Creative Beginnings

from the **Moral Imagination Program**

UNITED RELIGIONS INITIATIVE

Creative Beginnings *from the Moral Imagination Program*

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Creative Beginnings *from the Moral Imagination Program*

Background

URI's two year pilot project in the Moral Imagination approach to peacebuilding came into being because of the expressed needs of URI Cooperation Circle (CC) leaders deeply involved in peacebuilding work. Inspired by the book, The Moral Imagination, The Art and Soul of Building Peace, by John Paul Lederach, URI Global Staff member, Barbara Hartford and, CC leaders - Marites Africa and Abraham Karickam, along with Libby Hoffman of Catalyst for Peace, came to believe that this approach and URI's way of being and working in the world could be mutually enriching.

The Moral Imagination approach to building peace captured the enthusiasm of people dedicated to peacebuilding within URI because it reflected experiences of authentic peacebuilding activities and affirmed the value of these kinds of efforts for the entire URI global community. John Paul Lederach and Dr. Herm Weaver, educator and musician, served as primary project consultants and teachers. A core planning team, John Paul Lederach, Herm Weaver, Libby Hoffman and Barbara Hartford, designed this initial project in accord with basic criteria: CC teams were to be involved in conflict areas; CC teams would commit to a two year involvement; CC teams would come from different regions of the world; CC teams would commit to making this learning relevant locally and for the global URI. Applications from CC teams were sought from all URI regions. Four teams were chosen based on the criteria. A program spaced over two years was carefully planned in order to allow relationships to deepen naturally among the team members, to implement an action/reflection model where activities on the ground were part of the learning curriculum, and to give participants firsthand experiences in understanding different cultures and the unique challenges each team faced.

The four teams selected were – the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative CC from Uganda; the Interfaith Peacebuilding Initiative CC from Ethiopia, the Peacemakers Circle CC from the Philippines and a team drawn from different CCs in Kerala, India. In addition, an Organizational Learning Team was created comprised of global support staff members,

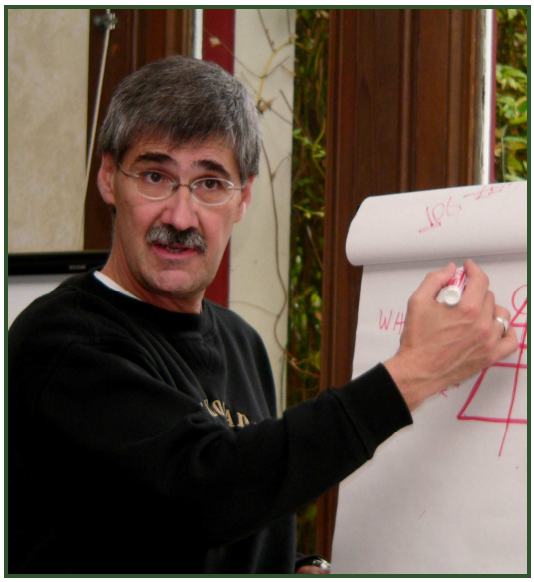
Charles Gibbs, Barbara Hartford, Sally Mahé, and Libby Hoffman, director of Catalyst for Peace, to help make this learning available to the larger URI network. Catalyst for Peace provided support in design, implementation, and organizational learning, as well as the funding for the project.

The basic framework for the project was to have five seminars spaced over two years. Each team had the opportunity to host one of the seminars; and each team received a site visit. The action projects undertaken by each team were supported and enriched throughout the two years by the seminars, the site visits, and the team visits to each team's locality. All of these program elements and a two-year time span, forged a powerful learning community that sustained each participant, supported each team and led to personal and team transformations.

About the "Moral Imagination"

For over three decades, John Paul Lederach, a highly respected peace educator and mediator, sought to answer, in practice and in theory, the question: *How do we transcend the cycles of violence that bewitch our human community while still living in them?*

After three decades as a peacebuilder, he believes the answer lies in cultivating the moral imagination, "the capacity to imagine something rooted in the challenges of the real world yet capable of giving birth to that which does not yet exist."



John Paul explains, "The kind of imagination to which I refer is mobilized when four disciplines and capacities are held together and practiced by those who find their way to rise above violence. Stated simply, the moral imagination requires the capacity to imagine ourselves in a web of relationships that includes our enemies; the ability to sustain a paradoxical curiosity that embraces complexity without reliance on dualistic polarity; the fundamental belief in and pursuit of the creative act; and the acceptance of the inherent risk of stepping into the mystery of the unknown that lies beyond the far too familiar landscape of violence." Or, to express this more poetically:

Reach out to those you fear.

