



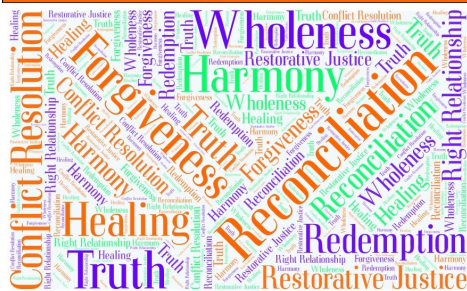
Touchstones Project

a monthly journal of Unitarian Universalism

May 2023

Reconciliation

Wisdom Story



a sentiment that Martin Luther King Jr. emphasized in his 1963 *Letter from Birmingham Jail*. If reconciliation is delayed, is peace denied since reconciliation is often delayed or ignored?

Reconciliation carries with it a positive and negative sense. When any power differential is set aside, the process of reconciliation has an inherent integrity that can result in a win-win outcome. When power is unequal, the outcome is often win-lose. Synonyms of reconciliation like appeasement, placating, and propitiation express this result. One definition of the word reconcile is “to cause to submit to or accept something unpleasant,” which betrays the purpose of reconciliation.

At the interpersonal level, Laura Davis identifies four kinds of reconciliation. The first results in *deep, mutual healing*. This is the most satisfying as both people grow and change in ways that heal the relationship. The second is *shifting one’s expectations*. In a way, this is one-sided, as one person changes their

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Building Fences

Long ago now, two sisters inherited a farm from their parents. They decided to divide it in two, using the small creek that ran through it as a natural boundary. This division made sense since one sister wanted to grow grapes while the other vegetables. Though small, both farms were quite successful. Beth’s vineyards produced luscious grapes, while the vegetables from Amanda’s farm sold out quickly each week at the local farmer’s market.



Though separated by a year in age, most people thought they were twins. They seemed so alike that the villagers would mistake one for the other, and they would even finish each other’s sentences. Their love for each other was quite remarkable, and they shared everything: farming ideas, tools, meals, stories, and their crops. Given this, the disagreement that occurred was so unexpected and painful, and it quickly escalated. They stopped sharing. They stopped talking. Their hearts grew hard. A relationship that had once been so sweet became bitter. To their credit, the villagers did not take sides, but they were saddened to see the conflict grow.

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Introduction to Theme

Conciliation is a word that is rarely used. Its Latin root refers to “a connection, union, or bond.” It is an act of overcoming jealousy or suspicion to gain favor or goodwill. By contrast, the word reconciliation is common. The difference is the prefix “re,” which has the sense of doing something again. Things fall apart. The center cannot hold. Humpty Dumpty takes a tumble. Relationships come apart at the seams. Sisyphus’s boulder rolls down the hill again. A house divided falls. And more, so we must work to restore, repair, redo, and renew. The “re” is important, daunting work.

British statesman William Gladstone said, “Justice delayed is justice denied,”

Reconciliation & Regeneration

Regeneration can occur because we are worn down or because a relationship has broken in some fundamental and tragic way: a marriage, a friendship, a small working group, a covenant, etc. In these situations, the process of regeneration often requires reconciliation. The steps of reconciliation may vary, but they include seeking the truth of what happened, both how and why; hearing the feelings of another’s experience; taking responsibility for one’s actions; making time and space for healing; atoning by expressing remorse and making amends; seeking and extending forgiveness; (re)building trust, and more. Promises made, broken, and renewed. Though imperfect, we have the capacity to begin again in love.

A Theme-Based Ministry Project

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Regeneration

Good Neighbors?

(Continued from page 1) **Wisdom Story**

One day, a traveling carpenter arrived at the village. Looking for work, he stopped at Amanda's market stand and struck up a conversation.

"Hello, ma'am," he said, "I was wondering if you know of anyone who has need of a carpenter. I can build just about anything."

