

A Season of Peace



Introduction

This year's *Season of Peace* Resources are designed to help participants explore practices for building peace on every scale. From the personal level to global issues, these reflections and prayers will help grow the faith and witness of the whole church. Throughout the 29 days of the 2020 Season of Peace, we are invited to reflect upon:

- Week 1 September 6–12: Peace Within
- Week 2 September 13–19: Peace in Relationships
- Week 3 September 20–26: Peace in Community
- Week 4 September 27–October 3: Peace in the World
- Final Day October 4: Holistic Peacemaking

From the Editor

In planning this year's *Season of Peace* Reflections, we have tried to emphasize that the work of peacemaking takes place at all levels of our lives. It's easy to see peacemaking in the world as some distant impossibility, too vast and unrealistic to ever engage in effectively as individuals. It's also easy to forget that there is peacemaking work to be done here at home, in our own lives. This resource is meant to help us remember that engaging with our own internal conflicts, building healthy relationships with each other, grappling with issues of justice in our communities, and re-imagining international relations are crucially interconnected steps on the path of peacemaking.

Henry Koenig Stone, 2020 Season of Peace editor



Sunday, September 6, 2020

Peace Within

Casting Out Demons in the Mirror

Henry Koenig Stone

Matthew 7:4–5

“Or how can you say to your neighbor, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ while the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor’s eye.” (NRSV)

John 8:7, NRSV

When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.”

Reflection: As we spend this month reflecting on ways to practice peacemaking, it is important not to skip the first step: wrestling with the causes of conflict.

Both personal and group conflicts often find their roots in the same human drives. Ego and lust for power can drive international conflicts just as surely as they do financial crimes. Fear of the “Other” leads down parallel paths to individual discrimination, racist structures and violence against immigrants and religious minorities. Personal insecurity, another form of fear, can lead to overt abuse or reinforce subtle forms of toxic masculinity or manipulation in relationships. It can also stop us from being willing to learn about the ways in which we, or the world, are failing each other. If we wish to be peacemakers in our relationships, communities and the world, we must first look within ourselves.

Can we really ever “cast out the demons” of fear, anger and hate? Can we ever silo away the impacts of growing up in societies full of racial stereotypes and toxic gender-power dynamics? No, not completely. Jesus acknowledges in John 8 that we are *all* sinful, all flawed. Not even he picks up a stone. But he does call us to do harder work: to look in the mirror and cast out the log in our own eye.

Although war, injustice and violence are present at every scale of human interaction, the work of peacemaking starts within. This week, let us think about the tools we need to unpack the parts of ourselves that are most in need of Jesus' grace, forgiveness and repair.

Practice for Peacemakers: Identify an area of peacemaking in which you feel disengaged or uninformed, and sit down for some self-education. You could choose to read “The New Jim Crow” or read a text on intersectional feminism. If you are feeling particularly brave, try and identify ways in which your own emotions are influenced by society’s biases, assumptions and values. You can do this on your own or in conversation with a trusted friend or therapist.

As you do any or all of the above, make sure this week to remember that there is room for grace. None of us have the self-control to be peacemakers at all times and in all places — and that is why it is so important that we be intentional about the work of peacemaking.

Prayer: Dear God, please forgive us when we approach peacemaking through the lens of judgment, rather than grace. Help us to look within ourselves and see the potential for your light, and then help us to approach our relationships, our community, and our world as makers of your Peace. Amen.



Henry Koenig Stone is the editor for this year’s *Season of Peace Reflections*. An activist and public policy wonk, he has previously served as editor of “Unbound” in Louisville, KY, and as associate for young adult social witness to the Advisory Committee for Social Witness Policy.



Monday, September 7

Making Peace Within
Finding Refuge in Stillness

Rev. Valerie Austin

Psalm 46:5–7,10a

God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved; God will help it when the morning dawns. The nations are in an uproar, the kingdoms totter; the Creator utters God's voice, the earth melts. The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. ... "Be still and know that I am God!" (NRSV)

Reflection: In order to be effective peacemakers, we sometimes need to reconcile with our own inner turmoil before we can deal with broken relationships, harmed communities and a world that experiences the fires of climate change as well as violent conflict.

There are times when we will unwillingly have to sit with ourselves. For some of us, this can be as mundane as waiting for an appointment to begin, or waiting in line. Some of us have experienced this acutely during the pandemic season of social distancing. Whoever we are, and wherever we may be in life, there will be times in which doing *absolutely nothing* will be our best solution. To be still and not reach for the next activity, move on to the next chore, or write the next email, can be a great challenge for many. To be still, and be at peace with ourselves, is a gift that the Divine longs to give, if only we would learn to receive it. Sabbath time is preparation for the work Christ calls us to do.

Sometimes when circumstances are less than ideal, or when life has not yet met our expectations, we may begin to listen more intensely to voices that demand constant productivity in an attempt to gain a sense of control. This striving can cause tension within us as our spirits wrestle against busyness to find a space of stillness, even as we may remain in constant motion. This wrestling can be quite uncomfortable, and can even cause our physical bodies to become unwell. Instead of allowing moments of rest to be the restorative blessings that they could be, we are tempted to devolve into an internal tug-of-war.

Dear friend, we must allow ourselves to quiet these voices of demand, to be still in the simple satisfaction of who we are, as we are, with all the successes and all the disappointments, and just let them be. We are invited to rest. As we remind ourselves that each person is a marvelous

creature, created in the image of the Divine, we can allow all these suppressed feelings to exist and fall under God's divine gaze. With God's grace comes far greater confidence for action.

Practice for Peacemakers: Find a place of stillness, preferably alone. Notice your breath, and take the time to reach a state of calm. Breathe slowly and deeply, filling up your belly. As you breathe, note whatever feelings and stresses arise. Perhaps there's tension or stress that feels tight on your shoulders or chest. Perhaps there is a sense of guilt or regret. You may notice more than one feeling, or not much at all. Imagine divine eyes looking upon each thing that you feel, a presence that is gentle and understanding. God accepts all of these thoughts and feelings as you notice them. Continue slow breathing. Refocus yourself again by listening closely to your breath. On the inhale think "Peace," and upon your exhale, think "Release." Continue for however long you may need.

Prayer: Eternal, all-knowing one, you see that our hearts are restless and our spirits refuse stillness. You long for us to savor rest in your presence. Let us find the courage to be still in your grace. Let us dare to find peace within ourselves as a step on the path of peacemaking in your world. Amen.



Ordained in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) tradition, Valerie Austin serves Mountain Rise UCC in Fairport, NY, as associate minister.



Tuesday, September 8

Peace Within

Peace that the Earth Can Give

Madison McKinney

Job 12: 7–9

*“But ask the animals, and they will teach you; the birds of the air, and they will tell you;
ask the plants of the earth, and they will teach you; and the fish of the sea will declare to you.
Who among all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this?” (NRSV)*

Reflection: The story of Job acknowledges that our walk with the Creator is not comfortable at all times. Throughout our lives, we have experienced and can expect more times of hardship and uncertainty. We experience injustice and betrayal, no matter how hardworking, loving or “good” we try to be. There are times when we pray to the Creator to guide us, and yet still feel lonely and unheard — as though God wished pain upon us. But we are reminded through scripture that we can connect to the Creator in any place and at any time. Even as everything around us screams, “Wrong!” there are constant signs of purpose everywhere. Sometimes, we just need to listen to what the Creation surrounding us can teach.

Finding inner peace is not just relying on God to find us and fix all our problems. When we turn to our environment, and all the living spirits that surround us, we can find the strength and inner peace we are looking for — long *before* wrongs are made right. Even in this world full of calamity and chaos, finding inner peace is a skill that can be built by living in harmony with the Earth and all the creations within it.

Sometimes the answers we are searching for in the midst of chaos may come in forms we often overlook in our day-to-day lives. When we are being tested and find ourselves in troubled waters, calling for help, the guidance we are looking for may be in the water itself. The Creator is always present: within us, around us and even in the ground beneath us. When you feel unheard, uncertain and lonely, remember that God may be answering your prayers through the nature that surrounds you.

Practice for Peacemakers: When was the last time you stopped and listened to the birds speaking their language? What were they saying? When the sun is hiding behind billows of clouds, and the rain is pouring, how do you connect to God? This week, take the time to be still, listen and find peace and strength from the Earth that surrounds you.

Prayer: Creator God, thank you for all your creations. Remind us that the whole Earth is your church, and that your spirit reaches far beyond the bounds of our physical places of worship, though we often do not recognize you. Thank you for being present in many forms, and for remaining accessible in our darkest moments. Amen.



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Wednesday, September 9

Peace Within

Accepting Hope

Elder Susan B. Orr

1 Timothy 4:10

“For to this end we toil and struggle, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.”

Reflection: On Epiphany this year, I was given my first “Star Word” by a Facebook friend. The premise is this: the magi followed the star to find baby Jesus, bringing their gifts. We too seek Jesus, trusting that the Spirit can and does use many signs (stars) to guide us closer to God. A “star word,” then, gives us one principle or goal to focus on throughout the year.

I was intrigued by the thought of having a guiding star word for 2020, and imagined how that might help me to focus on an aspect of our spiritual calling. I waited with anticipation for my FB friend to send me my word. I envisioned that the word might be *kindness, joy, love, serve* — you know, good churchy words. And then my word arrived: “Acceptance.” Huh? What kind of word is that? I was kind of grumbly about the whole thing, but I still propped that purple “Acceptance” star right next to my computer.