Touch the heart of complexity.

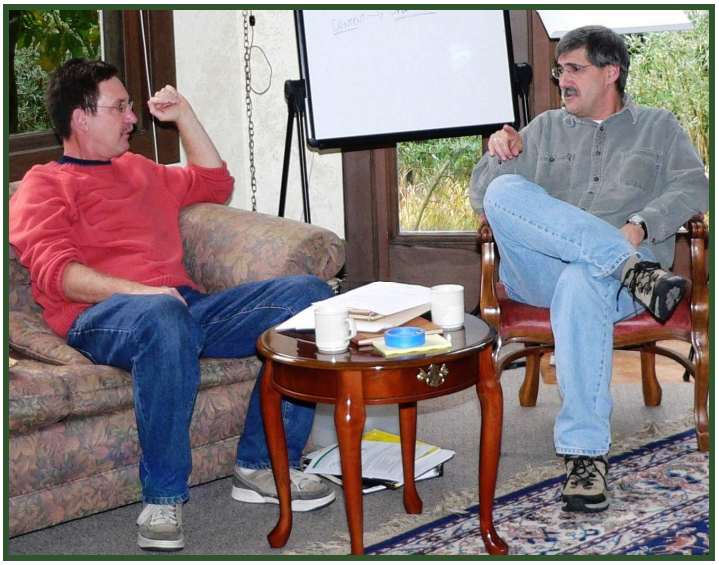
Imagine beyond what is seen.

Risk vulnerability one step at a time.

John Paul offers two broad directions: *First, we must understand and feel the landscape of protracted violence and why it poses such deep-rooted challenges to constructive change. In other words, we must set our feet deeply into the geographies and realities of what destructive relationships produce, what legacies they leave, and what breaking their violent patterns will require. Second, we must explore the creative process itself, not as a tangential inquiry, but as the wellspring that feeds the building of peace.*

Getting Started

At the heart of the URI/Moral Imagination (MI) training was the quality and the quantity of creative and spirited learning processes that John Paul Lederach and Herm Weaver offered as a foundation to help achieve the MI training goals.



Over the two-year project, it became clear that cultivating the Moral Imagination, involves a rich depth of learning that is layered with action/reflection experiences and that evolves over time. We learned the importance of balancing the amount of content with a spacious approach to time that allowed for deeper experience and reflection. Lederach says that this kind of education is about helping people grow in character, personhood and vision. So, lesson ideas, one day workshops or weeklong seminars, no matter how inspiring . . . are just the beginning.

Therefore, these ideas are given with the understanding that they constitute only a beginning – just a peek and an invitation to go deeper. You are invited to adapt these ideas for a variety of facilitating and teaching purposes. More stories and in-depth learning based on evolving personal experiences of the initial MI teams and a growing body of knowledge emerging from this work will follow in the months and years ahead.

1. Morning Walks and Morning Pages

To repeat John Paul's words, *we must explore the creative process itself, not as a tangential inquiry, but as the wellspring that feeds the building of peace.*

At the beginning of each of our MI seminar sessions, we instituted creative practices with the purpose of helping us to listen deeply to our own inner wisdom, to connect to our individual wellsprings of feelings, thoughts and creative responses to our lives. We began with “Morning Walks” and “Morning Pages”.

“Morning Walks”, duration about 30 minutes, usually began early in the morning and took advantage of the most beautiful paths or walkways available. Gathering first in a circle and often inspired by quotations or prayers, the group was invited to connect with ourselves as we walked, slowed down and opened to sensory perceptions and to one another. Walks were done in silence or speaking with a partner, as it suited the group.

Usually the “Morning Walk” was followed by “Morning Pages” unless breakfast intervened, in which case “Morning Pages” were then the first item of “business” when the group assembled for its first session of the day.

In her book, The Artist’s Way, Julia Cameron describes a writing process called “Morning Pages” - about 30 minutes is spent writing in a special journal, without lifting pen from paper. The idea is to simply let words flow without much thinking and no judgments. The purpose is to tap one’s own awareness, deepen capacity for creativity and cultivate the courage to know what we know. “Morning Pages” remain the private domain of the writer.
If working with a group, the entire group would write “Morning Pages” at the same time, alone and together, scattered in and around the same space.



