditions of paternalism — that is, you survive by knowing who it is who takes care of you — are still very strongly in place. There’s a much greater sense that this is going to devolve into more localized power. What one hopes is that that doesn’t devolve into a replication of the old power ways locally: more power comes from the national government to the local, but at the local level it’s still older men who control a lot of things.

I think there are a lot of bright spots emerging. One certainly is the constituent assembly, even though people claim it hasn’t been effective. It is far more extraordinary than anybody actually gives it credit for. People judge it by its inability to deliver the constitution so far, but I think that has to do with the difficulties of the political power struggles among the formal parties, the top half dozen.
This body for the first time looked more like Nepal. There were a lot more women, there were a lot more ethnic groups. For me, that’s a glass ball of what’s coming up. Whether or how that will be replicated at multiple levels and into later parliaments and the post-constitution period, those are big questions. But I think people are getting a taste for this.

I think there’s going to be an increasing rise in people saying, “Let’s not go back. We’re not going to go back to the old ways of doing it.” The groups that I work with are bottom-up models of organization. They had never contemplated as fully as we’re doing now the notion that that can translate into how we respond to conflict, how we deal with our resources and how we have something to say to other levels of the society. That is clearly a good sign.

The political world is an incredibly interesting one. It’s struggling a lot as you know. There is certainly a big chunk of this that is ideological. Nobody can deny that there are some significant ideological differences about what Nepal should look like. Those generally divide in three directions. One is based on an elite that has more connection but that is given to democracy; this would be a centrist democracy view. They’re very fearful of revolutionary communism and a takeover of the state.

There’s a very strong sector within the Maoist movement that ideologically is looking for a people’s revolution. They’d like the constitution to be a people’s constitution, and that means significantly shifting it to more of a socialist communist model. That is contested within the Maoists, but they are in a significant discussion about what the nature of revolution is and how far it can go.

The third one is about identity. The Madhesi and other ethnic groups are starting to assert themselves. There’s a discourse about historic exclusion, but there’s also a discourse about identity and respect for diverse identity. I think that pushback will be stronger in the years ahead. Whereas the war period was divided essentially between two visions, this third one may prove to be more complex and in some ways deeper and stronger. It will be interesting to see what happens. I have a lot of hope.

Occasionally I say this to people who want immediate results: I think that Nepal is in something equivalent to a 1,000-year shift, not a 10-year one. When you look at the constituent assembly and how the constitution was supposed to be done in one year or two years, you’re looking through a different frame of reference. What is emergent in this is something much longer and deeper: the questions of the monarchy, the questions of caste, questions of elite, questions of historic forms of this paternalistic model of power. Even the nature of the issues in constitution-writing takes time and goes much deeper: Who are we? How will we agree to live together in this country — from regions that have very little access, very little participation, to women’s engagement, etc.?

“I think that Nepal is in something equivalent to a 1,000-year shift, not a 10-year one.”

I tend to be very hopeful, but my hope is the horizon of decades. When they wrote the comprehensive peace agreement they had an enormous sense that things were going to come together and they had a lot of trust. They were very optimistic about their timeframes, which they remain optimistic about. You talk to any of them and they say, “No, we’re so close. Two months we’ll have this done.” And it’s four years later and it’s still “Two months!” It’s the ever-permanent two months.

DA: When you’re getting people to come together to engage in a peace process, what has brought you closest to a sense of being connected at a deep level to the people who were the most obstinate, difficult or dangerous?
JPL: Probably the hardest one was Somalia. Very early on after Siad Barre left the country, we were trying to create the potential for a meeting of the key elders and heads of the sub-clan groups and militias. They are often called warlords, though they don’t like that. There were times when everyone was kind of in a blame-game — that it wasn’t our responsibility that outside the door 1.5 million people were starving, that it was those other guys who were responsible.

There were times when I personally felt close to a sense of monumental evil in regard not to the individual person, but to a system that had somehow created this structure of people. They couldn’t get over a fight about who would get to be next president in order to safeguard what was happening to their wider population.

“*There were times when I personally felt close to a sense of monumental evil in regard not to the individual person, but to a system that had somehow created this structure of people.*"

That said, the more you actually sat with them and talked with them, had meals with them, you began to capture a sense of their humanity, the difficulties that they faced. You saw a little bit behind the demands that they have, that there’s often a deep sense of insecurity that comes across as a nobody-messes-with-me strength.

The part that I found particularly daunting, at least at one point, was that it wasn’t hard to see yourself in them — that we all long for acknowledgment and recognition and other things that they were seeking. I think that was probably the hardest.

DA: I heard you say earlier today that unhappy people don’t handle conflicts well. I think that is a truism that nobody really discusses.

JPL: I’ve always attributed to Carl Rogers the phrase, “What is most universal is most personal.” I found that I had paid very little attention to what brings me joy. I separated that out completely from all the seriousness of peacemaking — because peacemaking is so serious. You can easily lose sight of that. When I’m working with students I see that when they find forms of deep reflection that are playful and joyful, it simultaneously does two things: It improves the level of actual reflection and insight, but also they carry those things with them. They are filling their wells rather than emptying them. I think when we’re so serious we empty our wells. At some point they just run dry. And then we become very dry people who are doing very important things. We convince people how important it is, but it’s a desert inside.
I also want to point out how important the work of these two thought leaders in our field has been for our efforts here at the IPJ. Program Officer Zahra Ismail just returned from Kenya, where we’re training a community network to prevent electoral violence in the upcoming elections. In December, Deputy Director Dee Aker led a delegation of six Asian Women PeaceMakers to Cambodia, where they engaged peacebuilders ranging from local communities to political leaders. And in a few weeks, I will travel to Guatemala, where we’re working with local, predominantly Mayan communities to build justice from the ground up.

In all of these initiatives, we try to employ the insights and learning of our two guests by, among other things, listening carefully to our local partners and participants, shaping programs around their needs and their leadership, reflecting on our work as we are doing it and changing it, and working with multiple levels of society and institutions to ensure we have sustainable impact.