As the days and months unfolded and the Covid-19 pandemic made its unwelcome appearance, my carefully planned life began to unravel with cancellations of work-related opportunities and anticipated travel, and with separation from my loved ones. With each personal disappointment, my eye would rest upon my star word, encouraging me to take a deep breath, exhale and accept. As the news around the world revealed the pain and suffering caused by this new coronavirus, I struggled to accept the unknown science that couldn’t define why, when or how we would make it through. Yet even through the shadow of this valley of the pandemic, acts of kindness, care, creativity and ingenuity continually shone a light on our ability to thrive as a people through those extraordinarily difficult days.

Acceptance is not a flashy word. But sometimes, acceptance of the things we cannot change is essential to finding a path forward and doing the healing work that we are called to do. Although I did not want to hear it, that star word came at the right time to teach me that, although we toil and struggle, our hope is set on the living God who is the Savior of all people. I can accept that.

Practice for Peacemakers: Today, if there is a time when you are feeling overwhelmed or not in control, take a moment to breathe in deeply, exhale, and accept. Hear these words: “*You are God’s beloved child.*” Then, see if you can approach the issue with new strength and focus.

Prayer: Gracious, loving and faithful God, we are grateful for the guidance you provide us as we live our ordinary lives. Pour your power over us. Let it wash us, renew us and enable us to discern your will, that “*thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.*” Grant us wisdom and courage — and, when we need it, acceptance — as we face this hour and the next. Amen.



Susan B. Orr serves as acting presbytery leader for the Presbytery of Genesee Valley and presbytery leader for the Presbytery of Geneva. She will be co-directing the Mosaic of Peace program in 2021.



Thursday, September 10

Peace Within

Inner Peace in a Burning World

Rev. Ben Perry

John 16:33

“I have said this to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” (RSV)

Reflection: What does it mean to cultivate inner peace in a world that’s burning? I don’t have a neat answer to this question, but I do have a fervent conviction that personal equanimity is not God’s calling in this moment — particularly for white folks like myself. This year we have seen and participated in major protests against prevalent and repeated violence directed toward people of color, but in order for change to truly come, we need to do work far beyond those protests. “No justice, no peace!” cannot just be our public cry; it must be our private creed as well. There may be a time for seeking inward solace for its own sake, but that time is not now.

That said, we are no use to anyone if we become so overwhelmed by the magnitude of the world’s injustice that we remain mired in despair or become numb. So, the task of tending to our inner life is still an essential one, but only insofar as it makes us more useful in healing a shattered world. Far too often, “inner peace” becomes an excuse for spiritual solipsism and a betrayal of the God we serve.

Our relationships are the key to navigating this inherent tension. Immersing ourselves in loving, justice-oriented communities gives us resources to turn to when the weight of public violence becomes too much to carry alone — but they also provide an important source of accountability to ensure that we do not recede into quietism. Indeed, this should not be a surprise: It’s the kind of life Jesus modeled for us. Jesus was deeply intentional about cultivating a peaceful heart amid Roman oppression, but his interpersonal relationships ensured that his prayer, meditation and contemplation did not remove him from communal life. His friends called him to weep over Lazarus; his disciples accompanied him when he destroyed property protesting in the Temple. His loved ones surrounded him as he lay dying on the cross. Christ calls us to the peace found in community — an active peace that thirsts for justice and tends to wounds inflicted in its pursuit of internally and externally overcoming a world of injustice.

Practice for Peacemakers: We can never truly feel the pain of other people. But today, try to be open to the stories of oppression communicated by people who experience less privilege (or different kinds of privilege) than yourself. Listen to and read the testimonies of those who have lost loved ones to hate crimes, police brutality, or to the prison system and mass incarceration. And allow these stories to change you and motivate you to be fully engaged in your community and in the world.

Prayer: God, fill our hearts with a peace that cannot rest while our neighbors are killed. Tend to our hurt without calming our passions. And speak to us through our communities, that we might follow your call into the streets.



The Rev. Ben Perry is the minister of outreach and media strategy at Middle Collegiate Church in New York City. You can follow him on Twitter: [@FaithfullyBP](https://twitter.com/FaithfullyBP)



Friday, September 11

Peace Within

Ritual for a Lifelong Peacemaker

Rev. Richard A. Koenig

Philippians 4:6b

... in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.” (NRSV)

Reflection: Scattered around the grounds of the Chautauqua Institution in southwestern New York State are more than 20 “Peace Poles.” During the summer season, outside the Hall of Missions and across the brick walk from the Hall of Philosophy, people gather daily at one of these Peace Poles at 8:55 a.m. for a five-minute prayer service for peace.

Prayers for peace — made daily — in *five* minutes of ritual: not much time in which to transform a world filled with violent conflict! And yet I think of Bob.

Every summer while at Chautauqua, even into his early nineties, Bob faithfully left the breakfast table to make the walk to participate, adding his presence, his prayers to that daily Peace Prayer. That consistent act, that ritual, was a microcosm of Bob’s whole life, and it continues to remind me of the power that this kind of consistency can bring in driving our individual commitment to peace.

In his role as a high-level denominational executive in the United Church of Christ, Bob had spent his whole life on the front lines, working for peace. Bob worked for civil rights and the anti-war movement in the 1960s, developed Christian Education materials in support of the Women’s Liberation movement, inclusive language and LGBT rights. He traveled to South Africa during the time of apartheid and was fully engaged in the national conversations around peace and justice issues well into the early part of this century. He continued to march against the death penalty for decades past retirement.

Bob was a gentle, thoughtful man, who believed in confronting the principalities and powers of his time nonviolently, with humility, grace, love and a persistence grounded in a theological acceptance of God’s “*peace that passes all understanding*” and in the knowledge that peace is intimately entwined with the divine call to “*let justice roll down like water, and righteousness*

like an everflowing stream.” Bob understood that our “righteousness” before God is about seeking “right relationship” with the Divine Presence, a relationship that brings peace as we also seek justice in a broken world. His whole life was a testimony to that truth. Bob embodied the gospel in his personal, familial, communal and public life in a way that had far-reaching and profound impacts on the lives of those around him, and beyond.

The search for peace is not a “one-time” or momentary thing. Every generation must learn anew how to live lives rooted in the gospel message of the Prince of Peace. It is in a lifelong journey of discipleship that we come to know the justice and peace of God.

Practice for Peacemakers: Take five minutes today to reflect and pray on the needs for peacemaking action in your community and in the world. Take five minutes tomorrow and do the same. As you continue throughout this month-long study, consider whether prayer and ritual may help to empower you to do more in the work for justice and peace.

Prayer: Ever-present God, in our prayers and supplications, renew us for the tasks of peacemaking. Give us the strength, courage and consistency to live into the peace that passes all understanding, our whole lives through. Amen.



The Rev. Richard A. Koenig serves as pastor of North Congregational Church of Woodbury, CT, in the United Church of Christ.



Saturday, September 12

Peace Within

Wrestling with Toxic Masculinity

Rev. Carl Horton

1 Corinthians 13:4–8

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. (NRSV)

Reflection: I recently saw a TV ad for some sort of supplement with the lead line, “Man up, America!” The narrator’s voice had the tone and tenor of a World Wrestling Federation match announcer. “Guys,” he growled, “this is no time to be soft. Maximize your masculinity.”

From an early age, we are the recipients of a societal, slow-drip infusion of messages telling us what we are supposed to be like, look like and act like. Sometimes these messages are like foghorns: blasts of noise intruding in a commercial. More often, though, they are imperceptible and pernicious whispers that seep into our consciousness, needling our sense of self and scratching at the surface of our identities. Over time, their corrosive accumulation can become toxic.

We are in a time of reckoning for the societal structures and norms that have been in place up until now. Call it a shift, an earthquake, or an awakening, but 2020 seems like a socially-distanced “come to Jesus” year. Much of what we have accepted as “normal” is not and should not be “*normative*.” The curtain is being pushed away, the monuments are being pulled down, and power structures of the past are being revealed as fraudulent and certainly not “of God.” If anything, I think we’re being called not to “man up” but to “man down.”

Over time, our understandings of gender are deepening and the ideals of masculinity and femininity are cracking, opening up room for myriad expressions of our true selves. If we maximize anything, let us maximize the peace within that comes from loving ourselves kindly as

the complete persons God has created us to be. Confidence in God’s vision for us goes much farther than any supplement.

Practice for Peacemakers: Consider an aspect of your identity that doesn’t “conform” to societal norms or expectations. Embrace, accept, love and thank God for that “nonconforming” part of yourself.

Prayer: God of love, turn us from conformity toward authenticity and help us love — even ourselves — as you would have us love. Amen.



Carl Horton serves in Louisville, KY, as coordinator of the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program.



Sunday, September 13

Peace in Relationships

Family of Choice

Henry Koenig Stone

John 19:26–27

When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, “Woman, here is your son.” Then he said to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home. (NRSV)

Reflection: When it comes to relationships, we humans are often quick to categorize them, to put them in boxes — as though the relationships of all parents to their children, or all partners to their spouses, or all friends to each other, followed the same patterns.

In some ways, of course, there are important delineations. Children do not have all the same responsibilities that parents do. Clear communication about boundaries between friendship and romance can be important. And adults need to be careful about the lessons they teach and the examples they set for children, in order to help them grow up happily and healthily. But in paying attention to the nuts and bolts of what makes a parent a parent and a friend a friend, it is easy to lose the common thread: proactive nurture.

I love this passage from John because it emphasizes that even as Jesus was being stripped of all the physical ways to be a son, teacher or friend in the traditional senses of the words, he focused on what he could do to help the people around him heal themselves and persist. He knew that, although they were losing him, Mary and John could be a family of choice to each other.

This week, we will reflect on family, on teaching and on relationships more broadly. Different lessons will apply to different situations. But throughout nearly all human interactions, there are opportunities to extend healing and growth.