We purposely chose the site for each MI workshop so we would be able to take morning walks in beautiful natural settings – the woods and streams of Mt. Tamalpais in Marin County, California; the hillside nature trails of the Eugenia Lopez Center in Manila, Philippines; the Arabian Sea shore in Kovalam, India; garden pathways in Ethiopia; country roads in northern Uganda; and the wooded trails of the Fetzer Institute of Kalamazoo, Michigan.

These half-hour walks, taken as a group, often in silence, were intended to help us experience the deep beauty and wisdom of the natural world, and to listen deeply to our own inner wisdom called forth by the natural world – all as a foundation to explore and awaken our own inner creative resources – the wellspring that feeds the building of peace.

2. Opening and Closing Activities

As facilitators, conveners or teachers, how we create a safe place and an inviting atmosphere for participants to feel welcomed and grounded is vital to any kind of gathering. Also, how we close the valuable time people have spent together allows people to give fresh and deeper meaning to the learning they have received from their time together and can help them make the transition home.

Please enjoy the following Opening and Closing activity ideas.

Opening Prayer or Reflection

Taking time to invoke and sacred, to acknowledge what we are leaving behind and to become fully present is an important beginning. Invite the group to form a circle, holding hands and facing outward. Ask them to call to mind the people and responsibilities they have left behind to be participate in this gathering. Ask them to entrust these people and responsibilities to our Sacred Source for the time they are here. The leader might then offer a brief prayer for the wellbeing of all we have left behind, and then invite the people to let go of each others' hands and reform the circle, facing inward. Participants might be invited to offer, briefly, a hope they hold for this time together. The circle closes with a brief prayer for the fullness of this time together, and, perhaps, with a song.

Preamble, Purpose and Principles

In a URI gathering, the opening circle might be followed with a group reading of the Preamble, Purpose and Principles of URI's Charter.

Opening Questions

The leader asks each person to take a few moments to reflect on questions. The leader can choose to use one question or more than one. People may write whatever answers spring to mind and then offer one or two aloud.

a. What were three of the most significant things that happened in my life since we last met (or in the last few months)?

b. What I am most grateful for?

c. What is a question I have been asking that won't go away?

d. What is one thing I carry as a strong memory of the last time we met?

e. What two important things concerning "relationships" happened since our last meeting, etc…?

f. What happened in our work or in our team work (if applicable) that we want or need to share as we begin?

g. In terms of reflecting on the work or project each person is involved in, a teacher can ask, what are two important things that have happened since our last meeting? What on-going or new initiatives are emerging?

'Rememberings'

The leader tells a little story recalling highlights in both the content of the learning and the spirit of the learning from the last time this group met together. These "rememberings" can be offered with musical interludes or a poetic refrain can be used…"these are the stories of our lives." Not only do these "rememberings" help everyone re-member the richness of experience and content from the past but also an emotional bond is deepened as people listen to and re-connect with experiences they have shared together. It helps weave a collective narrative that all participants have in common.

Closing Questions

As a closing activity, please choose one or more of the following questions to help people crystallize the learning they have received.

- Valuing…what is one thing I can take from this day/session?
- What is one value or learning that I can take for my people back home or my work location? For the larger community of which I am part?
- From all that has happened today/this session…what applies to me? What applies to my region or workplace? What applies to a larger whole of which I am a part?

Personal Learning and Commitments

Reflect on the following open-ended sentences and complete them. When everyone is ready, please share your answers with others in the group.

a) One thing I learned this week (or this session) was….
b) One commitment I will pursue when I return home is….

Closing Prayer or Reflection

Invite the group to form a circle. Asking the people to face in and hold hands – the leader offers a prayer giving thanks for the experiences the group has shared and articulating aspirations that are being taken back home.

Then, the group is invited to face outwards and hold hands…leader acknowledges the individuals, communities of people and work responsibilities that will be there for the participants when they go home. People return to inward facing circle for final closing blessings or song.

Creating meaningful opening and closing activities enriches teaching, is an expression of care for the students and reminds the students to attend to their own self-care.

> *"Self care is never a selfish act. It is simply good stewardship of the gifts that I have – a gift I was put on earth for to serve others."*
>
> Parker Palmer

3. Singing Each Other's Songs

We sang together often, learning a song from each of the groups. Singing together and exchanging songs from our cultures was a creative approach that called us to set aside a linear approach to learning together and let our imaginations soar.