Mary Anderson, author of *Do No Harm: How Aid Can Support Peace — or War*, will be speaking here in this theater next week. Her talk is titled “The Listening Project: How Recipients Judge International Assistance,” and she will be reviewing a survey of 21 countries and 8,000 people who have told her about the impact of international assistance. I’ll now ask her to come to the stage to introduce her friend and fellow peacemaker.
Thank you, Milburn. It’s a great privilege and pleasure to introduce someone you’ve known for a while, and for whom you have the highest regard. That’s my job tonight and I’m delighted to have it. In thinking about how to introduce John Paul Lederach, I realized that he has earned all the appropriate degrees — he has his doctorate in sociology from the University of Colorado. He has a good list of publications, and I could read out loud all 16 titles of the books that he’s either edited or written. He has an impressive track record of working around the world in 25 countries quite seriously, and a number of others on mediation training and negotiation issues. And he has good titles: He’s the professor of international peacebuilding at the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies at Notre Dame, and he’s a distinguished scholar at Eastern Mennonite University.

But there are lots of people who have credentials like this who I wouldn’t walk across the street to listen to, so why should you be here tonight to listen to John Paul Lederach? I have three reasons that I want to be here, and I think you would share them.

The first reason is that John Paul’s work is grounded. He really goes places. He’s been there and he’s done it. He’s listened and he’s paid attention and he’s engaged. He knows what he’s talking about because he’s been there.

The second reason is because he’s thoughtful. He doesn’t just go back to ideas, but he creates avenues of analysis and thinking that actually are useful to other people in other places. So, he learns in this grounded way and then he’s thoughtful about it and takes it elsewhere.

“And what’s really inspiring about John Paul is that he helps us remember what’s essential and then he makes it seem possible.”

And then the third reason is because he’s inspiring. He’s a man of faith and that’s inspiring, and he speaks in inspiring terms and tells inspiring stories, but what’s really inspiring about John Paul is that he helps us remember what’s essential and then he makes it seem possible. And those are really interesting facets in today’s world. Someone sent me a quotation from Mohandas Gandhi last week, and it struck exactly right for ending this introduction. Mohandas Gandhi said, “The future depends on what we do in the present.”

John Paul Lederach lives in the present, creating the future that all of us will benefit from. He’s a delight to listen to. I look forward to listening to John Paul Lederach.
Thank you, Mary. Those were very kind words. And thank you to all of you here from San Diego, the university and the twin sister Kroc Institute. I’m happy to be here finally after many years. It’s been a very warm welcome.

I want to start this conversation this evening by sharing a couple of conversations. Every conversation is always embedded in a relationship, every relationship is embedded in a context, and every context is embedded in a long and evolving history. If I started by telling you the history and then the context and then the relationship and then the conversation, I wouldn’t get past my first page. So this evening, I’m going to start with three conversations that are a little window into the life of a peacebuilder. And as I finish each of these, I would like to take just a few seconds to let them soak, to have you take a little pause and ask yourself the question: If you were in my shoes, in that conversation at that moment, what might you say?

September 1987: “Anything else?” The minister was ending our meeting. “Yes,” I heard myself saying, “one more thing.” I had a message and a request I had carried from Costa Rica to Nicaragua. Unwritten, the words were plastered on the soul of a painful conversation. Only days before, one of the most significant though quite controversial revolutionaries, a defector from the Sandinista movement, had spent an evening in our home. He had heard the offers of amnesty announced by the government. Exiles who wished to return to Nicaragua, no matter their offense or their status, would be accepted back without fear of reprisal, legal or military, as long as they put down their weapons.
“Time has come to go home,” he had said. “But I have doubts they will agree. There are,” and here he paused for a moment, “mistakes, you know. No wounds are worse than those received in the house of a friend. Can you ask him?”

Now standing before the powerful head of the ministry of the interior, I heard myself describe the conversation, the person and the request. “Comandante, he wants to come home. But he needs some assurance. Would you have something to tell him?” Silence seemed to last longer than I could remember experiencing in this office that had become a space for negotiation and talking peace.

“Yes,” the comandante finally responded. “You tell that son of a bitch that he will rot in the worst of all hells: the hell of nobody remembers you.”

January 9, 1993: In the distance, we could hear the rumbling din of a crowd as we left the airport and traveled in the back of a pick-up truck toward the outskirts of Hargeisa, Somaliland. As we passed the edge of town, at times the noise seemed to grow, shouts and screams sounding more like a mob than a meeting. We had few details. We had just arrived. We only knew it was dangerous. Fighting was about to break out. Our hosts were visibly shaken; plans for the afternoon had changed. They spoke in low voices of some troubles with local imams.

By evening, the specifics emerged. Five women had been accused of adultery. No men were apparently caught in the act. On the heels of a brutal dictatorship and disintegrating political chaos, clan-based violence and warfare had given rise to sporadic violence and a much more fundamentalist expression of Islam that had promised restoration in that part of Somalia.

Our plane had touched down at the height of an impromptu court making their way to the stoning grounds. High-pitched, righteous fever carried the day. The women were buried to their necks, their heads barely above ground. Crying for mercy, they begged to be heard. They cried that they were not guilty. A young boy threw the first stone, and then clouds of rocks flew until the cries ended.

Late that evening, a handful of women arrived at our host’s house. It was risky to even talk with foreigners, but they needed a sense of assurance, a connection to the outside. They retold the story in vivid detail, having watched it from the edge of the crowd. Tears streamed down their faces. Fear reverberated in their shaking bodies. They pleaded for help.

April 24, 1995: “Before you start, I have just one question.” He looked around the room and then back to focus on us, his visitors. “Why do you think violence doesn’t work?” The H-block commander took a seat across from us in a chair. We sat, crunched on the underside of a bunk bed, legs dangling just above me on my right, in a sparse room made for a couple of lifers. We had 15 pairs of eyes watching our every move. It was my first visit to the Maze Prison in Northern Ireland. Three mediators and a room full of loyalist paramilitaries. This created an unusual break in their day, but it made for an intense atmosphere.

I felt myself wheeze in a quick breath. We had barely arrived in the room, had barely spoken our names, and then that question. I had the urge to turn to Brenden or Joe and laughingly say, “Why don’t you guys take this one?” when the commander’s hand rose to draw a silence and attention back to him. He was not finished.
“And before you answer, I have a story,” he went on. “A few months back we had some troubles with the prison superintendent here. He didn’t like some things we said and did. So one fine day he decided that this year we would not receive our annual family Easter baskets. We found this totally unacceptable. We protested. We asked in writing for a change of policy. We asked for a meeting. We asked for negotiations. But nothing would change his mind. So we bid our time and waited. Just prior to Easter, an opportunity presented itself. We grabbed a few of the guards when they opened the H-block gate. We force jammed the gate shut. We dragged them back to the end of this corridor. We took them into the showers. We stripped them naked and we beat them to a pulp and threw them back out through the door. The whole place got shut down for a while, but you know what? Our Easter baskets are back.”