Practice for Peacemakers: For at least one full day this week, try to imagine that everyone you meet is a member of your immediate family. This doesn’t mean that you necessarily talk to them

differently out loud — you don't need extra access to their time to do this, and your barista isn't suddenly "Cousin Starbucks!" What it *does* mean is that you should treat each interaction with the same intentionality as you would with someone that you'll see every day for the rest of your life. Although this approach may not be practical in the long term, the goal is to practice being aware of the impact that your words and actions have on people at work, in the community and at home.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to remember that we are all members of your beloved family, parts one body in Christ. Inspire us to live out relationships of nurture toward all those whom we call "family," whether they be biological family or family by choice. Amen.



Henry Koenig Stone is the editor for this year's Season of Peace Reflections. An activist and public policy wonk, he has previously served as editor of "*Unbound*" in Louisville, KY, and as associate for young adult social witness to the Advisory Committee for Social Witness Policy.



Monday, September 14

Peace in Relationships

Making Peace as a Child

Suzanne Gangemi

Matthew 5:9

You're blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That's when you discover who you really are, and your place in God's family. ("The Message")

Reflection: Children's Ministry and peacemaking go together like hugs and kisses, like mud puddles and splashing feet. Depending on the context, young children can be very open to new ideas and learning, and they are generally quick to forgive. With guidance and trust, they welcome those who are different, as they become cognizant of their many similarities. Digging a trench in a sandbox is much more fun with a buddy. You don't need to speak the same language or come from the same neighborhood to play a game of chase. Laughter, like tears, is so much better shared.

For the adults that are privileged with the opportunity to be involved in Children's Peacemaking, it is well to remember that it is guaranteed to be an exhilarating, exhausting and enlightening endeavor. It is much easier to teach peace when all the "isms" have not yet been internalized. Each of us (teacher and student alike) needs to know that we are beautiful in the sight of God, but not any more beautiful than our neighbor.

Remembering an almost five-year-old, who told me that she needed to know about "stuff like cooperation and negotiation before I go to kindergarten," I am very aware of the plethora of joys and hopes children discover and share about many things, including peacemaking. After all, children of any race, gender, ability, sexuality or economic position seek the peace of affirmation and love — just like the rest of us older children.

Practice for Peacemakers: Find a stash of crayons in your home or order a box of 64. Collect some paper for your creation. Light a candle, put on some peaceful music and begin. Choose a

crayon and doodle, draw or simply move a crayon across the page with light strokes. Think about the movement of your hand and what an awesome creation it is, while contemplating the wonders of which this color reminds you. Perhaps write words using an orange crayon (pumpkin, fall leaves, a harvest moon, the peace of a campfire). When you are ready, change to another color. Continue until your papers are full or you have run out of crayon colors. Take five deep breaths and say, “Amen!”

Prayer: Amazing God, wrap all of your children in the comfort of peace. Help us imagine and create ways to be a good neighbor. Forgive us when we are quick to judge, and help us muddle through the misinformation we devour. Remind us of the joy of children, and encourage us at all ages to play (maybe with a five-year-old). Amen.



Now retired, Suzanne Gangemi most recently served as director of family life ministry at Mountain Rise UCC in Fairport, NY. Much of her career was focused on building programming centered on helping children to grow into their calling as peacemakers.



Tuesday, September 15

Making Peace in Relationships

Restoring Peace in the Classroom

Rachael Eggebeen

James 1:19

My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry. (NIV)

Matthew 18:15

“If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over.” (NIV)

Reflection: In a middle school classroom, relationships built on respect are the number one predictor of student success. Teachers who prioritize building relationships tend to have students who are more willing to try new skills, and those students tend to have higher test scores. On the other hand, students who do not feel like their teacher supports them will often shut down. At the middle school age, even the slightest indifference can destroy a relationship, whether between two friends or between student and staff member. “Restorative conferences” hosted by school counselors can play a key role in building those relationships effectively, and in rebuilding relationships that may falter over the school year.

This fall, I had an extremely talkative class. If I paused to breathe while giving instructions, my students would start talking. As the first quarter progressed, I knew that something had to change. I was at a point where it seemed like the only ways forward were either applying whole-class punishments or taking the time to build a trusting relationship with each of the talkers. I chose to build relationships.

Each week, I focused on getting to know a new talker. An important part of building the relationship was letting them tell me why they like to talk. In time, they started to understand

when it was appropriate to talk. We devised different methods to remind them of when to be quiet. One student asked that I just say his name and motion to be quiet. Another student, who sat near the front, asked that I simply tap his desk and motion to be quiet. Another student asked that I pull my ear and motion to be quiet.

What does this have to do with restorative conferences — what does that even mean? Well, it means a mediated conversation (in this case, between student and teacher) that gives a chance for two people to clearly and privately express and reconcile their concerns. For example, one student felt picked on because I often called her name and asked her to be quiet. She felt that I was targeting her when others were also talking.

My student asked our counselor to lead a restorative conference with me, and one was scheduled. My student was able to share her feelings. I was able to share that not all redirection is verbal. I asked her to notice where I stand in the classroom (in front or near a student), and I asked her to watch my motions when I was addressing the class.

The counselor asked my student if not talking during instructions was a fair expectation for her and the entire class. The student was able to come to an agreement with me about how I could remind her to not talk during instructions. We agreed that I could call her name and ask her to be quiet. This worked the best, as she sat in the back of the classroom and wanted to know why I was calling her name. We also agreed that I would try to use a lower voice level so it would appear to be a conversation between us and differentiate learning from behavior redirection.

The result of this conversation was immediate. My student still liked to talk, but she was now aware of how I worked to meet the needs of every student. The number of reminders my student needed was reduced over the semester. More importantly, she and I were developing a solid relationship built on respect. In the spring, my student's schedule was changed in a schoolwide reorganization, but she and I would still check in with each other — all because of one restorative conference.

Practice for Peacemakers: When you next come into conflict at the workplace, at church or in school, take a step back before jumping into action. Discern whether there is a space in which you can resolve the conflict constructively. Prepare for this situation by asking yourself: “Is there a trusted third party who can help to mediate and de-escalate the tensions in each of these areas of my life?” If not, keep watch for people with the training and emotional maturity to help perform these vital functions responsibly.

Prayer: Dear God, we give you thanks for good teachers and school counselors. Help us to remember your call to extend grace, even in person-to-person confrontations. Whether as educators, friends, parents or as colleagues, may we be granted the patience to seek common

denominators when disagreements get in the way of communication. In the name of Jesus, our teacher of your Way, Amen.



Rachael Eggebeen has taught middle school social studies for seven years and served as co-chair of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)’s Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP). She is also a member of the PC(USA)’s “Educate a Child” team.



Wednesday, September 16

Making Peace in Relationships

Walking Together on the Path to Peace

Rachel Anderson

Luke 10:1

After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go.

Reflection: Road trip! Travel may be more fun with friends. Facing the unknown may be smoother with a companion. Engaging potential hostilities may be safer with partners. Let's face it: living life in general is often not fun, smooth or safe. Often when we aspire to step into the justice and mercy of God, we find instead discontentment, embarrassment or insecurity. And so, as we do the hard work of building peace in our community and abroad, Jesus calls us into partnership with each other.

Jesus sends his friends out like sheep among wolves, with none of the items that might make us believe we are secure: an emergency fund, a well packed suitcase or our favorite snacks. Instead, he says all we need is another by our side. Within a local congregation, we find the relationships that work for peace. We are a people, individually and communally, who have received God's compassion. As such, we are called to become a people of peace, dedicated to justice. Our congregations provide us practicums in peacemaking. In relationships, we can stand as we cannot on our own.

When Moses stood before Pharaoh, he always stood with another (see Exodus, from chapter 4 onward). When he stood alone and struck the rock, ego got in the way of God's work (Numbers 20). There is comfort in not being alone. But there is more than comfort: there is a space for self-examination and growth. It is in the context of authentic relationships, the sacred space and bond between people, that we are best able to engage our own internal work. Creating and sustaining those honest, challenging relationships is a core way in which the church joins God in transforming us into people of God's peace.

Jesus sends us together.

Practice for Peacemakers: Identify a congregation member or other friend with whom you are willing to share your internal spiritual challenges. Begin praying together at least once a week.

Prayer: Compassionate God, let our relationships create the space for our transformation into people of peace, that we may rededicate ourselves and our communities to be sanctuaries of justice.



Rachel Anderson serves in Louisville, KY, as mission specialist for the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program.



Thursday, September 17

Peace in Relationships

“This Person is a Beloved Child of God!”

Rev. Erin Dickey

1 John 3:2

Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. (NRSV)

Reflection: Growing up in southern Louisiana, and then going to college and seminary in Texas, has led me to become very familiar with the saying, “Bless Your Heart!” You likely know this saying, too. It is often used as a way to express pity for someone — usually with irony. A fellow minister once joked that the “church” version of this is to say to someone, “Oh, they’re a beloved child of God!” when the name or words they’d like to use are far less affirming.

But what if — what if, with every person we met, our first thought about them was a sincere, “*This person is a beloved child of God!*” How would our interactions, our first impressions, our ongoing conversations change if we took the time to say about each person we meet, “This person is a beloved child of God!” As we seek ways to bring about peace in our relationships — our friendships, spouses/partners, colleagues, neighbors and strangers — perhaps one way to begin is by first seeing them as beloved, as a child of God, as someone who shares the peace of Christ.

In a time when we so desperately need the peace of Christ, let us see one another through eyes of compassion, acknowledging that each person we meet, each relationship we nurture and sustain, is part of a covenant with God’s beloved children. When we finally see one another through the lens of God’s perspective, how can we live in anything other than peace?