John Paul Lederach's colleague and friend Herm Weaver led this part of our learning experience. He has pioneered research and practice in the role of music in peacebuilding, beginning with a dissertation on the topic.

As John Paul described his work: *He (Herm) embarked on a journey to take his music as seriously as he took his intellectual studies and to focus more on music in the process of healing and reconciliation. In essence, he wrote songs and paid attention to how the creative process might be related to the process of healing.*

To create a learning atmosphere that conveys spirit as well as content, invite people to share each other's songs and sing them together!

To begin each day or to open each session, invite a person or a group to introduce a favorite song from their culture or faith tradition. The words of the songs can be written on a flip chart for people to read together. People will mimic the lead singer, learning words, often in new languages, and learning often foreign sounding melodies. A few drums and rhythm instruments can be close by to be used as the spirit moves.

Songs already learned can be practiced every day. Timid starts will soon give way to uproarious “home-made” music and fun.

Whatever your purpose is in bringing diverse people together, the same insight applies: creating music and sharing songs can bridge chasms of difference and build sincere and seemingly unbreakable bonds of mutual respect, friendship and care. Creating music together helps people heal and live into new and brighter visions.

From our experience, it was essential to have a leader like Herm, who could empower and energize people to sing. Without strong musical leadership, a group might explore working with a carefully selected array of recorded songs that people could sing along with.

4. The Listening Tree

Moral Imagination goals of increasing personal vision and character are linked with developing a capacity for listening. First, we listen to ourselves, to our own sense of calling about who we are to be in the world, to our own deep inner wisdom. Listening is not only what we do for others but what we do for ourselves. Morning Walks and Morning Pages model this deep inner listening. Extending this deep inner listening, we listen deeply and openly when we sit with friends, family and colleagues who are experiencing challenges. We listen to help them figure out what is going on; we listen when people have conflict (fear, animosity, frustration).

Practicing compassionate, open listening with those who know prepares us to listen that way to others with whom we disagree or to listen across religions especially when there is tension and historical animosity.

Lederach reflected that he was increasingly convinced that people have an understanding of listening, but don't often bring it forward in ways that make it explicit. This exercise helps people work with their own deepest understandings of listening, and to bring this knowledge forward. Begin by listening to the very first things that jump out to you – be in touch with your intuition about listening.

The Listening Exercise

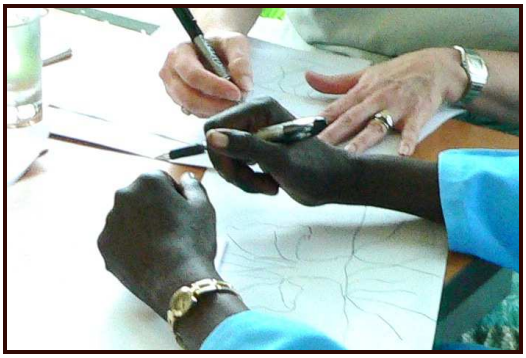
1. Off the top of your head, without pausing to think much, write a few sentences in response to this phrase: *For me, good listening happens when…*

2. Now remember a time when you really felt someone, maybe a friend, a family member or mentor really listened to you, a time one on one when you experienced listening in your life. Write a quick series of descriptors, words or short phrases that capture the moment.

3. Reflect for a moment on what the person listening did and what you did –jot descriptor words or phrases.

Qualities the listener brought/ what the listener did . . .	Qualities I brought / what I did . . .

4. Go back and see what you see from these lists…What are the most important words from these exercises? Circle or highlight these words.



5. Work with a small group to create a "Listening Tree." Make a handout of a simple drawing of a tree, root system, below ground, above ground, trunk, branches and fullness of leaves. Use your lists to fill in the picture.

    a. What are the fruits of good listening? (Add these words to the fullness of tree and its branches.)

    b. What is the deep part of listening, what is needed for good listening that is invisible and beneath the surface? (Add these words beneath the ground within the root system.)

    c. What is my listening best? What qualities do I use when I am at my listening best? (Write these words in the trunk.)

John Paul reflects*: Too often in the field of peacebuilding, listening is something people "do" –like techniques of good listening; but listening approximates something more like prayer/meditation. We can cultivate in ourselves an ability to listen in such a way that the person you are with comes to a deeper understanding of what the Divine is saying in their life. Listening has to do with those things that aren't fully said, those things that we feel in a person more than what we hear. We can listen with the heart and listen for the voice that is speaking behind the voice that we actually hear.*

5. Action/Reflection and Peer-Learning Methods

The Moral Imagination seminars often involved pairs or small groups in peer learning situations in which each participant drew from his or her own practical experience from the field. This is an action/reflection learning model which means that participants were asked to choose an action-project in their locality and use their experience working with this project as a basis for their learning. Seminar sessions were spent engaging each other (often in teams) about these projects and helping each other understand more deeply what was being learned from past actions and what opportunities or new ideas could be useful for future actions.