He paused, story finished, and looked me square in the eyes. “Now, tell me why you think violence doesn’t work.”

If you found yourself flipping between ideas and responses or drawing a complete blank about what you might have said, don’t worry. In a book I have started, I just compiled about a dozen or 15 of these stories in the opening chapter titled “Speechless Memoirs.” For me, these vignettes were intensely lived dilemmas. They stick with me like a scene from a movie that you’ve seen too many times, but every time it comes up you can’t help but watch once again. They’ve embedded themselves in my consciousness because they stopped me short. They constitute what I call the “Oh my God moment.”

In spite of finding some words to externalize in the moment itself, the experience of these conversations left me profoundly speechless. Mute. “Oh my God moments” create a vivid reminder that our lives unfold with multiple layers of meaning. At one level, we are carrying out a conversation focused on some content or process or problem that seems immediately apparent and urgent. And at other levels, we suddenly realize that there are other layers of meaning unfolding below and beyond this visible surface.

This evening I would like to explore this challenge of the below and the beyond. Before I go there, however, I need to make a few introductory comments about some key words in the title of this talk — “Compassionate Presence: Faith-based Peacebuilding in the Face of Violence.” I actually am not sure what I was thinking when I gave this title. I am in the very early process of trying to write a book about these topics, and I’m still in the exploration phase, which means I’m sorting out my own confusion. So tonight is basically an invitation for you to join my confusion. I can’t accomplish everything that this title suggests in the minutes that we have together, so I will only begin by giving you a few thoughts on it, some key words, starting in inverse order. In the latter part of our time, I want to come to this first part of the title, Compassionate Presence.

“At one level, we are carrying out a conversation focused on some content or process or problem that seems immediately apparent and urgent. And at other levels, we suddenly realize that there are other layers of meaning unfolding below and beyond this visible surface.”

Violence

Over the past 30 years, I have witnessed and walked in and through some rather tough and bitter conflicts. You may have noticed in the conversations or vignettes that I just shared that this was the case. I guess what I wanted to say with this phrase “in the face of violence” is that I have been in close proximity to, and with people who have suffered from and have participated in, a good bit of violence.
In the recent book that my daughter and I worked on together, we began to explore the impact of deep violation, particularly on people from local communities who have to come through it often in waves or cycles. We started noticing how, in very different kinds of places, certain phrases or words kept jumping up when people spoke of the hard journey of healing from what they were experiencing and continue to experience. Phrases like: “I have no voice.” “I have no sense of home.” “I felt so lost.” “I struggle to know who I even am.” “I'm just trying to feel like a person again.”

We noted these metaphoric layers and started noticing other people’s language and how it had parallels. We noticed it with, for example, internally displaced persons (IDPs). If you work in the international community, you know this means people who are displaced by violence. If they leave the country, they become refugees. If they stay within their home country, they become IDPs. When we were talking with these people, they conveyed a deep sensation of being internally displaced — a sense that “I have lost my root, my home, my meaning.”

- Violence numbs. The search to heal is the search to feel again.
- Violence uproots and removes voice. The search to heal is the search to belong again, to be in touch with the sense of personhood, to be an author not a victim.
- Violence damages the essence of humanity. The search to heal is the search to find a way through brokenness, to feel safe and part of a community of care.
- Violence destroys the capacity to feel and see beauty. The search to heal is the search to somehow recapture awe, wonder and hope.
- Violence lives well beyond the statistics that count the number dead.

Thoughts on Faith

Peter Berger has suggested that we live in a furiously religious world. We do. Religion and faith have been expressed in ways that bring forward the very best of shared humanity, and have contributed to, and at times justified, the very worst of violence. In many of the settings where I have worked, religious identity and notions of spiritual truth are contested. The contesting creates and drives fear, projection, protectionism and exclusivity, and quite often justifies violence.

A prevalent fear is this: If your version of the truth prevails, mine will die. A lot of talk happens in these settings, but not much listening. More often than
not, a sense of in-group security is created by constructing a clear image of 
an enemy who opposes and wishes to destroy our truth. We know who they 
are by projecting a clear sense of who we are not and who it is that wishes 
us harm. The devil is in the details, and here is the main detail: The devil is 
in their camp, not ours.

“You could say that in reference to faith, 
I am less certain of the certainties I once bad … For me, 
faith is not about quantity and certainty. 
It’s about essence.”

In this world of holy justification and dangerous devils, some people despair 
of faith and disparage religion. I must confess that I have many more questions 
now than when I first started this work. You could say that in reference to 
faith, I am less certain of the certainties I once had, though I must also say 
that living in the face of violence alongside people of extraordinary courage 
has deepened my faith. I don’t see the fact that I have less certainty to mean 
that I have less faith. For me, faith is not about quantity and certainty. It’s 
about essence. If you know my writing, it’s about the haiku. I think Jesus 
called it a mustard seed. So here is my mustard seed, a few guideposts I have 
found meaningful for a person of faith engaged in peacebuilding:

• Offer what you hope to receive from others — honest transparency. 
  This mostly means be yourself.

• Be open, be curious. Know that truth unfolds endlessly. Prepare to peer 
  into your own deepest understanding of truth by way of windows 
  offered in the lives, understandings and experiences of others — even 
  those who believe very differently than you. Sometimes those are the 
  greatest windows into our own understanding.

• Deep truth sharing and searching of the honest kind that I’m 
  referring to require trust. Trust comes with friendship and time. 
  This is particularly true in settings where friendship and truth 
  emerge across violent religious divides, so find a friend if you’re 
  interested in looking for truth. And make sure it’s not one who 
  thinks just like you.

• Share faith when asked, and listen to the other as if God is speaking to 
  you. Saint Francis of Assisi offered a bit of advice to the faithful 
  peacebuilder. It was pretty simple: Speak always to the love of God; 
  use words if you must.