Practice for Peacemakers: You know what to do! For the next few days, try to start your conversations and meetings with one internal thought: “*This person is a beloved child of God!*” Let that thought peel away initial feelings of resentment and worry, and drive you to interact with the grace and appreciation that is shown to each of God’s children.

Prayer: Dear God, sometimes folks seem so rude, destructive or out of the loop that we can forget their connection to You. Other times, our own biases get in the way. Help us to see past superficial differences, and even past character flaws, to get at the holy potential at the heart of each person we meet. And in so doing, help us to build peace in our relationships with those around us.



The Rev. Erin Dickey serves as senior pastor to Riverside Avenue Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Riverside-Avondale, FL.



Friday, September 18

Peace in Relationships

Practicing Words of Peace

Rev. Martha Koenig Stone

Mark 10:13–16

People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, “Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.” And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them. (NRSV)

Reflection: My mother was a fount of wisdom. Whatever my questions or worries, I could come to her for information and opinions, comfort and challenge. One memory stands out: She often said that “the hardest thing you have to learn is *how to get along with other people.*”

I’ve spent my whole life trying to do that, but like the rest of the world, I have a long way to go. I remember a time when my own children were small: the day had been long, we were all hungry and I was struggling to put supper on the table. I could feel the tension rising as the kids played in the next room, but I didn’t have the energy to go and settle one more argument. I tried to ignore the increasing volume.

Then the angry words began. I don’t remember what it was about, but I remember the desperation I felt. In a last-ditch effort to intervene without leaving the kitchen, I found myself shouting out a phrase they had practiced using at their daycare center: “Kind words and gentle touches!” “*Yeah, right,*” I thought to myself. “*That’s not gonna work.*”

For a moment though, they settled down! I had little hope that the peace would last, but we made it safely to bedtime.

To this day, I am profoundly grateful for the dedicated teachers who nurtured my children, for the tender example they set, and for the habits of respect for others and self-control they cultivated. And I wonder, “What would this world be like if every child had high-quality schools, patient and gracious mentors, plentiful food, safe beds, a vision of a world filled with kindness and gentleness and ample time to practice their peacemaking skills?”

Only when we learn how to live in concert with one another will God's realm of peace be complete. Jesus invites us to sit at his feet with our questions and concerns. Then he sends us out to "practice, practice, practice" the Way of Peace. I'm still working on it.

Action: Think of a time when you experienced a conflict that ended peacefully — with your kids, co-workers, a stranger or perhaps on the world stage. What words were spoken that helped those involved to step back from the brink? How can you apply those words to conflicts in the future?

Prayer: Thank you, God, for letting us kids come and talk with you, and for never giving up on us! Show us how to talk with each other, too, and how to listen better. Give us patience to keep working on getting along, because we're going to need a lot of practice! Amen.



The Rev. Martha Koenig Stone is a UCC pastor who has served local churches for 25 years, currently serving at Henrietta United Church of Christ, near Rochester, NY. She chairs the N.Y. Conference UCC Commission on Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations and co-chairs the UEK Forum, a denominational task force that attends to the UCC's partnership with the Protestant church in Germany. A former foreign-language teacher, she is passionate about work that brings together people of varied ages and backgrounds.



Saturday, September 19

Peace in Relationships

Making Peace with Humility

Thea Koenig Burton

Acts 28:27

*‘For this people’s heart has grown dull,
and their ears are hard of hearing,
and they have shut their eyes;
so that they might not look with their eyes,
and listen with their ears,
and understand with their heart and turn—
and I would heal them.’ (NRSV)*

Reflection: “Have you ever won an argument? Really won an argument: not just worn down the other person to the point where they say, ‘*Fine, you win,*’ but actually changed that person’s mind enough that they agreed with you?”

This was the question from my minister’s sermon last week, and it got me thinking about conflict, where it comes from and how we resolve it. When we argue, it is because we think we are right, and we want to be heard? Perhaps we are afraid of losing control of our own life, or afraid of change. At the same time, we are forgetting that the other person thinks they are right, they want to be heard, and perhaps they are afraid of losing control — afraid of change.

The lyrics from Sondheim’s “Into the Woods” remind us:

*People make mistakes holding to their own, thinking they're alone. Honor their mistakes.
Fight for their mistakes. Everybody makes one another's terrible mistakes. Just
remember: Someone is on your side, someone else is not. While we're seeing our side,
maybe we forgot: They are not alone. No one is alone.*

It’s important, as peacemakers, to have enough humility to remember that we, too, are fallible. When having an argument, what would happen if each person stopped and asked themselves, “What if *I’m* wrong? What if *I* am in need of healing?”

If each of us did that, the argument might cease; a dialogue might begin. When I give up my need to be the arbiter of truth myself, that leaves more room to recognize shared Truth and realize a state of harmony. The motto of our church is, “*You are not alone.*” I think of it both as a comfort and a challenge to remain connected, to name evil when I see it and to keep the dialogue going, knowing that no one is alone.

Practice for Peacemakers: Prepare yourself to be wrong. Sometime in the next few days, it is bound to happen. When it does, don’t shy away from the moment. Embrace your inevitable human fallibility, and let both God’s grace and correction from those around you guide you toward the truth of that moment. Finally, always remember: Doing this once is easy; doing it consistently is a life’s worth of humble learning.)

Prayer: Dear God, we know that there are times when you call us to speak truth to power, and others when you call us to listen and learn. Help us to approach the work of peacemaking with humility, grace and an open mind.



Thea Koenig Burton is a speech-language pathologist, a community theatre actor/director and the founder of the Wolfville Theatre Collective. She has been a contributor to Christian education curriculum for the UCC and the periodical “These Days.” Thea is currently the volunteer children’s Sunday School music/drama facilitator for Orchard Valley United Church, New Minas, Nova Scotia.



Sunday, September 20

Peace in Community

It's War in America

Henry Koenig Stone

Isaiah 58:2–3; 6; 9b–10; 12

² *Yet day after day they seek me
and delight to know my ways,
as if they were a nation that practiced righteousness
and did not forsake the ordinance of their God;
they ask of me righteous judgments,
they delight to draw near to God.*

³ *“Why do we fast, but you do not see?
Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice? ...*

⁶ *Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke? ...*

*If you remove the yoke from among you,
the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil,
¹⁰ if you offer your food to the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,
then your light shall rise in the darkness
and your gloom be like the noonday. ...*

¹² *Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;
you shall raise up the foundations of many generations;
you shall be called the repairer of the breach,
the restorer of streets to live in. (NRSV)*

Reflection: Today’s prayer will take the form of a poem that I wrote in May of 2020, and it requires contextual understanding of a series of events taking place at the time. The extrajudicial execution and murder of George Floyd took place on Memorial Day weekend. This came only weeks after the nighttime home invasion and killing of Breonna Taylor, also by police, in Louisville, KY. By the end of the month, protests against the killing of George Floyd had broken out all across the country — even as a video circulated in which a white woman called the police on a black man *for asking her to please leash her dog*. She told police that he had threatened her life — a blatant lie, and one that instead put *his* life on the line.

Even balanced against the need for quarantine measures to contain the 2020 Covid-19 coronavirus outbreaks that had already claimed nearly 100,000 lives in the U.S. alone, these protests were *necessary*. It is crucial to dispel the illusion that we are already at peace within the United States. This goes beyond the specific issues of guns and policing, to the deeper, consistent reality that there is and has been a state of war between lethally armed white folks, on the one hand, and black victims on the other — going directly back to the lynching tree, which also returned as a tool of violence in California this year. The violence of this war has been celebrated, at times, by white supremacists marching openly. At others, it has been tacitly supported through the ever-present dog whistles of “those protesters are just thugs” or “well, he should have done XYZ differently [if he wanted to not get shot]. He had it coming.”

If we are truly to make peace in America, we must acknowledge the scope of this violence and take measures at every level of society — spoken word, raised sign, passed law and risked life — to stop these killings from continuing. The fact that God chooses for us is to “*undo the thong of the yoke*” that our society still binds to Black America, and let God’s oppressed people — finally — walk free from fear of unjust persecution.

Practice for Peacemakers: This week, we focus on building peace in community. Start by rereading Isaiah 58, and interpreting this harsh and yet hopeful Word of God as it applies to the United States of America. Then, throughout the week, reflect on the meaning, method, and necessity of public protest in order to reach a state of justice and peace. When violence next repeats itself, will you bear witness to the change that must come?

Prayer:

Peace is not achieved when you stop hurting.
Peace is not a victory won from the inside.
The protest-lines for peace are drawn up in your soul, for sure
But they will always be there if you choose to hide.

Peace does not come to those who ask—not for free

It takes a greater sacrifice than war.
As every Power is violent, every Principality
Is strangling Justice beside “Others” and “the Poor.”

There is no peace between those with all and nothing
Nor even when the conflict seems subdued
The status quo of domination, in its enduring
Perpetuates the Great Lie behind each smaller ruse.

Peace is not achieved while “they” are hurting.
Peace has not been won through some past fight.
There is no peace, absent justice: in practice and *de jure*
to make peace is to care, repent, repair — and to make right.



Author: Henry Koenig Stone is the editor for this year’s Season of Peace Reflections. An activist and public policy wonk, he has previously served as editor of “*Unbound*” in Louisville, KY, and as associate for young adult social witness to the Advisory Committee for Social Witness Policy.



Monday, September 21

Peace in Community

“Good Neighbors” Don’t Stay Quiet

Simon Doong

Luke 10:27; 36–37

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” ...

“Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” [Jesus asked]. He [the lawyer] said, “The one who showed him mercy.”

Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.” (NRSV)

Reflection: “Love your neighbor as yourself” may appear the simplest, and seemingly most obvious commandment for us as Christians. We like to assume that our faith is built on the foundation of love. Yet, in practice we often forget this commandment when the going gets tough, particularly when it comes to standing up to injustice.

When there is a mass shooting, we talk about how tragic the event is and then let it fade into the back of our conscience until the next incident of gun violence. When a black man is brutalized, or even killed by police, we say how terrible it is and how wrong that particular officer was. Then we move on. When a friend of ours says something about a particular group of people that is insensitive at best or downright racist at worst, we shrug our shoulders and look away, unwilling to engage in an uncomfortable and possibly heated conversation.

Jesus teaches that being a good neighbor takes more than friendliness and goodwill. In the story of the Good Samaritan, he points out the true challenge of being a good neighbor — and that we cannot simply assume we are one. Helping to heal the wounds inflicted on God’s children requires more-than-normal care, mercy, financial commitment and follow-up. It also requires listening and allowing those in our community who are suffering to give voice to their pain. It requires us to take action. And we are to do this without expecting anything in return.

If we allow our neighbors to experience injustices of gun violence, police brutality, racism or limited access to necessary resources, and *do nothing*, we fail in our calling to love our neighbors and our community as ourselves. So long as we fail to take action to correct these systemic issues

— leaving God’s children on the side of the road, we fail at our call to be peacemakers as Christians.

When we allow one member of our community to suffer physically at the hands of injustice, we all suffer spiritually. We are one in the community of the Spirit.

Practice for Peacemakers: The next time you look at the news app on your phone or watch news on TV, remind yourself that every person on that screen is a part of God’s community. Pray for them. If you see injustice at work in your own community, do some research. Look into the specifics of the situation, as well as the larger systemic issue that situation represents. Then join a local group working to address that issue.

Prayer: God of Peace, give us the strength to speak up and stand up when our siblings suffer. Grant us the courage to engage in difficult conversations. And most importantly, help us to listen to each other. Amen.



Simon Doong served as a Young Adult Volunteer (YAV) in South Korea (2016–2017) and in New York City (2017–2018). He is currently a mission specialist for the Peacemaking Program of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). His recent work includes a webinar series on how faith communities can address gun violence, “[Standing Our Holy Ground.](#)”



Tuesday, September 22

Peace in Community

Prayer Calls us to Reconcile and Repair

Rev. Dr. Ruby Wilson

Matthew 5:23–24

“Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother [your sister] has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.” (“Berean Study Bible”)

Reflection: Our busy lives tend to distract us from doing what is right. Prayer is a critical discipline we can engage in to move toward peace in community. Time in prayer, time at the altar, must be a priority in our lives — especially prayer that calls us to fix things which we have left broken. The ancient prayer moans and groans that *“we have left undone those things which we ought to have done; And we have done those things which we ought not to have done; And there is no health in us.”* John’s third letter to the beloved Gaius opens with the words: *“Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, just as it is well with your soul”* (3 John 1:2).

The time to pray, meditate and be still offers us a blessed opportunity to remember. We remember to be grateful, give thanks, praise God and worship our Creator. But this is all for naught if we fail to reconcile with someone who has something against us. We cannot experience the soul-filled joys of good health, as individuals or in community, if there is a wedge between our souls and our Savior. We cannot find peace in community if we are unable to bridge the gaps of human-made labels, with all the “-isms” and schisms that keep us separated and divided. When we remove ourselves from the cares of this life, even for a little while, to spend time with our Creator in that sacred space, God’s Spirit offers us time to make things right with God. That sweet and sacred time, punctuated with God’s power, also awakens the call in us to make it right with others.

When we practice peace in community, then community becomes a place where friendships can flourish, where common identity can be forged, where common pursuit is possible, and where our individual and communal aspirations can be achieved.

Practice for Peacemakers: Be intentional today about reconciling with family members, with neighbors, and even with those in your local and global communities you may be connected to on social media.

Prayer: Dear God, we ask for the power to love, to love using all that you have equipped us with to love you — with all of our hearts, souls, minds and strength. Give us the power to embrace our divine love of self, a necessary step in following the teaching that we must love our neighbors as we love ourselves. And though this is tough, give us the power to love our enemies, even those who exploit us on every hand. Teach us to pray. Teach us to practice prayer in our community, empowering us to share your love with all whom we meet, each and every day. Amen.



The Rev. Dr. Ruby Wilson is senior pastor of Safe Haven UCC and was recently elected president of the UCC N.Y. Conference’s Metro Association. She serves on the New York Conference UCC Commission on Ecumenism and Interfaith Relations, and is also the founder and executive director of JasD’Jor: Emerging Philanthropists, a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping families of special needs children and training children to use their gifts and talents for service to the world.



Wednesday, September 23

Peace in Community

A Community of Mentorship

Rev. Dr. Annika Stroope

Leviticus 19:33-34; 24:22

“When the foreigner resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress them. The foreigner who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God. ... ‘You are to have the same law for the foreigner and the native-born. I am the Lord your God.’” (NIV)

Reflection: Human beings have a natural instinct to identify ourselves not only by who we *are*, but also by who we are *not*. But although this instinct is natural, it is not always helpful in the context of making peace. A key spiritual discipline for people of faith is to see another person as a child of God, beloved by God, just as we are. This spiritual discipline disrupts the human instinct to identify ourselves by who we are not.

Scripture carries this tension. Portions of scripture witness to human beings engaged in war, genocide, prejudice and separation. Portions of scripture also witness to human beings crossing borders and boundaries, holding religious customs to the test of love, and Christ’s witness to see everyone as God sees God’s beloved creation.

Each week on Tuesday evenings at Central Presbyterian Church in Des Moines, Iowa, mentors who are members of the congregation, as well as medical students from Des Moines University, gather as mentors for a reading program. The mentees are children of families who came to Iowa as refugees from Sudan. Mentees speak Arabic at home with their families and worship in Arabic at First Arabic Presbyterian Church on Des Moines’ near west side.

Most of the mentors are from the “Baby Boom” generation and have roots in the Midwest. Pairs of mentors and mentees have been together for several years. They know one another’s family members and the names of pets. They have inside jokes from reading chapter after chapter of the youth novels whose main character is called “Captain Underpants.” Mentors and mentees eat supper together, prepared by volunteers from Central.

The Holy Spirit is present in the peacemaking that is the partnership between each mentor and mentee. The students’ young minds are molded by the acceptance and affirmation of the mentors. The mentors’ minds — no matter how many chronological years they have — are

molded by the interaction and growth that they witness in their mentees. Without the intentional choice to create a space for these interactions, this growth could never take place.

Action: As we approach World Communion Sunday, ask yourself: Is there a neighbor with whom you have been reticent to connect? Allow the inspiration of World Communion Sunday's bold and inclusive spirit to guide you to make a connection.

Prayer: Gracious God of our whole lives, we lift our praise and thanks to you. Guide our looking inward and our reaching out. May we be peacemakers within ourselves, that we may be peacemakers in your world. In Christ's inclusive love, Amen.



The Rev. Dr. Annika Stroope is interim mission co-worker for Our Sister Parish, a partnership between a congregation in Iowa and the Pastoral House in Berlin, El Salvador. She also serves as parish associate for adult education and mission at Central Presbyterian Church in Des Moines, IA.



Thursday, September 24

Peace in Community

“No Justice, No Peace!”

Rev. Dr. Geoffrey Black

Jeremiah 6:14

They have treated the wound of my people carelessly, saying, “Peace, peace,” when there is no peace. (NRSV)

Reflection: I can remember the first time I heard the words justice and peace linked together. While participating in an anti-police brutality demonstration in New York City in the mid-1980s, I heard the other demonstrators begin to chant, “No Justice, No Peace!” One could hear the chant two ways, as I did later when reflecting on the day. (The second way to hear it, of course, is, “Know Justice, Know Peace!”)

The mantra, “No Justice, No Peace” describes the reality of community life in the United States as it has been since colonial days, through the American Revolution and into the present, because of the persistence of injustice. Enslavement and genocide are grave injustices. America has not come to terms with either. Each has only been compounded by the history of segregation, mass incarceration, lynching, impoverishment and economic exploitation.

It is true that over the course of American history we have lived through wars. We have reached the cessation of hostilities at home and abroad. Yet we have not known peace. At the end of each of these great tragedies, we only return to the context of American injustice, which thrives in communities throughout the United States.

Most recently, a spate of police murders of African American men and women in communities spread as far apart as Louisville, Ky.; Minneapolis, Minn.; and Brunswick, Ga., highlights the truth that racist violence is not only in our past, but remains a present reality. Because there is no justice in American community life, there is no peace. As communities, we deceive ourselves when we pretend that because violence, death and destruction are not at our doorsteps, there is peace.

Here I am speaking of peace as the holistic Biblical shalom, which is at the heart of Just Peace theology and the vision of the Just Peace church. Shalom is a much fuller understanding of peace

than simply the end of conflict. Shalom is the communal expression of wholeness, healing, righteousness, equality, fairness and justice working together synergistically.

When we hear the chant as “Know Justice, know Peace,” the chant becomes proscriptive, informing us that it is only when we know justice, engage justice and create just social conditions that we can know shalom, which is the fullest expression of peace. This can be understood as a way forward out of the abyss of racially inspired violence and racial injustice in its many manifestations throughout the United States.

People of color, African Americans, Indigenous/Native American people, Hispanic Americans and Asian American people are determined to struggle against racism and racial injustice. If nothing else, to do so is simply an expression of our humanity. However, the realization of peace in American communities requires that Euro-Americans become equally committed partners in that struggle.