Action/reflection and peer-learning are effective methodologies to engage members of a URI Cooperation Circle as they undertake any range of projects; also these approaches work well for any group or organization that is dedicated to organizational learning and having people "travel far together" to act and to learn together. In the Moral Imagination training, just being

with each other over time, allowing our experiences to teach us slowly, and being around the "quality of the others" mattered. In fact, action/reflection and peer learning taught us new ways to face local challenges and problems – we took our local endeavors to a larger group; we took time to sit and listen and hear each other's burning questions, goals, challenges, hopes and action plans. We sat with each other, listening to each other and offering our contributions to each other's work in a supportive way. We learned that the wisdom was often "in the room" and all we needed was a process for extracting it. We realized that as we focused on the presenting issues or problems, we were learning and changing, going deeper into ourselves and into the complexities of the problem at hand.

Peers who are involved and committed to shared or similar goals can be extraordinary resources to each other. The following processes are useful for any group involved in long range projects who want to utilize an action/reflection model and peer-learning methods in leading gatherings.

Burning Questions

Burning Questions are questions that carry special meaning and force for each person as they relate to the topic. Burning questions can cover a broad range. They can be personal (I don't know how I will act if faced with violence?); or contextual (Will we have enough resources?); or general (Do people in the world care about this issue?) An exercise raising up "burning questions" can be quite useful at the beginning of projects. Not only does it allow people to get these burning questions off their chests (so they don't become obstacles in the learning process), but it also gives important information to the facilitators in designing future sessions about what might be most helpful for the group.

Invite people to speak in pairs together about the burning questions they bring to their topic, project, or responsibility, etc. Partners write down each other's "burning questions." Partners report each other's burning questions aloud to the large group. These questions are recorded on a wall chart and clustered. The entire group reflects on these questions and offers insights, and a sense of themes and meanings that are emerging.

Sharing Action Plans

If individuals, CCs, or groups you are working with are planning activities or projects, invite them to create (or review) their Action Plans which are simply their plans for how they wish to accomplish their goals. Action Plans can be brief or lengthy. Action Plans include the purpose of the project; goals or objectives; strategy to accomplish the goals; support or resources already available; and support or resources needed. Action Plans can include a

budget if funds are needed. As Action Plans are presented one by one, the group listens to presentations and provides written feedback after each one. Group completes a template answer sheet based on what they heard:

Action Plan Feedback Template

Strengths - heard in the plan

Concerns - raised by the plan

Ideas – to support the plan

Questions - raised by the plan

After each plan is presented, the listeners choose one item from their template they think is most relevant to the presenter and read this item aloud back to presenter. Each listener gives their completed template to the presenter.

"Sobre Mesa"

"Sobre Mesa" is a Spanish phrase that means "around the table." It is an expanded notion of just sitting together around a table and talking. It is an intentional "open time" without any agenda that provides a nurturing space for conversations to happen and ideas to flow. As a learning tool "Sobre Mesa" is a process that is grounded in the simple trust that giving people space to have informal conversations will tap unpredictable creative and helpful ideas and resources. "Sobre Mesa" times might be planned 30 minutes after lunch or before or after dinner or anytime.

> *All social change can be traced to a single conversation.*
>
> Margaret Wheatley

The Samoan Circle / Clearing Meeting

The Samoan Circle and Clearing Meeting are similar processes of open, non-judgmental listening to explore a range of ideas, to deepen the questions being raised, and to gain greater clarity and understanding of the issues at hand and how the people involved are thinking and feeling. In providing a way to go into more depth about the issues or plans, people "join with" those carrying the responsibility.

People sit in two circles, an inner circle and an outer circle. They sit as a community to face challenges and to create a container to hold the questions and the concerns of the people involved. Each team has a time to be the focus of a Samoan Circle process, and time to address the issues they are facing through this kind of dialogue.

The inner circle, usually about 6 or 8 seats, is where people talk. An outer circle forms around the inner circle and this is where people listen. The inner circle includes the team that is presenting a situation for response, plus one or more facilitators. It also always has empty seats so people from the outer circle may step into the inner circle when they feel called to say something, and then return to the outer circle.