**Compassionate Presence**

I am currently in a writing process, a book I hope, on this topic. For me it has 
a deeper personal side that I suppose has been nudged by the inquisitiveness 
of a practitioner, scholar and teacher. But right now it is in wild gestation — 
rambling ideas that are seeking some coherence.

On the personal side, these things became more open and significant during 
and after a near-death experience, a car wreck that I barely survived in the 
Basque country, with badly crushed rib cages on both sides. The experience 
literally took my breath away completely, and it stopped me dead in my 
tracks: hospitalization, months of near complete dependence on others, and 
then the slow winding and unwinding process of healing. During this time, 
I became aware as never before of my own fragile and precious humanity. I 
experienced moments of compassion, love and care in how people around 
me held and provided for me, from a night nurse who went the extra mile 
when I couldn’t move to my wife Wendy and her unending patience and 
encouragement through the recovery.

Some days I dipped so low I lost sight of everything. Minutes felt like 
years. I experienced for the first time in my life a feeling of overwhelming 
powerlessness. There was nothing I could do and certainly nothing I could
control. I felt things I could not express. Words failed me. I had fallen into the world of the unspeakable. This precipitated in my life a period of very deep questions. It has been nearly 15 years since then, and these questions have not gone away. They are questions without answers, about life, about vocation, about my place in the world.

“Below and beyond our doing, below and beyond our responding, what quality of presence do we embody that creates the ripple of the sacred sensing of mutual humanity?”

What I experienced in those years also sparked a curiosity about care, compassion and presence. Compassion arrived by way of people who held their hearts in their hands — angels of sorts, who in moments of urgent need noticed and then reached out to help me. They responded to something I needed and that I could not provide for myself.

At the same time, deeper than the act of the doing, I experienced a connection embedded in the somewhere and the somehow of who they were as people. I still have very few words to express this. The best I can offer is this: I sensed their presence. I sensed them sensing my humanity and holding it with care. This is something that I experienced as deeply sacred. It went below and beyond words to express. I kept saying, “I have noticed angels all around me for the first time in my life.”

When I returned to the writing, teaching and practice of peacebuilding, I carried this deeper inquiry with me. Below and beyond our doing, below and beyond our responding, what quality of presence do we embody that creates the ripple of the sacred sensing of mutual humanity? I refer to this, and am working on the notion, that it is below what we see on the surface and it is beyond and envelopes something that holds it all.

This is not particularly new in our field, as I’ve come to discover. One of my mentors Adam Curle, a Quaker peacebuilder from the U.K., talked about this as the public and the private side of peacemaking. Public, he said, is what we do. Private is who we are. And he said they are intertwined without end.

Rabbi Edwin Friedman, in his more provocative fashion, put it this way. He said too many of our leaders have failed what he called the “I have a dream test,” and instead get wrapped up into the individual and collective anxieties that focus on blame and besting. His final book, A Failure of Nerve, proposes that leaders, and here I cite him, “focused first on their own integrity and on the nature of their own presence, rather than focusing on techniques for manipulating or motivating others.”

It may help to visualize this below and beyond, or to hear it in poetry. Here is a painting from Jason Tako, a painter from the northeast United States, titled “Stone Bridge in Autumn.” I think you get the sense of this stone bridge crossing a river, but I have found this to be a very intriguing image of peacebuilding presence. The arching physical bridge stretches to reach and hold two shores in relationship; this is what you see above. The reflection moving and shimmering in the water completes nearly a full circle with the bridge; this is what Parker Palmer calls the hidden wholeness.

Let me try the same from the angle of poetry and go to Northern Ireland and Seamus Heaney, whose famous lines from “The Cure at Troy” appeal to this similar kind of imagination:

So hope for a great sea change
On the far side of revenge.
Believe that a further shore is reachable from here.
Believe in miracles and cures and healing wells.
Much of our work in peacebuilding focuses on how to rebuild this bridge that holds the further shore together with the near shore. I have found in my own working life that we have not attended as much to this hidden wholeness. How do we incite this thing that Friedman calls the nature of our presence? I have been trying to explore this, and I do it primarily through a couple of things — for lack of a better term, I’m using the word “arts” — that I think form the core elements that may contribute to compassion and a quality of presence. Let me share three of these this evening with a few reflections on each.

**Awareness: The art of noticing**

The first one I’d like to share is the art of noticing, or what we might call awareness. I don’t think compassion begins with the sensation of feeling the suffering, which I’ll come to in a minute. I think compassion begins when we notice what we could perhaps call the humanity of the other — when we see a fellow human being. I think this has something to do with actually seeing. I think it has something deeply to do with respect.

I’m going to give you a small Latin lesson tonight on several words. Here’s my first one. I love etymology and I love figuring out where words came from. The word respect is built in Latin from *re*, which is “over again” or “repeat,” and *specere*, which is “to see.” So respect means that you look once and then you turn and look again. And in the looking again you see something that you had not noticed initially.

To look again — *respecere* — opens a space of awareness. Our Buddhist colleagues would likely refer to this as mindfulness. I have been working at this in my training and education efforts, and I have devised a series of little exercises that require people to do things that we don’t do much. They require us to take the time to actually sit and notice what’s around us. The artist Frederick Franck called this the zen of seeing. He approached it through the angle, which was essentially his view, that drawing was a form of meditation. I have done it more through poetry, so let me give you two examples.

In my classes, I’ve been taking people out of the classroom and onto the sidewalks of our campus. I got perplexed about this when we first were starting the program at Eastern Mennonite University, about 18 or 20 years ago. To be approved by the recommending boards that approve master’s degrees, we had to receive a certification. To receive our certification, people came out and looked carefully at whether we were worthy of such a thing, and one of their questions was, “How many seat hours do you have for each class that you teach?”

“I think compassion begins when we notice what we could perhaps call the humanity of the other — when we see a fellow human being.”

After they left, this bothered me very significantly for a very long time because I had to wonder: Who if we listed them were the five greatest teachers in the whole history of humanity? They might be the Greeks, they might be Jesus, Buddha, Muhammad — you have a whole range of them. And I guarantee that if you look carefully at how they taught, they taught by walking. They walked with people, and as they walked they talked. As they walked and talked they noticed, and as they noticed they took account. And as they saw they began to learn. This was not seat hours. There’s no scientific proof that you learn better seated than you do walking.