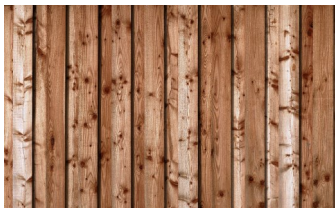
Amanda answered, "Actually, I have a project in mind. I need a fence built along the side of my farm that runs along a creek that is on the west side of my farm. It's a vegetable farm. Perhaps you saw it as you came into our village."

"Ma'am, do you mean that creek with vegetables on one side and grape arbors on the other?"

"Exactly. I need a fence built. My sister owns the other farm, but we had a falling out two years ago. Since I no longer want anything to do with her, I need a fence to make sure she stays on her side. Can you make it tall enough so I don't even have to see her?"

The carpenter paused for a moment and then said, "Yes, ma'am. I understand exactly what you need and why you need it. I am quite good at building fences. I can start tomorrow and complete it in a week." So, they agreed on a price, and the carpenter began the next day."

Amanda watched his progress. First, he started building the fence at one



end of the property line. Then he stopped, went to the other end of the property line, and started building. And so, it went. Half a day on one end. Half a day on the other. Slowly the gap between the two grew smaller. Beth also watched the fence go up and grew even angrier at Amanda.

One day, both sisters had to go to the village. Amanda was there to sell vegetables, while Beth was there to buy supplies. When they returned to their farms in the late afternoon, the fence appeared to be done except for one thing. In the

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Practice Compassion

Remembering the Better Part

Christina Baldwin

As long as we share our stories, as long as our stories reveal our strengths and vulnerabilities to each other, we reinvigorate our understanding and tolerance for the little quirks of personality that in other circumstances would drive us apart. When we live in a family, a community, a country where we know each other's true stories, we remember our capacity to lean in and love each other into wholeness.



I have read the story of a tribe in southern Africa called the *Babemba* [aka *Bemba*] in which a person doing something wrong, something that destroys this delicate social net, brings all work in the village to a halt. The people gather around the "offender," and one by one they begin to recite everything he has done right in his life: every good deed, thoughtful behavior, act of social responsibility. These things have to be true about the person, and spoken honestly, but the time-honored consequence of misbehavior is to appreciate that person back into the better part of himself. The person is given the chance to remember who he is and why he is important to the life of the village.

I want to live under such a practice of compassion. When I forget my place, when I lash out with some private wounding in a public way, I want to be remembered back into alignment with myself and my purpose. I want to live with the opportunity for reconciliation. When someone around me is thoughtless or cruel, I want to be given the chance to respond with a ritual that creates the possibility of reconnection.

Source: *Storycatcher: Making Sense of Our Lives through the Power and Practice of Story* by Christina Baldwin

Buddhist Reconciliation

Deep Listening/Loving Speech

Thích Nhất Hạnh

Much of our suffering comes from wrong perceptions.

...The first thing we can do ...is to acknowledge internally that ...what we think happened, may not be accurate.

...The second thing we can do ...is to tell the people who we think have hurt us that ... [our] suffering may have come from our own wrong perception. Instead of coming ...with an accusation, we can ...ask them to explain ...why they have said or done those things.

The third thing is very hard.... We need to listen very carefully to the other person's response to truly understand and try to correct our perception. ...We may find that we have been the victim of our wrong perceptions.



...If we ...want ...to learn the truth, and ...use gentle speech and deep listening, we are ...more likely to ...hear others' honest perceptions and feelings. ... We may discover that they too, have wrong perceptions. After listening to them fully, we have an opportunity to help them correct their wrong perceptions. If we approach our hurts that way, we have the chance to turn our fear and anger into opportunities for deeper, more honest relationships.

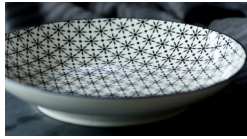
The intention of deep listening and loving speech is to restore communication, because once communication is restored, everything is possible, including peace and reconciliation. [...]

We are all capable of recognizing that we're not the only ones who suffer.... The other person ...suffers as well, and we are partly responsible.... When we realize this, we can look at the other person with the eyes of compassion and let understanding bloom.