Only then will peace, a “*just* peace,” be possible.

Practice for Peacemakers: Today’s practice for peacemakers is to not let words get in the way of justice. Sometimes there may be a tempting excuse to hear the chants and to say, “They’re doing this the wrong way! That doesn’t speak to me!” But it is much more helpful to identify injustice and find meaning in the actions that are already being taken to remedy it.

Prayer: Gracious and loving God, we thank you for showing us the way to peace and for inspiring us with a vision of your shalom and your beloved community. We pray that you would grant us wisdom and courage to engage in the struggle faithfully for a just peace. Amen.



The Rev. Dr. Geoffrey Black served as conference minister of the UCC's New York Conference for nine years beginning in 2000. He was elected general minister and president of the United Church of Christ in 2009, and served in that position until 2015.



Friday, September 25

Peace in Community

Revisiting Prison

Adam Stone

Matthew 25:37–40

“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’” (NRSV)

Reflection: As a public defender, I frequently encounter parts of the legal system that are irresponsible barriers to justice. One of the reasons so few people take on this work is that in many of these cases, even a good lawyer has a hard time protecting their clients from unjust sentencing.

In Iowa, simple possession of marijuana, *first offense*, is a “serious misdemeanor,” punishable by up to 180 days in jail and a \$1,000 fine. If the defendant has been convicted of possession of a different controlled substance, or in other ways violated the controlled substance statute in the past, other sentencing enhancements can apply, such as the “habitual offender enhancement,” making the mere possession of marijuana punishable by up to 15 years in prison or more.

That is *insane* — especially for a drug that hurts society less than cigarettes or alcohol. These sentences are employed almost exclusively against people of color, although whites use marijuana at a similar rate, which means that there are far more white users of marijuana, overall.

The debate over legalization is heated, and it would need to be accompanied by significant regulation. However, it strikes me as an obvious step to reduce simple possession of marijuana to the lowest possible level, a “simple misdemeanor,” and to keep all other drug possession charges to one level higher, “serious misdemeanor,” regardless of the number of offenses. At any level of

punishment, only providing access to care centers and treatment is going to produce any good, healing results.

We should also eliminate the “habitual offender enhancement” from felony drug possession cases and other nonviolent property crimes. In Iowa, if you have been convicted of two or more felonies, and are convicted of another felony, the minimum punishment you can receive is an indeterminate term of incarceration not to exceed 15 years, with a mandatory three years before parole.

Prosecutors regularly charge defendants with multiple felonies and then attempt to apply the habitual offender enhancement to each one. For example: a guy commits seven acts of forgery, and in so doing, steals about \$1,500 from a bank. He has previously been convicted of two or more felonies. The prosecutor charges him with seven class D felonies, each punishable by up to five years in jail, and then applies the habitual offender enhancement to each. Each charge is now punishable by up to 15 years in prison, for a total of 105 years, with 21 years mandatory before parole eligibility. This, too, is crazy. Life in jail does not fit the crime of stealing \$1,500, but this happens every single day. It is in the process of happening to one of my clients as I write this reflection.

Prison is not a tool of peace, and should be a place of last resort — a place for violent offenders, and offenders who commit inherently evil, “*malum in se*” crimes, and others who pose a direct and appreciable threat to the others. It should not be a repository for the mentally ill, which it currently is, nor be a mechanism for oppressing Black America, *which it also currently is*.

Demons within this system of “justice” are legion. Cash bail laws put impoverished people in jail without a trial. Racially profiled traffic stops, ostensibly done for trivial reasons like having too much dirt on a license plate, are not just. The overwhelming power of prosecutors leads to disparate treatment across the system, and a shortage of prosecutors of color contributes to this bias. District court judges need to stop bending over backwards to justify police conduct, stop doing lip service to the warrant requirement, and actually apply the law of the Fourth Amendment, strictly. And racial sensitivity training, substance abuse education and poverty simulations should be required for all prosecutors, every year that they practice.

Practice for Peacemakers: Today, remember God’s children that are imprisoned and in jail. Consider giving to The Bail Project, which pays bail for those being held without a trial, or to an organization that provides resources to people recently released from prison. Alternatively, join or start a prison ministry organization through your church and live out the Matthew 25 call to visit God in jail.

Prayer: Dear God, we know that your justice is restorative, not retributive. Help us to heal our flawed institutions, and not forget those whom we have cast into prison. And help us to heal our nation, so that one day we may be — and feel — equal under the law.



Adam Stone is a lawyer and public defender who serves the communities in and around Des Moines, IA. He lives in Des Moines with his partner Melissa and their two children.



Saturday, September 26

Peace in Community

On Being Open and Affirming

Rev. Jason Boyd

Micah 6:6a, 8

“With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high? ... [God] has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (NRSV)

Reflection: Somewhat recently, the number of churches in the United Church of Christ that have adopted an Open and Affirming covenant surpassed 1,600. This is a long way from when the first churches did so, nearly 40 years ago. But, even as some progress has been made in making a more just world for LGBTQ persons, we must continue to ask ourselves, “What does it mean to be Open and Affirming?”

The first thing it means is that a congregation has made a specific welcome of LGBTQ persons. There are very few churches that do not proclaim some form of words like, “All are welcome here.” That doesn’t cut it. LGBTQ people have learned, often the hard way, that this doesn’t really mean them. LGBTQ folks have come to understand, through lived experience and through the relentless bigotry practiced in society and in so many churches, that, “All,” in practice, rarely means “Yes! YOU! You are welcome here!”

Being Open and Affirming also means that a congregation has taken the time to study itself, unpack where any anti-LGBTQ prejudices may exist, and work to eliminate them. Intentional emotional and spiritual injury of LGBTQ people inflicted by churches is real, and is a sin for which many churches still need to repent. Eliminating and repenting of homophobia, transphobia, queerphobia — all the phobias of gender and identity — are necessary processes for there to be a state of peace in God’s beloved community. To really be Open and Affirming is to recognize this, and to provide a safe place where LGBTQ people are embraced and celebrated as God made them, lifted up as the holy and beloved children of God that they are.

Being Open and Affirming means, well, just that — affirming who God made LGBTQ people to be, and rejoicing in the beauty and joy of God’s creation. It is making the church a place of love and justice, and affirming God’s creation of LGBTQ people as a part of God’s gift of love.

Practice for Peacemakers: If you are a member of an Open and Affirming, More Light, or other church with an “LGBTQ-friendly” commitment, take the time to go back through the checklists of that commitment. Is your church ready to celebrate when an LGBTQ member or visitor gets married, no matter who their partner may be? Is your church ready to follow the leadership of LGBTQ members in local Pride events? Are your study groups comfortable with discussing issues of gender and identity, learning and self-improving inclusive language, and maintaining a safe space for honest self-portrayal? If, in discerning where your church’s comforts and discomforts lie, you discover consistent hang-ups or limits to welcome, then it may be time to start again from the beginning and follow the process of learning to truly be a welcoming space.

Prayer: God of the rainbow, we give you thanks for all your creation, and ask your blessings on us as we strive to love one another as Christ loved us. Strengthen us on this ongoing journey of making Earth as it is in heaven. Amen.



The Rev. Jason Boyd is senior pastor of Henrietta United Church of Christ in Henrietta, NY. He has served churches in a number of states, previously worked in higher education for more than 20 years and is a proud Schnauzer parent.



Sunday, September 27

Making Peace in the World

Eyes That Open to New Paths for Peace

Henry Koenig Stone

Psalm 2:1–3

*Why do the nations conspire,
and the peoples plot in vain?
The kings of the earth set themselves,
and the rulers take counsel together,
against the Lord and his anointed, saying,
“Let us burst their bonds asunder,
and cast their cords from us.” (NRSV)*

Reflection: This week, we reflect on the tools needed for peacemaking in the world, as well as on the tools that are overused and ineffective.

The first and greatest tool for peacemaking is love: the kind of radical love that welcomes strangers into your home, that shows mercy to those you name your “enemy,” and that brings the courage to take risks for peace. As the saying goes, “Do I not defeat my enemies, when I turn them into friends?” A second tool is organization: relationships cultivated over time. Building up trust and mechanisms to build economic and political support beams for peace can be the source of much in the way of stability and reconciliation in the world at large. A third tool is humility: acknowledging the blind spots within our own assumptions and limited expertise. While this is sometimes a frustrating thing to do, it can allow us to better serve the needs of people, which may be very different from our own needs. We must remember that *we, too* are in need of an introduction to God’s peace.

In a world of fear and division, the temptation is always to be drawn to the power of domination over “Others” — whether we define people as Other by their skin, their language, aspects of their

identity or their chosen mode of faith. Too often, the first response we reach for when we are afraid is a violent one — a military crackdown to assert our own power and authority to police the world. But, barring very rare circumstances, diplomacy and multilateral international relations are more likely to lead to peaceful outcomes in the long run. God reminds us that, in the end, there is no lasting security that comes from force; the “conspiracies of the nations” are all in vain. The path of domination leads only to anger, suffering and violence. And so, instead, we are called to take our refuge in God — to trust in the call to honest witness in the world, to justice internationally, and, gradually, to a state of *shalom/salaam* between all peoples.

Practice for Peacemakers: This week, allow your assumptions about conflict to be challenged. Strive to see moments of contention as practice for peacemaking in your own life, and consider ways in which conflict de-escalation could be given greater priority in U.S. foreign policy.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to see the work of peacemaking through your eyes of love and understanding. May we not see an “Other” at the far side of the negotiating table, but instead be aware of the communion that is to exist between all of your children, regardless of ethnicity, geography or creed.