I’ve become a very firm believer in this walking notion, so I actually take my classes on walks. Sometimes we walk single-file. We look very funny, especially on the campus of the University of Notre Dame, which is a very sophisticated research campus. I tell all the students when we go out, “You have two disciplines. The first is I’m going to ask you to pay attention to just one of your senses for the next hour. And the other is I want you to ignore everybody looking at you.” Neither of these is easy to do. We walk single-file out, we walk single-file back, and then for about 15 minutes, without lifting
pen from paper, they try to describe everything that, as an example, they just felt cross their cheek. Or everything that they heard. How little notice we take of the beauty and that which surrounds us.

I do this with groups too, for example in Colombia, who have experienced enormous trauma. We go out of the training room, and I will say, “For 15 minutes, I would like everyone to sit somewhere in this yard and pick only one thing to look at. And respecere.” I explain. “Look once, then turn and look again. And then for five minutes, without stopping, write what it is that you saw.” Why? Because we don’t have much of a practice of noticing. We’ve lost an ability to see and be in touch in a deep way. We simultaneously have never been in a world that is better at providing images and observing things, while at the same time may never have been worse at truly noticing.

“I think this art of noticing requires the practice of respect that opens the heart and presents the mind the possibility of bringing a fullness of presence to the moment we’re in. That is, I think, the starting point of compassion.”

The front end of compassion I think starts with the noticing. I’ve landed on another word that I work with this. It’s poiesis. You may have noticed my interest in poetry. Poiesis is the Greek word for poetry, and for me a huge revelation was to find that this Greek word actually appeared in the New Testament. It appears in the phrase “Blessed are the peacemakers,” and it’s in the “maker” portion of that phrase that it is located. Poiesis means in Greek “to craft artistically,” “to work,” “to do.” So a more proper translation of that text might have been, “Blessed are those who poetically craft peace.”

Now this act of poiesis is always an act of creation, and I think there’s something that links noticing and creativity. It’s a thing that’s not always easily developed, but it has some interesting roots. For example, what was Saint Benedict’s first guidepost to his followers? To learn to listen with the ear of the heart.

I was recently in Amsterdam at the Van Gogh Museum, and I had strolled through it many times but had never noticed this one little bit. If you have seen Van Gogh, you know Van Gogh painted with the ear of the heart. When he painted a cypress tree it was as if it was alive and exploding. It was like he had somehow tapped life itself in the way it came out. Of course we know from earlier and recent books, the guy was a quasi-kook, and there’s a lot of debate about whether art takes you to the edge of sanity. This is a good question for us to ask. So I will follow in the footsteps of those who have gone before me and said sanity is what destroys. Sanity is not to be in touch with what lives. And to notice that is maybe the greatest gift that we have to develop.

So what was this little thing in the Van Gogh Museum? They pulled out a phrase from a letter that he had written to his sister Wil, a very short little phrase that said, “I am always obliged to go and gaze at a blade of grass, a pine tree, an ear of wheat, to calm myself.” I think this art of noticing requires the practice of respect that opens the heart and presents the mind the possibility of bringing a fullness of presence to the moment we’re in. That is, I think, the starting point of compassion.

**Attunement: The art of staying in touch**

The second is attunement: the art of staying in touch. I’ve been reading books about compassion, and one of the things that shocked me was to find how few books about compassion have been written in our field of peacebuilding. So I’m trying to figure out why we haven’t done that. But a lot of those who do write from different traditions often emphasize that compassion is about feeling
or being in touch with the suffering of another person. This feeling moves us to action. But these feelings can be a tricky thing.

We may find it useful to go to the notion that Clifford Geertz once used for describing ethnography and the work of an anthropologist: that we need not a thin description, but a thick description. So maybe it would be useful to talk about thin feeling and thick feeling, because many of the authors warn against thin feeling. They don't use that term, that's mine. What they warn against is that feelings can move quickly and be very superficial, and that when we feel the tug at the heart of a dilemma of another, we may experience some form of pity or sympathy or even empathy. But this may have a kind of fleeting, transient element to it, and in our action we're trying to relieve our own sense of the difficulty of experiencing that, which may be a way that we release guilt, a way that we release an intense sense that it has touched a suffering in us. But it may not be for truly being with the suffering of another. And that, of course, is the beginning and the root of this word.

Compassion in Latin is with "pati" — with suffering. That "pati," by the way, is a similar word to the one that forms the word patience. So we might suggest that compassion could add a little dose of saying it stays with suffering. Not physically perhaps, but it increases an ability to live with this notion that we haven't just seen the suffering and want to quickly get past it, but that we hold a space in which we are with that person.

A first impulse quite often, and it may be a good one, is that we seek some kind of a response to the suffering. We want to fix it. But this may not be thick compassion. It may in fact alleviate our need to get past the suffering that we feel in the moment.

The interesting root of the notions of compassion that we find in the Greek and the Hebrew languages locate compassion in a different part of the body. It's not about a head level. In Greek it's about the entrails, the guts. You feel in your guts. In Hebrew compassion is located in the womb. I think thick compassion has something to do with this gut level, and in some instances staying with an uncomfortable sensation. I would like to suggest that compassion requires us to stay in touch. There are ways that we can come at that.

If we go back to our bridge metaphor, one aspect of the bridge is our side of that divide. And if we begin to look at our side, I would like to suggest two words that I have found helpful that I'm still trying to find ways to practice. The first is the word sincerity. I did my doctoral dissertation in Central America, and I did it based on the language of local people and how they responded to and experienced conflict. I noticed over and again how often people said that what was required was that people had to be sincere. I never fully got that until some years later when I understood where this word came from.

Let me tell you a little story from the Roman Empire. This word traces back to the period of the great construction in marble. You can imagine with all
the empire being built with all its massive buildings that they needed a lot of good granite and marble. So people who were sellers of stones had a pretty good market, and when they sold a big piece of marble, if they really wanted to make a great case for how good it was, they needed to cover up its defects. They did so by placing wax into various cracks, and at some point, after they purchased that block of marble, people would find that it had too many defects to work with, that they had been tricked. And so they said, what we need are people who sell marble sine cera — “without wax.” That’s the root of the word sincere: to live in the world without wax.