Source: *Fear: Essential Wisdom for Getting Through the Storm* by Thích Nhất Hạnh

Readings from the Common Bowl

Day 1: “Nothing can match the treasure of common memories, of trials endured together, of quarrels and reconciliations and generous emotions.”



Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

Day 2: “If there is to be reconciliation, first there must be truth.” Timothy B. Tyson

Day 3: “When we learn to respond to each other rather than react, we will move ...in our conflict toward resolution and reconciliation.” Matt Chandler

Day 4: “...There is no easy road to freedom. We know ...that none of us acting alone can achieve success. We must ...act together..., for national reconciliation, for nation building, for the birth of a new world. Let there be justice for all. Let there be peace for all.” Nelson Mandela

Day 5: “Remember, confrontation is about reconciliation and awareness, not judgement or anger.” Dale Partridge

Day 6: “If our desire for justice is not rooted primarily in the pursuit of restoration, then reconciliation will be nearly impossible to achieve.” Jamie Arpin-Ricci

Day 7: “Why are some countries able, despite their very real and serious problems, to press ahead along the road to reconciliation, recovery, and redevelopment while others cannot?” Ellen Johnson Sirleaf

Day 8: “Since science and religion provide two different perspectives on the human situation, they must ultimately be able to be reconciled.” Jeremy Griffith

Day 9: “Yes, Mandela’s day is done, yet we, his inheritors, will open the gates wider for reconciliation....” Maya Angelou

Day 10: “Reconciliation requires imagination. It requires looking beyond what is to what could be. It looks beyond intentions to real outcomes, real hurts, real histories.” Austin Channing Brown

Day 11: “A peace lover is someone who enjoys the absence of conflict, but a peacemaker is someone who is proactively engaged in works of reconciliation in every sphere of life, from the personal to the global.” Ian Morgan Cron

Day 12: “Stop telling people to reconcile, when you have no idea what it took for them to break free.” Zara Hairston

Day 13: “Moments of kindness and reconciliation are worth having, even if the parting has to come....” Alice Munro

Day 14: “...It is quite possible and tempting to be more in love with the idea of reconciliation than to actually engage in the actual work of reconciliation—the arduous, painful and messy marathon work of reconciliation.” Brenda Salter McNeil

Day 15: “But reconciliation is not about white feelings. It’s about diverting power ...to the oppressed, toward the powerless. It’s not enough to dabble at diversity and inclusion while leaving the existing authority structure in place. Reconciliation demands more.” Austin Channing Brown

Day 16: “Is an apology valid without change? ...Doesn’t that resemble manipulation more than reconciliation?” Chanel Miller

Day 17: “He also believed strongly in reconciliation rather than revenge; he once remarked, ‘I do not forget any good deed done to me, and I do not carry a grudge for a bad one.’” Viktor E. Frankl

Day 18: “My father used to tell me that sometimes you cannot reconcile with someone else. Sometimes you have to find that reconciliation on your own.” Cassandra Clare

Day 19: “Reconciliation can also be with your own self. If you don’t reconcile with yourself, happiness with another person is impossible.” Thích Nhất Hạnh

Day 20: “Reconciliation is the pursuit of the impossible ...where those who are powerful have relinquished that power to the margins.” Austin Channing Brown

Day 21: “Sometimes ...when nothing can be shared except regret, then regret must serve as the place to begin. Reconciliation does not demand that one side surrender to the other. The simple, mutual recognition that mistakes were made is in itself a closing of the divide.” Steven Erikson

Day 22: “Our era calls for a public accounting of what caste has cost us, a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, so

that every American can know the full history of our country, wrenching though it may be. The persistence of caste and race hostility, and the defensiveness about anti-black sentiment in particular, make it literally unspeakable to many in the dominant caste.” Isabel Wilkerson

Day 23: “One minute of reconciliation is worth more than a whole life of friendship!” Gabriel García Márquez

Day 24: “Kindness is not ‘niceness.’ Kindness does not avoid conflict; kindness engages conflict, but with a goal of reconciliation.” Russell D. Moore

Day 25: “Truth can be told in an instant, forgiveness can be offered spontaneously, but reconciliation is the work of lifetimes and generations.” Krista Tippett