Henry Koenig Stone is the editor for this year’s Season of Peace Reflections. An activist and public policy wonk, he has previously served as editor of “*Unbound*” in Louisville, KY., and as associate for young adult social witness to the Advisory Committee for Social Witness Policy.



Monday, September 28

Peace in the World

Courageous Peacemaking

Gay Harter

Hebrews 13:1–2

Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing so some have entertained angels without knowing it.

Reflection: In the 1990s I was the director of a small nonprofit organization that supported asylum seekers who were detained by the immigration authorities. Before the era of Homeland Security, it was known as the “INS,” but many of its practices were the same as those of ICE today. Asylum seekers could be released to the care of our organization once they had legal representation. In practice, that meant that an INS officer would call me to say that “Ahmed,” “Henry” or “Emmanuel” would be on the sidewalk outside the detention center in 30 minutes. Usually I had met them a few weeks earlier through visits to the detention center for Bible Study or worship.

These young men came from the conflict zones and dictatorships of the world: Iran, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Zaire. They were often minorities in their countries and had harrowing tales to tell of persecution and escape. They came to live at our house until they had work permits and could survive in the larger community.

The above verse from Hebrews was my guide in this ministry, and indeed we entertained many angels. There were risks involved. I had to make decisions about treatment for mental illness, involve the police in a stabbing, and confront my own inability to help in some situations. But the love, joy knowledge that were brought to me far outweighed those risks. I was taken into the hearts and lives of people from many different cultures and religions, and they were given a peaceful introduction to the country that would become their new home.

Peacemaking involves trusting the stranger, sometimes on the basis of very little knowledge, and sometimes at the risk of both personal and national security. Peacemaking involves heart-opening curiosity about the lives and beliefs of others. It involves shedding the mentality of exceptionalism to which we Americans are so prone. But it brings messages of wisdom, love and gratitude that are lasting.

Practice for Peacemakers: Make the courageous choice to welcome the stranger. Your church can help host an asylum-seeking family, or you can connect with a local organization that does refugee placements yourself. There are many ways to extend grace to those who are finding their way in a strange land for the first time.

Prayer: Great Being, who has created all of us humans, open our hearts to each other that we may dare to risk the peacemaking to which you call us. Amen.



Gay Harter is a retired social worker. She spent the last years of her career as director of the Refugee Immigration Ministry in Boston, MA. She is a member of First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, in Guilford, CT, and co-founder of the UCC Palestine Israel Network.



Tuesday, September 29

Peace in the World

Building Peace, Not “Peacekeepers”

Rev. Dr. Ruby Wilson

Philippians 4:7

And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Reflection: The peace of God is nothing like the peace that the world understands and gives. Jesus told his disciples, “*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives*” (John 14:27). The peace that comes from the world, to pull from a Tracy Chapman song, calls “missiles — peacekeepers.” In crises, to some, police and military presence may provide a sense of comfort far more than the presence of a priest.

The world is dangerous. Our conflicting and competing loyalties keep us mired in combat, fighting to the death over our little pools, puddles and ponds. We guard them ferociously, lest anyone deign to believe they are entitled to any piece of them. Yeah, Tracy Chapman’s question is right: “Why are missiles called peacekeepers when they are aimed to kill?” That is “peace” as the world gives it; like the era of Pax Romana, “Roman peace,” where order was maintained by the vigilant efforts of a heavy military and police presence. It is in contrast with all this military might that Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers” (Matthew 5:9a).

Practicing peace in the world has absolutely nothing to do with having the strongest army, the most aggressive police force, or the bully brand name of *superpower*. God’s peace has nothing to do with ammunition or the manipulation and fabrication used to control creation. We are too finite to even attempt to comprehend God’s peace.

But we can learn to practice peace in a number of ways. One such practice comes from my mother, the late Mother Dovetta Wilson, who taught her nine children to “lend a hand whenever and wherever you can.” Another comes from my father, the late Deacon David Wilson, Sr., who

taught us to “always give something back, to build health and strong people and communities.” A third practice for peace in the world is to *remember that love is a verb*. I believe the King James translators got it right when they translated the Greek word ἀγάπη (agape) as “charity” (1 Corinthians 13).

Love is not only something to feel. Practicing peace in the world through acts of charity, mercy and grace are all expressions of the love called for by our God. In a world full of domination and violence, these acts of love are radical. But oh, how sweet the loving communion when we are made right with God and have made peace with others! There is nothing that can compare.

Practice for Peacemakers: Listen to Tracy Chapman’s “Why?” and consider the radical changes in perspective that are needed to build peace. This week, be conscious of the times in which your language plays into the assumptions of military dominance and violent, so-called justice.

Prayer: Dear God, we know that our practicing of peace means a willingness to be made vulnerable by loving and being compassionate toward one another. We know that your peace surpasses our understanding of how the world works. Instead of violence and the supremacy of power, you offer love. Help us to cast away the worship of power, to keep ourselves from being polluted by the violence of the world, and instead to accept the religion to which you call us: to look after orphans and widows in their distress, to extend mercy and love to our “enemies,” and to acknowledge the grace that you extend to all. Amen



The Rev. Dr. Ruby Wilson is senior pastor of Safe Haven UCC, and was recently elected president of the UCC N.Y. Conference’s Metro Association. She serves on the New York Conference UCC Commission on Ecumenism and Interfaith Relations, and is also the founder and executive director of JasD’Jor: Emerging Philanthropists, a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping families of special needs children and training children to use their gifts and talents for service to the world.



Wednesday, September 30

Peace in the World

Let Peace and Justice Begin with Us

Rev. Michael Neuroth

Psalm 85:10

Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other. (NRSV)

Reflection: One of my most cherished memories from my childhood is standing at the piano, singing with my grandmother. Usually my uncle would be at the piano while my “Nanni” would pick the songs and dance around the room, prodding each of us to sing along. She loved show tunes, but her favorite song was “Let There Be Peace on Earth” written by Jill Jackson-Miller and Sy Miller in 1955. It is a powerful song with a beautiful crescendo of commitment to “take each moment, and live each moment, in peace eternally.” It still gives me goosebumps when I remember belting out that refrain as a young boy.

While I still appreciate the song for its beauty and its inspiration to seek peace, the line “let peace begin with me” now rings somewhat hollow for me. Although peace includes transforming our own minds and hearts, too often the work for peace ends there. It isn’t enough for us to think about peace or sing about peace. As we see in Psalm 85:10, building a “Just Peace” involves relationship and connection. We are called to engage the other and unite peace with justice (“righteousness” and “justice” both come from the Greek word *δικαιοσύνη*) not at arm’s length, but closely. Building peace is not a solo act. It begins in relationship, and it cannot be sought independently from the struggle for justice in community. Peace must be active, applied, engaged — we must *wage* peace. Peace begins with *us*, and it begins through justice.

Through the years, I have interacted with some incredible people and organizations working to build peace. I have met with Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) in Hebron, Justapaz staff in Colombia, and Nonviolent Peaceforce Unarmed Protectors in Iraq. What inspires me most about their work is their engagement — the relationships they have cultivated, in communities and with people experiencing conflict, as they step into the fray. These peace *builders* risk

experiencing violence by drawing close in order to expose the injustice, address trauma and seek reconciliation through the vision of Just Peace.

Although not all of us are called to work in these settings, I do believe that we all must be willing to more closely connect our hope for peace to deeper engagement with one another and our communities.

Practice for Peacemakers: Take time today to learn more about the many organizations working to build peace in conflict areas around the world. Look for their stories of engagement and accompaniment. See how you can get involved directly and support their work financially. Further, see how you can build peace in your own relationships and community through deeper connections.

Prayer: God, help us live into our vow to be peacemakers. Let us be drawn toward one another and be willing to risk for peace. Let your Just Peace reign on Earth. Let it begin now. Let it start here. Let it begin with *us*. Amen.



Rev. Michael Neuroth serves as the United Church of Christ's policy advocate for international issues in the Washington, D.C. office. An ordained minister, Michael advocates on a wide range of international peace, human rights and economic justice issues reflected in UCC policy. Michael holds master's degrees in divinity, theology and social work from Princeton Seminary and Rutgers University. He lives on Capitol Hill with his wife, Amber, and their two boys.



Thursday, October 1

Peace in the World

Peacemaking Demands Justice, Not Domination

Ron Stone

Luke 14:31–2; 19:41–2

“Or what King, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able ... to oppose the one who comes against him ... ? If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace....

As he came near and saw the city [Jerusalem], he wept over it, saying, “If you, even you had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace!” (NRSV)

Reflection: As the Peacemaking Program celebrates its 40th anniversary, it is good to remember that it grew out of concerns about American foreign policy. The Peacemaking Program’s Founding Document was prepared in the optimism for peacemaking of Advent, 1979. However, the General Assembly’s adoption of “*Peacemaking: the Believer’s Calling*” in 1980 was followed by an election that led to a massive armament program. Since that time, American policy has repeatedly utilized superior armaments and the threat of nuclear weapons to dominate others. It is time to come to terms with the fact that U.S. foreign policy has long emphasized domination over peacemaking.

Over the years, diplomacy of the sort that Luke calls for has saved us from many wars and even reduced our nuclear arsenals. But developments in the Middle East and our own shortsightedness have drawn us into unending struggles in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan and Iran, even though we know wars in Asia, with its multitudes of unknown religions and folkways, are not good projects for the U.S. We need to sit down and negotiate with our present and our potential enemies.