The second word is vulnerability. We often seem to bring vulnerability over into the area of weakness, unprotected perhaps, and sometimes gullible. If you’re vulnerable, you’re going to get taken advantage of. The word actually traces to Latin in this case: vulneris is the word for “wound.” If you wanted to recast or reframe the notion of vulnerability, I would suggest that what it means is to carry a wound gracefully. I think this is the starting point on this side of that bridge that tries to cross over, and this is part of what is under the wholeness that shimmers in the water. It is about sincerity: being who you are without falsehoods. And it is about vulnerability: offering and carrying your own wounds gracefully.

For me, this has a lot to do with staying in touch. It has a lot to do with coming back to the notions we may then begin to understand about the womb, a space that provides for growth, that surrounds and holds, that in some ways is where creativity can happen. And I think it is in those spaces and from these kinds of contexts that we begin the process of small doses of compassion. This is one of the ideas I’m playing with, so it’s a very nascent idea. I’m not sure it’s going to hold, but let’s try it.

I don’t think compassion takes care of everything. I think what it does is this: We experience it in doses, and it touches our humanity. And in so doing, it helps in small ways to begin the process of inoculation against fear, against isolation, against enmity.

---

**Alongsideness: The art of befriending**

We go to my third one now because I’m near the end of my time. Alongsideness: the art of befriending. My mentor that I mentioned earlier, Adam Curle, who came from the Quaker tradition, is the only person that I have found who actually used this word consistently to describe mediation. He said mediation requires that you befriend people who are enemies. It’s not cited in the literature very much. It’s hard to find anywhere, to be honest. Maybe it was a little too Quaker-y. Adam defined it pretty much at face value. He would say you are basically with people in a way of friendship. These are his cited words in one of his books, *In the Middle*: “You approach them with respect and liking.” Those are his words.

> “It is about sincerity: being who you are without falsehoods. And it is about vulnerability: offering and carrying your own wounds gracefully.”

My own feeling is that the art of befriending has a couple of elements that are worth some explanation. You don’t have to go much further for your own view on this than to think about your own friendships. I think friendship is about enjoying and caring for each other. I also think it has a lot to do with humility, and I have three kinds of humility I’d like to mention.

The first is the root word of humility, which is humus, which is also like the stuff that you recycle into the garden. It is earthy. My own sense is that friendship begins when we are with another person in a down-to-earth way. You’ll notice how this seems to reverberate back to some of the things I’ve been talking about. I think where we have real friends we feel a sense of being able to simply be ourselves. We’re down to earth. This, of course, is
not easy to do in the middle of a conflict or when you're with the minister of the interior. But how do you bring to bear the notion that you are bringing your full person, who you are?

I think the second aspect of humility has to do with something I mentioned earlier. Humility is not about being above as in superior, ahead as in knowing a way, or behind as in pushing. It may in fact be that we come low, we get right down to the ground level; there's actually a sense in which humility is about lowering. I think humility has a real sense that we are in essence alongside, this term that I would like to use. If compassion is about the thin side — the thin side would be pity or sympathy or even empathy or providing a fix or response — it's often with the view that I the healthy one extend my help to the unhealthy. This humility would say, “We carry our wounds gracefully. We feel and see the suffering because we have ourselves suffered.” We are in essence, to use the words of Henri Nouwen, a wounded healer.

Now I think one of the tricks of this term compassion is about how quickly it may translate to ways of unequal relationship and superiority. This provides for a great challenge.

The third element, I think, is that humility has a lot to do with truth-seeking, and here our context of contesting religious truth becomes so critical. My own view is that humility is one of the few safeguards that we may have to help us remember that we have not yet arrived. If we feel we have arrived, and have arrived at the truth, we move from humility to arrogance, even if we are firmly convicted and we don't think that we're doing that. I believe that the humility that's required is for an unending search for truth, because I believe truth is big, and I only perceive, as Paul would say, through a dark glass dimly, what this bigness might mean.

A final little note about befriending because it's not only within a particular moment, it's about having well-worn paths. I can't say enough about my particular view that we too much conceive of our peacebuilding, conciliation and mediation work as offering a service that's in and out, in which befriending is hard to fit. I have often considered it from my angle as actually committing to friendship. “How long?” you might ask. I have one that's in its 22nd year, and it took 18 years before they asked me to do anything. Well-worn paths — it's a little phrase that comes from the meaning that friends have well-worn paths that reach each other's doorsteps.

I hear a lot of complaint in places that I'm in that nobody's paying attention, nobody's coming. They aren't listening. This is frustrating to a lot of people, so I have tried to make a commitment to listening but also to regularity of contact. I discovered early on that I couldn't do that in very many places. That was a hard lesson, so I made an increased commitment to do longer times in fewer places.

“I believe that the humility that's required is for an unending search for truth, because I believe truth is big.”

Conclusions

Let me return for a moment to our opening stories and vignettes, and back to this painting of a bridge. What I've discovered in class whenever I shared a few of these stories — and one or two of these I have used on occasion just to elicit a conversation with students — is that inevitably the students want to know: What did you say to the minister of the interior? What did you say to the commander in the Maze Prison? What did you say to the women in the candlelit room in the darkness of that night in Hargeisa?

4 In 1 Corinthians 13:12, the Apostle Paul writes “For now we see through a glass, darkly.”
I always find this interesting because obviously what people want to know is what is my approach and technique? Can we learn something here that we can apply? There must be some brilliance in the way that this person arrived at the way that they shifted the conversation to make something move and shape. We all would like to think that we are good conversationalists and that in the moment we might come up with something that would touch this context in a different way. But I notice that the questions don’t always find their way to attend to that hidden wholeness. They want to know about the open side of it.

Well, some words did come in each case. With the minister I remember that my colleague and I appealed to his own recent proclamation that the time had come to heal the nation. Maybe it would be good to think about what healing the nation would mean. And I think we said something about it never being easy to find a way home.

With the commander in the Maze Prison, we ended up talking quite a bit that afternoon about the peace process and his fear of what was coming with the peace process. But it was clear after several back-and-forths that the commander who opened with that line, “Tell us why you think violence doesn’t work,” had absolutely no interest in talking about violence. What he wanted, I think, at a much deeper level was to check out who we were. He was testing. He wanted to know if we were coming to judge, to lecture. He wanted to know if we would have the ears to hear the heart of a hard life. I have to say that unfortunately, for the most part, I probably failed my own compassion exam that particular day.