Day 26: “Reconciliation is realized when two people come together and understand that what they share unites them and that what is different about them needs to be respected.” Wab Kinew



Day 27: “Walking with someone through grief, or through the process of reconciliation, requires patience, presence, and a willingness to wander, to take the scenic route.” Rachel Held Evans

Day 28: “Over time people break apart, ...and it is through the breaking and the reconciliation, the love and the doubting of love, ...that we find our own identity and define our relationships.” Ann Patchett

Day 29: “Because the more familiar term ‘racial reconciliation’ implies a preexisting harmony and unity, we propose the use of the term ‘racial conciliation.’” Soong-Chan Rah

Day 30: “My gut feeling says he needs a second chance. Like we all do.” Mary E. Hanks

Day 31: “We live in a society that shuns guilt, hardly knows it. It is drummed into us: ‘Don’t feel guilty.’ No one wants to pay the price of reconciliation, of atonement, of forgiveness.” Robert Dykstr



A Theology of Reconciliation

Historically, our Unitarian and Universalist forebears could not reconcile themselves to Calvinist theology, which was built on the belief in a vengeful God, depraved humanity, infinite punishment in an afterlife, and the capricious doctrine of the elect, where certain souls were saved and others forever damned regardless of virtue or behavior. The task of Unitarians and Universalists was to develop theologies that would reconcile them with God, not with their conservative detractors.

Unitarian theology tended toward a low Christology with an emphasis on the humanity of Jesus rather than his divinity as Christ. This was connected, in part, to a rejection of the belief that Jesus died to atone for humanity's sins. Their theology was also based on a high anthropology grounded in the belief that humans were neither inherently corrupt nor depraved but capable of both good and evil. This contrasted with the low anthropology of the Calvinists, given their belief in human depravity.

William Ellery Channing expressed a high anthropology in his 1828 sermon, *Likeness to God*. Channing affirmed "that true religion consists in proposing, as our great end, a growing likeness to the Supreme Being. ... Religious instruction should aim chiefly to turn men's aspirations and efforts to that perfection of the soul, which constitutes it [as] a bright image of God." Channing then enumerated attributes of character, including "seeking truth," "withstanding whatever may warp judgment," following conscience "in opposition to the passions," ... encountering "peril or scorn with moral courage," ... performing "a disinterested deed," ... warring "against habit or desire [that may undermine] our higher principles," and thinking, speaking, or acting, "with moral energy, and resolute devotion to duty." These, he wrote, grow divinity within us. He concluded that "free beings ... are ... saved ... by their own prayers and toil." Thus, Channing formu-

lated what has been called *salvation*

by character, a bedrock affirmation of our faith. While Universalists embraced a higher Christology and lower anthropology

than Unitarians, they, too, offered hope over the despair engendered by Calvinism. Hosea Ballou, in his *Treatise on Atonement* (1805), rejected the Calvinist notion of infinite sin and infinite punishment. He wrote, "There is nothing in heaven above, nor in the earth beneath, that can do away sin, but love...." Positing a loving God in opposition to a vengeful one, Universalists believed in universal salvation, which was also called universal reconciliation.

Both Channing and Ballou saw sin as real and problematic, but they believed it could be overcome, Channing by human character and Ballou by the love of God. Ironically, neither these contemporaries nor their theologies were reconciled. Their disputation was best captured by Rev. Thomas Star King who said, "The Universalists believe that God is too good to damn them, while the Unitarians believe they are too good to be damned."

In 1886, Unitarian minister James Freeman Clarke articulated his five points of a new theology, which he contrasted with the five points of Calvinism. Clarke's theology was based on The Fatherhood of God, The Brotherhood of Man, The Leadership of Jesus, Salvation by Character, and The Progress of Mankind onward and upward forever. His last point, the hope of a Promised Land, represented, in the end, an unrealistic optimism, as the Great Depression, two World Wars, and the Holocaust made tragically clear.