This "clearing process" focuses on *sitting together* rather than confronting each other. Rather than pushing for "solutions" to someone's "problem", people identify big issues and potential directions. Clarity arises from the group in conversation, asking clarifying and supportive questions, and careful listening. Some guidelines for participating in the process are:

- Be with each other
- Hear / Understand Questions & Challenges
- Remember that facing any plan or challenge requires time to "till the soil."
- Go deeper. This space is not about telling people what to do but helping to touch the creative sources from which arise the unexpected, evoking deeper wisdom than is already there.

There is an Indonesian proverb about preparing a seed bed that speaks to the process of these circles: *Till the soil – the ox is slow but the earth is patient.* It is important to till the soil with the people doing the work. That means taking time, going with others and trusting that solutions and creative next steps will emerge.

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6. Using Stories to Learn

The Moral Imagination approach to peacebuilding places value on learning from stories. In the seminars, we learned from our own stories about working within conflict situations, from the success stories of others, and using the core, guiding stories that Lederach offers at the heart of *The Moral Imagination*:

- the story of how a young man's unexpected and courageous humility created an opening to resolve a festering conflict between the Dagombas and Konkombas in Ghana;
- the story of how a handful of women in Wajir, Kenya, acting courageously, creatively, humbly, stopped a war in their part of the world;
- the story of how a professor in Tajikistan helped end a civil war when he assured an enemy leader, *I will go with you, side by side. And if you die, I will die*;
- and the story of how a Columbian peasant empowered an entire community, caught between guerillas and the army, to stand firm in their unwillingness to take up arms in the face of demands from an army commander that they either fight against the guerillas or die.

Listening with Questions in Mind

Before reading or listening to the selected stories, a group is asked to listen with questions in mind. After the reading they are asked to reflect on and discuss these three questions:

- What were the keys to change in this story?
- Were any of the keys to change common to each story?
- What is the moral or key learning from this story?

Another exercise is to ask a group to listen for how the four qualities of the Moral Imagination are present in the stories and how they made a difference.

- The capacity to imagine ourselves in a web of relationships that includes our enemies.
- The ability to sustain a paradoxical curiosity that embraces complexity without reliance on dualistic polarity.
- The fundamental belief in and pursuit of the creative act.
- The acceptance of the inherent risk of stepping into the mystery of the unknown that lies beyond the familiar landscape of violence.

Stories used in this learning activity can be selected from actual stories relevant to the group itself and prepared beforehand. The four stories referenced above, told by Lederach, are featured in his book, Moral Imagination, The Art and Soul of Building Peace.

Writing Our Own Stories - Everything is True…except…

As noted above, for over three decades, John Paul Lederach sought to answer, in practice and in theory, the question: "*How do we transcend the cycles of violence that bewitch our human community while still living in them?"* After three decades of experience as an educator and an internationally acclaimed peacebuilder, he believes that the answer lies in cultivating the Moral Imagination, which he describes as *"the capacity to imagine something rooted in the challenges of the real world yet capable of giving birth to that which does not yet exist."* Instead of lecturing about these topics, he invited our teams to try out doing this for ourselves.

> *We launched into a day of storytelling designed to draw us deeper into the exercise of the moral imagination. John Paul told a story of the moment in Nepal's recent history when a constitutional change meant that the army was no longer answerable to the king, but to the people's elected representatives in the government. The problem was that the generals and the leaders in the government didn't know each other.*
>
> *So, in an effort to help them create a bond of common purpose, they were asked, in small groups containing an equal number of generals and government leaders, to write a letter they would send to a grandchild at some imaginary point in the future describing what they had done together to make a better future for all future generations of children of Nepal. The small groups embraced the assignment and by the time they were finished they were powerfully connected through a shared vision of the positive future they wished to create together.*

Writing Your Own Story - Everything is true… except the part that has not happened yet…
This creative exploration in story-telling and imagining a better future begins within each person – drawing upon each person's reservoir of personal experience and imagination.

First, imagine your grandchildren and the world your grandchildren will live in. Imagine yourself telling the story (you are about to write) to your grandchildren. Begin your story in your present reality by describing the troubling situation or conflict you are involved in that you want to impact in a positive way.

Begin with the words … *Everything in this story is true except the parts that have not happened yet…*

At some point midway in the writing of your story, make a seamless shift to the part of the story that has not happened yet. Create an ending part that arises from your imagined sense of how this story could end in a most favorable light.