Peace for Jerusalem is as far away as it was for Jesus, and as it has been for the United States. Christian faith has done little for peace in Jerusalem. Neither Jerusalem nor the United States has known much peace during the last 100 years. The preceding 400 years for the Americas was full of wars against indigenous peoples, and the 20th century was a cataclysm of war. The future of

peace for Jerusalem requires, as Jesus said, negotiations for the terms of peace. Following Jesus means real terms of peace, however, not domination by a U.S.-supported government. Terrorism arises from any context of occupation, domination and enforced poverty — not simply from fanaticism. To truly be peacemakers in Israel-Palestine, leaders must work toward justice for Israelis and Palestinians alike.

Practice for Peacemakers: Peacemaking by the Church takes work from the ground up. If your church does not yet have a peacemaking committee, create one to discuss issues of witness and foreign policy. This committee can report to session for education and a call to action in the form of public witness, protest or other calls for peace.

Prayer: Jesus, may our church become a supporter of peacemaking in a violent world, learning from you and binding us together in real community actions. Amen.



After 40 years of college, university and seminary teaching, Ron Stone (right) as The John Witherspoon Professor of Christian Ethics at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary in 2005. In the 1970s, he was one of the writers for “Peacemaking: the Believer’s Calling,” and he wrote or edited another two dozen books on social ethics, foreign policy, peacemaking and particularly on the work and thought of Paul Tillich and Reinhold Niebuhr.



Friday, October 2

Peace in the World

Liberty and Justice for All

Rev. Dr. Marvin McMickle

Amos 5:23-24

“Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream.” (NRSV)

Reflection: I am reflecting on justice, long before you will read it, and wonder whether we will remember the intensity of this moment.

I am reflecting on justice while people across the United States and around the world are filling the streets, in outrage following the death of George Floyd, who was murdered when a Minneapolis police officer pressed his knee into Floyd’s neck for eight minutes and 46 seconds. Part of what is fueling those protests are the deaths of Ahmaud Arbery, who was shot and killed in Brunswick, Ga., while jogging, and Breonna Taylor, who was shot eight times and killed by police officers when they burst into her apartment in Louisville, Ky., in a case of mistaken identity. What meaning can peacemaking possibly have in such a circumstance — other than to unravel these patterns of violence and replace injustice with justice?

I am reflecting on justice only days after the president of the United States instructed his attorney general to clear the streets of peaceful protesters, which was done by the use of tear gas, rubber bullets, mounted police and police batons used to push people from Lafayette Park. This was done so the president could stand in front of a church he did not enter and hold up a Bible from which he did not read! God will have none of such noise and melodies.

But, if you listen to and remember the chants that have risen from the streets of this country, you will hear what justice means. Justice means the full enforcement of the provision of the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which guarantees “equal protection under the law.” Justice means the full embrace of the language of the Pledge of Allegiance’s promise of “liberty and justice for all.” Justice means not only living up to the language in the Declaration of Independence that “all men are created equal,” but also agreeing that the promise extends to men, women, nonbinary people, and indeed to all people, regardless of creed, color or identity.

Justice is necessary for peace.

As we consider making peace in the world, we must remember too that the wider world has wisdom for peacemaking that applies to us. The United States, just like ancient Israel, is guilty of ignoring its own foundational laws that were designed to create a just and equitable society. Even as we may protest and boycott systems of oppression and apartheid in the world, we must have the humility to accept similar judgment.

Justice and peace cannot come, at home or abroad, unless we live up to our highest ideals of equality and self-improvement. In order to build peace, it is time that we do justice.

Practice for Peacemakers: Consider the ways in which self-glorification gets in the way of justice in your life, and in the life of our country as a force for or against peace. Reread the Declaration of Independence (or the Bill of Rights, or another founding document) and reflect on the aspirations and the failures of the vision for justice at that point in time. Where have we failed to realize the vision's original potential, and where have we moved that vision forward? Write down your thoughts and share them with others in your church or community, asking them to do the same. Then use those thoughts as a starting point in your local activism.

Prayer: Dear God, as we strive to be peacemakers in your world, remind us to listen. Let us not sing songs of self-praise, but instead let your justice roll over us like an ever-flowing stream, guiding us on a path that washes away the structures and systems which hold injustice in place.



Now retired and living happily in Shaker Heights, OH, the Rev. Dr. Marvin McMickle served for many years in different roles: as president, as professor of African American religious studies, and as director of the Doctor of Ministry Program at Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School.



Saturday, October 3

Peace in the World

Rooting for China

Randall Stone

Matthew 5:9

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” (NRSV)

Reflection: To many, China has become a disquieting word within American political and economic discourse. Pundits and politicians worry about the time, coming soon, when the U.S. economy will no longer be the largest on the planet. Some analysts point to historical parallels, suggesting that war is likely during a power transition. Presidential candidates charge each other with being “soft” on China, as they once did in reference to the Soviet Union. Indeed, China offers a troubling image as a repressive regime that tramples the rights of ethnic groups and citizens of Hong Kong, and that is becoming more belligerent towards its neighbors. Avoiding violent conflict with China may not be easy, but it is essential.

Peacemaking requires hard work, starting with a shift in perspective that takes us away from *realpolitik* and focuses instead on shared goals and the necessary conditions to achieve those goals. To start: it’s important to remember that *the world needs China*. China will be an essential partner in current and future struggles with climate change and infectious diseases. The dynamism and innovation of the world economy depend on engaging the talents of all of the world’s people, which requires open markets and the exchange of ideas. There are no attractive future scenarios without peaceful coexistence with China.

Second, the alternative to China becoming the largest economy in the world *is to keep one-fifth of the world’s population in permanent poverty*. China has a population of 1.4 billion, so its economy will surpass the size of the U.S. economy when it reaches roughly 23% of the U.S. standard of living. China’s economic growth has been impressive, but it started from a low level: 88% of China’s population was under the international poverty line in 1980. China has been returning to its historical share of world GDP after recovering from a series of disasters in the 20th Century — civil war, invasion during World War II and economic mismanagement and

famine under communism — which had reduced most of its population to subsistence agriculture. Raising 850 million people out of poverty yielded impressive growth rates, but still leaves China a poor country with about one-sixth the U.S. level of per capita income. We should be rooting for the people of China, encouraging their rise out of poverty even as we encourage their government to relax its iron grip of control over them.

Third, *U.S. supremacy is not a necessary condition for sustained peace*, nor is it sufficient to guarantee security. In fact, the effort to maintain a temporary advantage may well undermine world order. In the long run, a peaceful world is hard to envisage without multilateral cooperation that allows all of its peoples to strive for development.

Practice for Peacemakers: Read an article in an international newspaper, and try to put yourself in the writer’s perspective. It is good to regularly leave your comfort zone and challenge some of your assumptions.

Prayer: God, free us from the idolatry of trusting in power for our safety. Free us from the sin of fear: fear of others, fear of loss of control, fear of the future. Grant us the courage to engage in the hard work of negotiating fair and equitable settlements that allow room for all of your people to reach their full potential.



Randall Stone is a professor of political science at the University of Rochester and the author of books and articles on international relations. He is a member of Henrietta United Church of Christ and treasurer of Genesee Area Campus Ministries.



Sunday, October 4, World Communion Sunday

Holistic Peace

Practicing Holistic Peace

Henry Koenig Stone

Philippians 4:9

Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you. (NRSV)

Reflection: As we reach World Communion Sunday, a time each year when we try to connect with Christians around the world and live into our shared nature as children of God, we can't help but be aware of all that has not yet been done for peace. But we do have a path laid out before us for the work of peacemaking at every level of human interaction. One important spiritual practice is to support institutions that promote peace and justice, locally and globally. Participating in the Peace & Global Witness Offering is an effective way to extend our reach as individuals by empowering churches, mid councils and the Presbyterian Mission Agency to provide materials for learning, advocacy for peace and resources for all God's children.

We know that the work of peace must start in our own hearts, as we are called to wrestle with the weeds of racism and gender bias, and reject all divisions that are sown in us by society's expectations and our own fears. In practicing internal peace, we wash away the toxic influences that bar us from God's path.

We know this work continues as we define ourselves in relation to each other — with family, friends and even with adversaries. We are called to speak truth, not out of hate, but out of love, and to seek justice, not in the form of revenge, but in the form of reparation. Practicing peace in our relationships with each other is part of being in right relationship with God.

We know that at the levels of both local and larger communities, we have let structures of privilege and norms of "order" get in the way of the work for justice and peace. We are called to put the mission of peace through justice ahead of our own self-interest, comfort and expectations. Practicing peace in community means living out God's call to love our neighbors as much as we love ourselves.

We know the world suffers from many fires, whether they be ecological or political. We are called to renounce the temptation of domination and instead, to practice collaborative, multilateral approaches to peace and prosperity in the world. Practicing peace in the world means rejecting the human power dynamics of struggle, and seeking instead a balance rooted in mutual covenant.

In all times and places, we are called to find a path to God's holistic peace, which surpasses all of our human understanding and assumptions. This path is difficult; it is scattered with easy excuses for inaction and the emotional challenges that are present in every human soul. But on this hard, unusual path of peacemaking, we get to walk alongside our Creator.

Practice for Peacemakers: Throughout the past month of this resource, we have been given ways to tie peacemaking into all levels of humanity: internal, interpersonal, communal and worldwide. Today, reflect on which piece of the peacemaking puzzle is most intuitive and spiritually fulfilling to you. Then identify an area that is less comfortable. Challenge yourself to take at least one step forward in each area.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to cast aside the psychological, social, structural and cultural excuses that we find to be at war with each other. Lead us gently and firmly to the water of your life and love that we may learn to share it freely among all your children, reaching a state of Just Peace for all. Amen.



Henry Koenig Stone is the editor for this year's Season of Peace Reflections. An activist and public policy wonk, he has previously served as editor of "*Unbound*" in Louisville, KY, and as associate for young adult social witness to the Advisory Committee for Social Witness Policy.