Unitarian Universalist minister Earl Holt wrote, "Liberal theology, if it can be said to have an overriding weakness, tends toward a sometimes unrealistic optimism; hope is its central virtue. But essential as hope is, it is insufficient unless grounded in something deeper. A potent religion must address the darkness, inner and outer. That darkness is real. Moments of grace do come, but not easily or often, and it is most often those who acknowledge the darkness who recognize the grace."

Despite Clarke's optimism, a theology of reconciliation must take sin seriously. Not in the way of fundamentalism but as

a sober recognition of what imperfect human beings are capable of, as well as systems and societies created by imperfect human beings. Unitarian Universalist minister Margaret Beckman writes, "In rejecting original sin, we have—for all practical purposes—rejected sin in any guise." She continues, "Opinion columnist, David Brooks ... describes sin as 'anything that assaults the moral order.' ... That understanding ... provides room for personal misdeeds and collective misdeeds—by both acts of commission and acts of omission. So, we can talk about personal acts of racism as sin, and we can talk about [America's] ... sin of historical and institutional racism"

A theology of reconciliation recognizes that there are moments of grace, goodness, and tranquility for many people but not all, moments that are



sometimes interrupted by tragedy, pain, and sorrow. There are things that cannot be mended, but a theology of reconciliation recognizes that many things can, though not easily nor quickly.

All of our principles point directly or indirectly to the importance of and our capacity for reconciliation. Rev. Rob Eller-Isaacs captured this perfectly in *A Litany of Atonement* (SLT #637), where, despite a litany of actions that shatter relationships, he counseled reconciliation with this constant refrain: "We forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love."

Paul David Tripp writes, "The church is ... a conversion, confession, repentance, ... forgiveness and sanctification center...." As it turns out, reconciliation involves several steps. Conversion is "turning" to a deeper reality of what it means to be human. Its use from the mid-14th century means "a radical and complete change in spirit, purpose, and direction of life." In the context of reconciliation, it can involve change that is quite challenging. As Rabbi Jack Riemer writes (SLT #634), "It takes an act of will for us to turn. It means breaking with old habits. It means admitting that we have been wrong, and this is never easy. It

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Making Up

Michael Thompson and Catherine O'Neill Grace, authors of *Best Friends, Worst Enemies: Understanding the Social Lives of Children*, write, "Wherever children gather, a complex group dynamic begins to pick up strength. It may turn into a storm or not, but it has power in a child's life." Some children function well in a group, and others do not. However, friends, one or several, are more important to the well-being of a child. Despite the enormous power and influence of groups, Thompson and Grace write, "At the end of the day, it is friendship that will nourish the soul of a child."

Teaching children about reconciliation is best done within the crucible of friendship. While reconciliation comes into play between a parent and child, the power differential makes reconciliation far more complex, with more responsibility borne by the parent.

Tracey Chitty and Chris Barr write, "All children have to learn how to manage their own individual neediness and greediness while maintaining a relationship with another." This is important to do because of the value of friendships. They list eight essential childhood benefits of friendship. These are intimacy, affection, a reliable ally, companionship, nurturance, tangible support, trust, and enhancement of self-worth. The fact that these are significant makes a disruption in a friendship a matter of consequence.

The process of reconciliation for children is known as "making up." This process is not new. The term goes back to the 1660s. It meant ending a quarrel, reconciling, settling differences, and becoming friends again. Reconciliation/making up is always a two-way street. The ability to make up often requires taking responsibility for one's actions, understanding feelings, both one's own and another's, which involves empathy, knowing how to apologize and being willing to do so, making amends by trying to address wrongdoing if

possible, being able and willing to cooperate, negotiate, and compromise in order to resolve differences, and being understanding and forgiving of a friend's mistake, while asking to be forgiven if appropriate.

While conflict in a friendship is never desirable, making up may make the friendship even stronger and positively impact future friendships.

Source: Touchstones

Family Activity: Friendship

Invite a discussion with your children about what makes a good friend. Consider sharing memories of some of your childhood friends. Then invite your children to share some things about a few of their friends. Based on the sharing, make a list of the characteristics of a good friend. Then shift the discussion to things that can upset friendships. Again, sharing stories about such upsets will add context and depth. Finally, explore some of the ways to make up with a friend.