With the women in Hargeisa, we could not find adequate words. To be honest, all I remember is that we sat and cried. I did write poems about two of these experiences, and it’s been about 20 years that I’ve had those in a file that I carry with me. I read them privately to myself on a pretty regular basis. The poems remind me of these friends, of their faces. It’s the primary way that I pray.

Let me conclude with saying that I think in peacebuilding, inevitably, we are exposed to demanding egos. We are exposed to people who are seeking meaning, trying to exert their voice, but often in the pain of conflict they’re doing that from lived insecurity and fear. And often the way their egos respond is in ways to protect themselves, to hold on to defending and blaming as the way they can handle the difficulties of what they’ve experienced. I also know that peacebuilding places us in close proximity with a significant amount of suffering and trauma.

I have noticed this about these two things in my life: Damaged egos and trauma affect my spirit and my soul. I have seen it over and again. I think compassionate presence in peacebuilding requires that we cultivate a kind of resiliency to courageously face this outpouring of ego in the midst of conflict, without replicating its anxious dynamics — and that we nurture the listening heart to live alongside deep trauma without taking over responsibility for healing others.

In both instances, compassion suggests a commitment to alongsideness that provides a different quality of presence. This quality of presence, I think, requires open vulnerability but not gullible weakness, boundless love with clarity of boundaries, listening for the fragile voice of truth, and choosing to live by that truth without arrogance or imposition.

Thank you very much.
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Both the physical and virtual audiences (via overflow seating and online viewing) submitted questions that were read by Executive Director Milburn Line.

ML: Thank you, John Paul. I was struck by the level of introspection, insight and reflection that you’ve offered us tonight about our knowledge of peacemaking and our participation in peacebuilding. How can the arts be a part of that introspective process happening with people in conflict who aren’t ready to befriend, who need some wax removal, potentially? Where have you seen the arts be transformative for those in conflict?

JPL: There are probably a lot of examples. A few I tried to touch on, especially in the book *The Moral Imagination*, are certainly around music, which I think has a particular capacity to touch people on a different level. There are some very intriguing stories about ways that music created some environment that made a difference.

The example I relayed in that particular book was the context of Enniskillen in Northern Ireland, where we had a conference bringing together different sides of the Protestant-Catholic divide. The organizers had decided that after lunch they wanted to have a young dance troupe, made up mostly of women, create choreography to a Paul Brady song that had been prohibited during the years of The Troubles. This song is an extraordinary set of lyrics that raises questions about the sanity of the violence that was happening, and it was banned by the paramilitary troops that called radio stations and said, “If you play this song, you run the risk of being bombed.” So the song had not been played, even though quietly behind the scenes people would have played it. In the background, they had also developed a slideshow of the 34 years or so of the Troubles. So what you had was all three forms of the arts hitting you at one time.

I was sitting between the head of the police force of Northern Ireland, a tough man who had come through a lot of stuff, and a recently elected mayor from the other side of the community, who himself had been very close to paramilitary activity. It took about five minutes for this song and choreography and photos, and I could hear these two men doing everything they possibly could to control their shaking and emotion.

I’m not saying that you need the arts in order to unleash the emotion, although that’s certainly a part of it, but this was touching something that they rarely let anybody touch. I remember the very first words of the police chief. He grabbed his hanky, leaned over and said, “I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I don’t know what …” And I had to think: What an interesting humanity we live with, that after 34 years of so much violence and lost life, this man would have to apologize for feeling the tug of what he had probably lost, maybe even participated in, in some instances.

“*I have been concerned for a long time about an understanding of a holistic response — that we’re whole people, we’re whole communities.*”

I have been concerned for a long time about an understanding of a holistic response — that we’re whole people, we’re whole communities. We’re not partialized out to fights over ideology and arguments that we try to make with each other. We are touched by these things on a deep level and we often create a lot of calluses to protect that soft area because it’s too scary in there. I’ve found that it’s not easy to get there by talking to somebody and convincing. It may be that all kinds of things that are on the side open up spaces of a different quality of reflection.
ML: A question from our internet chat room: Religious faith often seems to undermine compassion. Why then do you consider it an appropriate basis for peacebuilding?

JPL: I’d be interested to go one step further into the below and beyond of the question itself. Religious faith is often thought about in terms of the strict creedal, institutional ways that people feel contribute to separation and division. What I’ve been trying to appeal to tonight is not actually something that’s focused on the creedal side or the institutional side, but on the side that touches the spiritual.

“Religion has done a lot of good and a lot of harm. … we would do much better to be as transparent and honest about any of the traditions that we come from and what they have contributed to good and bad sides.”

I have come to believe firmly that we are affected at a deep spiritual level by things that happen in conflict, especially in violence. Those often touch on aspects that can be drawn forward and worked with, not by saying “Here is an answer,” but by saying “Here is the experience of the struggle I have. I’m trying to get to a place that I understand something that I don’t have words to describe.” Those things I would refer to as the below and the beyond, and I think they have a very clear spiritual aspect to them.

Religion has done a lot of good and a lot of harm. I don’t think there’s any way to deny that. In fact, I would argue we would do much better to be as transparent and honest about any of the traditions that we come from and what they have contributed to good and bad sides.

I come from a small Christian denomination known as Mennonites. We sometimes are called those who are apart — the Amish are our cousins — and everybody looks at us as little idealistic enclaves. You get on the inside of that and you almost can’t wait to break out of it because you’ve got a big thing that’s holding you down a lot of times. And people get, as the Irish say, their knickers in a twist over anything. I often say that what prepared me to meet Somali warlords was mediating Mennonite pacifist church conflicts. You would not believe what happens when people feel a deep sense of threat to their identity. You have to create the spaces that permit people to face a fear, but without projecting on to the other that they’re an enemy. This is not easy in any sense, but it deeply affects the spirit and soul of people. It’s riveting when you see it, and that’s what I was aiming for.

ML: Our next question comes from the current cohort of students in the master’s program in peace studies: How can trust prevent violence ordered by those in power? My question is related to violence between people who used to live together, who shared drinks and meals. One day someone in authority ordered, demanded, encouraged a group to attack and assassinate their own neighbors. This is what happened to my neighbor in Burundi.