To model the assignment, the teacher or facilitator might want to create and share their own story. JP Lederach and Herm Weaver created a CD, "Dream the Light – A Story and a Song" to address the 9/11 disaster and aftermath. "Dream the Light" became the theme song of our MI Pilot Project.

Listeners try to guess at what point the story shifted from the "real" to the "imagined". After listening to the presentations, listeners reflect insights, learning, shared themes arising in the stories.

An example of one of our stories:

> *In the final report, the group from Ethiopia spoke movingly of Ethiopia's ancient history as a place that helped give birth to great religions and where their people largely lived in harmony. Sadly, those days have dissolved and today they are facing escalating Christian – Muslim violence within Ethiopia and an escalating threat of war from neighboring Somalia. Their work has been conflict prevention work, with a special focus on young people. They imagined their success in leading peace delegations into areas facing inter-religious violence within Ethiopia and helping to create a day when children growing up on the Ethiopian-Somali border would be cared for equally by people on either side of the border. The also imagined the freeing of financial resources from war to address the urgent issues of HIV/AIDS and poverty.*

Setting the Context by Telling Your Story

Building on the imaginative leap of the first storytelling assignment, the second assignment asked us to move more deeply into the reality of our present day situations and tell the story of what we faced at the present time. We were asked to provide three or so characteristics of the place we live and work; three or so challenges we face; and three or so hopes we have. Ask individuals (or teams) from different locales and different action projects to make a list of these:

Characteristics - of the place they live and work (ex. small town, almost everyone knows each other, many religions co-exist well)

Challenges - they face in this setting (ex. longstanding religious and political hostility among religious leadership)

Hopes - they have (ex. harmony can be reached among feuding religious leaders for the benefit of the entire community)

These characteristics, challenges, and hopes can be specific or general. This exercise introduces people to the general contexts each person or team is facing. Then, either working alone or with a team, stories are created drawing on the information in these lists. The stories describe the context wherein the action projects are happening, the challenges emerging, and the hopes and possibilities.

> *The team from India provided a picture of the challenges they faced with division and violence among people of different faiths. They offered a compelling vision of work to mediate an intra-Christian conflict they feel might turn into another Northern Ireland; and imagined how that work might expand to help solve the incidents of communal violence that from time to time plague India.*

7. Unleashing Creative Acts to Build Peace

"*Creative tilling wakes up my soul!"*

Perhaps the most joyful of all of the learning experiences in the training was the abundance of ways we were given to explore one of the core qualities of the Moral Imagination, *the fundamental belief in and pursuit of the creative act.*

How do we cultivate creativity and creativity in others? How does the creative act provide an alternative to patterns of behavior that cause conflict, violence and harm? How do we become better people by tapping our creativity? How do we come to know ourselves and use

our very presence to bring about a reduction of conflict in our midst and bring about the possibility for peace?

There are many ways to help people tap creativity and begin to see and enjoy its fruits. When more traditional styles of learning are integrated with activities that invite people to use their creative resources, people awaken to ideas, images and new possibilities. These "creative fruits" bring energy, spirit and strength to the work at hand. People notice transformations that begin to happen within themselves. After immersing in some of these creative activities, people might exclaim,

- *I never knew I was a poet!*
- *I feel so light and relaxed just to be invited to write this way!*
- *I learned that I had wisdom inside myself and here it is in a teeny-tiny book I wrote myself!*

Writing Autobiographical Haikus

The haiku is a form of poetry originating in Japan. Its form is simple, short and elegant. The poet uses few words, placing words with 5 syllables in the first line, words with 7 syllables in the second line, and words with 5 syllables in the third line. The haiku strives to touch and express an essence, a core feeling, a poignant experience, a description that touches the heart of the matter, simplicity on the other side of complexity.

Each person dedicated to the art and soul of building peace is unique and brings unique feelings, observations, knowledge, wisdom, and creative impulse to his or her actions. A haiku autobiography isn't a formal haiku, but adapts the principles of a haiku poem. A haiku autobiography invites us to describe ourselves in essential ways, to perceive our unique qualities and strengths in new ways, and thereby frees these gifts to be used, shared and honored.