Family Activity: Making Up Day

The book, *Hot Day on Abbott Avenue*, by Karen English (Author) and Javaka Steptoe (Illustrator), is a story about the ups and downs of being, and having, a best friend. Kishi and Renée are stuck in a "best-friends-breakup day." Both girls struggle to engage or apologize. Eventually, they are drawn out of themselves by Double Dutch jump roping. This breaks the ice, and though subtle, forgiveness and sharing occur as it becomes "a forgetting-all-about-what-you-were-mad-about day." The book is available through various booksellers, and a reading of the book is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=feOb5Zp4-FM> (7:29).



Restorative Justice

The Mennonite Church, which is known as a "Peace" church along with the Quakers and Church of the Brethren, has long had a focus on seeking peace, bringing reconciliation, practicing nonresistance, and doing justice, especially in the face of violence and war. These commitments led the Mennonites in both Canada and the United States to advocate for restorative justice, beginning in the 1970s. Restorative justice views crime primarily as a conflict between individuals that results in injuries to victims, communities, and offenders and only secondarily as a violation against the state. It seeks to create peace by reconciling the parties and repairing the injuries through the active participation of victims, offenders, and their community.

Restorative justice applies principles of reconciliation to the legal system by seeking restoration in place of retribution. Notable in the approach is bringing the victims of crime and their concerns into the center of the justice process rather than keeping them on the sidelines. It seeks to give victims a voice, allow them to engage with the offender, facilitate justice that accounts for their concerns, and bring about at least some healing. Beyond this, it acknowledges the standing, concerns, and needs of the community. As a result, restorative justice makes the offender answerable to the victims and the community. The offender's accountability involves confronting and understanding the harm they created and experiencing remorse, accepting responsibility, apologizing, making restitution, and being reintegrated into the community.

Mennonite Howard Zehr, in his book *The Little Book of Restorative Justice*, writes, "The movement owes a great deal to earlier movements and to a variety of cultural and religious traditions. It owes a special debt to the Native people of North America and New Zealand. The precedents and roots of restorative justice are much wider and deeper than the Mennonite-led initiatives.... Indeed, they are as old as human history."

Source: Touchstones

The Brittle Heart Evades the Truth

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expectations of the other person. The result is a workable, if a less satisfying, change in the relationship. In essence, this is reconciliation as accommodation. The third involves *agreeing to disagree*. In this situation, two people have very different understandings of events, which cannot be reconciled. As a result, they allow the past to be the past while working to find common ground out of which their relationship can flower. This might be described as a “shallow” reconciliation. Its durability may be uncertain depending on the disagreements. The fourth is an *inner resolution*. Usually, this involves coming to peace with the past because reconciliation with the other person is not possible. When this is the only option, the process may involve grieving and moving on.

In these four, truth is handled differently. In *deep, mutual healing*, it appears that the renewed relationship is grounded in a shared truth. In *shifting one’s expectations*, the truth is one-sided, held by the person making the change, since the truth for the other person doesn’t enter into the equation. In *agreeing to disagree*, there are two truths that cannot be reconciled. With *inner resolution*, dialogue about the truth is not possible. Truth, however, dictates a fifth option when, because of abuse, profound deceit, etc., reconciliation should not be pursued.

As these make clear, the role of truth is crucial to the outcome, but truth is often elusive. Truth does not reside on the surface, which is defaced with half-truths, alternative facts, rationalizations, deceptions and self-deceptions, conspiracy theories, whataboutism, logical fallacies, propaganda, denialism, lies, and all manner of other misrepresentations, including 1984’s “Newspeak.” As Orwell wrote, “The whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought,” such that dissent will be “literally impossible, because there will be no words in which to express it.” So, we have to dig deep for truth, and often truth may not be connected to fact if it is actually “identity-based truth” that has been put in the service of maintaining privilege and power. Because of this, so much depends, as our 4th principle affirms, on “a free and responsible

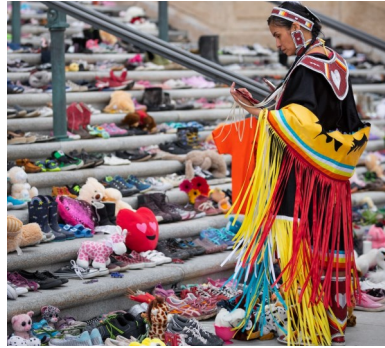
search for truth and meaning.”