JPL: One of the areas that I work with is trying to sort through what I refer to as theories of change, that is, how do we think what we’re doing impacts situations that we’re working in? So I’m going to revert for a moment to a small little anecdote about trust, because one of the key theories of change for a lot of peacebuilding is that your focus is to increase trust. I wrote a portion of my doctoral dissertation on this, so for me it goes way back to the beginning. But the more that I asked people what trust was and what it meant, the more that people themselves became confused about how it actually was operative, or what it was that was happening.

Just as an example, one of the places that we started trying to work through a theory of change was in the Rift Valley of Kenya, which is slightly different
be defined as, we've stopped killing each other but we still hate each other. My Tajik friend used a phrase that I've always found very intriguing. He was talking about how he had to engage a commander to convince him to join a process. When you talk to somebody in Tajikistan, you never go straight at what you're talking about. You go around the branches, around the corner, around the bend. You never go straight at it until, and this was his phrase, “you have enough trust to talk truth.”

There's an interesting connection between how and in what ways we create places where honest truth can emerge. This would have to be seen in a very careful way, because I don't know all of where that question was coming from. It would seem that people [in Burundi] were beginning to create some of that, but then a power structure that didn't like it destroyed it, and it came apart quickly.

ML: A question along the lines of personal vulnerabilities: I have a keen desire to engage in the type of work you do, but I’m not fearless. When attempting to resolve conflict and bring about peace in a violent environment, how do you prevent yourself from being a victim of that violence if your efforts are not well received or are rejected?
John Dunne, one of our theologians at Notre Dame, talks about the idea of faith to incoming freshmen. He notices that a lot of freshmen come in and they have a great deal of clarity about their life ahead of them: four years through business school, a good internship, M.B.A., I’ll be out, I’ll have 2.5 kids and a $100,000 salary by year five. He says, “This is like driving in a desert at high noon, where everything is totally visible. On the other hand, life is a little more like driving at midnight with a low beam.”

That’s what life is like. You take a step into what it is you see clearly. While you have a sense of horizon, the important thing is that you take one step at a time. And I would highly suggest you do that holding hands — that you have a set of people you can do that with and not on your own.

“I think we have to learn to be comfortable with saying that we have a deficit of love in our culture.”

ML: One last question. To increase the status of peacebuilding, what changes need to take place in our culture?

JPL: I would wonder which of the “ours” we’re thinking about around this interesting room. I’ll assume American. I’m going to change the question: To increase the quality of peacebuilding, what changes need to take place in our culture? There could be all kinds of little angles you could go at this, but I’m going to come back to one that I believe in as deeply as any other. I think we have to learn to be comfortable with saying that we have a deficit of love in our culture.

I envision a deficit of love primarily as the fear that we have of reaching out to those who may in fact be closest to us, of sharing the deepest part of who we are. We’ll ultimately be measured by the presence and quality of love that we
have engaged in our communities, and I think that has to start at the level of where we have actual relationships. We don’t have to go very far to find this, or to know that it requires us to love both those who are like us and those who are not like us, for they are our brothers and sisters in this global community. And that’s what I think increases the quality of peacebuilding.

RELATED RESOURCES


ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY OF SAN DIEGO

Chartered in 1949, the University of San Diego (USD) is a Roman Catholic institution of higher learning located on 180 acres overlooking San Diego’s Mission Bay. The University of San Diego is committed to promoting academic excellence, expanding liberal and professional knowledge, creating a diverse community and preparing leaders dedicated to ethical and compassionate service.

USD is steadfast in its dedication to the examination of the Catholic tradition as the basis of a continuing search for meaning in contemporary life. Global peace and development and the application of ethics and values are examined through campus centers and institutes such as the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice, the Values Institute, the Trans-Border Institute, the Center for Public Interest Law, the Institute for Law and Philosophy and the International Center for Character Education. Furthermore, through special campus events such as the Social Issues Conference, the James Bond Stockdale Leadership and Ethics Symposium and the Joan B. Kroc Distinguished Lecture Series, we invite the community to join us in further exploration of these values.

In recent years, USD has hosted many distinguished guests including Nobel Peace laureates and former Presidents Jimmy Carter and Oscar Arias, Supreme Court justices, United Nations and United States government officials as well as ambassadors from countries around the world. In 1996, the university hosted a Presidential Debate between candidates Bill Clinton and Bob Dole.

The USD campus, considered one of the most architecturally unique in the nation, is known as Alcalá Park. Like the city of San Diego, the campus takes its name from San Diego de Alcalá, a Franciscan brother who served as the infirmarian at Alcalá de Henares, a monastery near Madrid, Spain. The Spanish Renaissance architecture that characterizes the five-century old University of Alcalá serves as the inspiration for the buildings on the University of San Diego campus. The architecture was intended by the founders, Bishop Charles Francis Buddy and Mother Rosalie Hill, to enhance the search for truth through beauty and harmony. Recent additions, such as the state-of-the-art Donald P. Shiley Center for Science and Technology and the new School of Leadership and Education Sciences building, carry on that tradition.

A member of the prestigious Phi Beta Kappa, USD is ranked among the nation’s top 100 universities. USD offers its 7,500 undergraduate, graduate and law students rigorous academic programs in more than 60 fields of study through six academic divisions, including the College of Arts and Sciences and the schools of Business Administration, Leadership and Education Sciences, Law, Nursing and Health Science, and Peace Studies.
GIVE THE GIFT OF PEACE

Support the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice

You can support the educational, research and peacemaking activities of the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice by making a secure, tax-deductible, online donation at http://peace.sandiego.edu/giving or mailing the donation form below with a check payable to:

Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice
Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies
University of San Diego
5998 Alcalá Park, San Diego, CA 92110-2492

__ I would like to join the Institute’s Leadership Circle and the USD President’s Club with a gift of $1,500 or more and receive invitations to special receptions and events.

__ I would like to support the Institute’s programs with a gift of:
   - $1,000
   - $500
   - $250
   - $100
   - $50
   - Other $______________________

__ Enclosed is a check for my gift
__ See credit card information below

Please charge my credit card: __AmericanExpress __Discover __MasterCard __Visa
Acct. # ___________________ Exp. ___________________
Signature_________________________________________________________________________
Name ___________________________________________________________________________
Address_________________________________________________________________________
City/State/Zip/Country _____________________________________________________________
Phone (Day) ( ____ ) _______________________ (Eve) ( ____ ) ___________________________
Email ___________________________________________________________________________

__ Please add me to your mailing list for information about Institute programs and upcoming events.