To lead people in writing haiku autobiographies, read some models first. (See examples below) Provide people some quiet space with enough time, maybe overnight or during a lunch break, etc. Speak about putting aside "the critic" that sits on most people's shoulders and whispers or yells in our ears that what we write is not good enough! Reassure people that each expression will be different and there is no right or wrong output. Explain that what people will write will be "slightly incorrect haikus" in that they don't need to conform to a number of syllables nor to a specific form but only need to be about 100 words. People can express themselves quite differently. Share samples below.

While oral presentations and small group conversations are a good way to share them, why not also create a way to save them for posterity and to give people a special reminder of this creative moment? If photos are available, each “haiku” could be accompanied by a photo of its author and a lovely little booklet could be made.

In the Moral Imagination program, we chose a partner and became each other’s personal photographer, finding just the right spot and pose for our official “peacebuilding portrait.”

Pages with the “haiku” and the “photo portrait” can be given as a gift to each person or pages could be bound in a simple booklet.

Most of us who don’t usually see ourselves as writers, poets or artists, need encouragement when we begin to risk creative acts and begin to value our voices and expression as our special tools for building peace in our lifetime.

Samples of “haiku autobiographies”:

Mill Valley Peace
Mist softens the earth
Skybound the redwoods sink deep
Fog carries me home

John Paul Lederach

I may not have a clear vision of where I might be going but I know that I am on my way. I have taken the first steps forward and the next steps will not be as difficult as the first few steps. My journey towards somewhere is wonderful because it certainly implies a common sense of destiny where all the travelers of religions, traditions, cultures would converge. At some point of the journey, to stop means to look back and forth to see how I have taken the first few steps in reference to where I might be. May the step I have taken be the way to peace.

Lee Collano

I am a traveler
And sometimes a pilgrim.
I hale from a place
The diverse nature of which
  Sometimes makes divisions.
    I wish peace and love
    Prevail in my neighborhood.
I am supposed to learn, teach and guide
As Teaching is my chosen path.
When I feel weak to fulfill
My duty as a fellow traveler
My wish and prayer to the Almighty
Is to fill me with energy
To go ahead in service to humanity.

Jacob Kunjappy

The civil war in Northern Uganda started when I was 13 years old, now I am 33 years old. I grew up in the war, studied in the war, married in the war, ordained a deacon in the war, and got my firstborn Samuel Omara Onono in the war…. My father was man full of wisdom and he wanted me to be a lawyer but I am a political scientist and a teacher by profession and a trained theologian and peace builder.
My grandfather used to tell us stories about the Lamogu rebellion which took place in 1911, the Mau Mau rebellion in Kenya and the Maji Maji rebellion in Tanganika.

But now I have seen the impact of war. My son Samuel was born on 27 January; the first thing that his ears heard was a gun shot the morning of 27 January.

What a cycle of violence is this? What will be the future of my grandchildren? Will they enjoy any peace in their lives? Is peace not more than the absence of war? What is my contribution toward a struggle to transcend this cycle of violence?

Rev. Patrick Lumumba

Summary

The activities included here are applicable in a variety of settings. Please feel free to use and adapt them to fit your learning needs and opportunities.

A primary lesson we learned as participants in this pilot project was that “how” peacebuilding work is sustained is of utmost significance to its ultimate successes. We learned the there is long term value in supporting local CCs by making time and effort to create a learning community where local peacebuilders go to learn more, to feel their work supported, respected and understood, and to give as much to this community as they receive.

Acknowledgments

The learning activities and concepts presented in this booklet are taken from the seminars led by Dr. John Paul Lederach and Dr. Herm Weaver during URI's Moral Imagination Pilot Program. Comprehensive information about the concepts of the Moral Imagination can be found in The Moral Imagination, The Art and Soul of Peacebuilding, John Paul Lederach, Oxford University Press, 2005.

"Creative Beginnings from the Moral Imagination Program, United Religions Initiative" was created by a team effort:

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We hope you enjoy these creative beginnings! The entire Moral Imagination Pilot Project team looks forward to sharing more ideas, stories and learning in the future.

Back row: Elelta Asmelash, John Paul Lederach, Herm Weaver, Sr. Mary Tarcisia Lakot, Bizu Abiy in front of Sheik Musa Khalil, IPI Peace Ambassador Haile Gebreselassie, Kedru Zeynu, Marites Africa, Lee Collano, Barbara Hartford, Prameela Devi. Front Row: Abraham Karickam, Patrick Lumumba, Jo Kashim, Semir Yusuf, Libby Hoffman, Akmad Wahab, Sally Mahé, George Mathew. Not pictured: Jacob Kunjappy and Ledet Befekadu.