Truth is central to reconciliation, as illustrated by the work of over 70 national Truth & Reconciliation Commissions since 1974, although some have had different names. *kinSHIFT* is a project of the Canadian-based organization *IndigenEYEZ*, which was formed in 2013 to cultivate indigenous leaders and educate non-indigenous allies through their *Truth & Reconciliation Workshop*. The name of the workshop is telling: *Elements of Truth: Before Reconciliation*.

Priscilla Hayner writes that “A truth commission (1) is focused on the past, rather than in ongoing events; (2) investigates a pattern of events that took place over a period of time; (3) engages directly and broadly with the affected population, gathering information on their experiences; (4) is a temporary body, with the aim of concluding with a final report; and (5) is officially authorized or empowered by the state under review.”

In order to place truth before reconciliation, these commissions constitute “official truth-seeking” bodies working to construct an authoritative, truthful narrative that often challenges dominant versions of the past and of the truth. Many commissions have been established to investigate abuses against indigenous peoples and marginalized populations. Per Laura Davis’s typology, how many oppressed people have been forced to settle for reconciliation as an *inner resolution* until and unless the truth, which they have known in their bones for generations, has been unearthed, acknowledged, and owned?

Jesus said, “You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free.” (*John* 8:32) Of course, that is only possible if the truth has first been set free. In the truth and reconciliation process, the impact of truth varies. For the oppressed, it is the balm of Gilead. For the oppressor and the bystander, it is a significant challenge, a come-to-Jesus moment, if they come at all. As one person quipped, “The truth will



set you free, but first, it will make you miserable.” In this case, misery is a form of repentance, one that leads to transformation. Yet many people evade misery through denialism, which is an irrational, ideological-based action to deny an uncomfortable truth, to protect their sense of self, and, often, to maintain privilege and power.

For reconciliation to grow out of truth, it matters how the heart responds. Parker Palmer writes, “Heartbreak comes with the territory called being human. ... The brittle heart ... breaks apart into a thousand shards, [while] ... the supple heart ... breaks open, not apart,

growing into a greater capacity for the many forms of love. Only the supple heart can hold suffering in a way that opens to new life.” The brittle heart evades the truth. The supple heart breaks open to hold the truth with love, a necessary prerequisite to participating in reconciliation.

A key person in facilitating reconciliation is an “insider-reconciler,” an individual working to foster reconciliation within their own community. The *Mary Hoch Center for Reconciliation* surfaced six key aspects of meaningful reconciliation based on interviews with insider-reconcilers.

Truth: Uncovering the truth is necessary for overcoming histories of harm.

Healing: Individual and community trauma and the corresponding inner “woundedness” must be surfaced and healed in order to overcome conflict.

Well-being: Promoting social and individual well-being, including insider-reconcilers, requires “being aware of trauma, how it affects the community, recognizing triggers, and minimizing its ongoing impacts on day-to-day life.”

Recognizing Shared Humanity: Shifting from a “us vs. them” mindset for all involved to a recognition of the humanity of the “other,” their complexity and struggles, can facilitate truth-telling and healing as well as “increased opportunities for communication, recognition of harms, and visioning of a shared future.”

Structural Reform: Truth-telling and

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Orange Shirt Day

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formal apologies are significant but not sufficient. This must be followed by action to reform the structures that contributed to the conflict. This includes changes in government, social, and peacebuilding systems, as well as financial support to facilitate reform.

Inclusivity: Inclusivity in the reconciliation process must expand far beyond the leaders and formal interactions to reach all stakeholders, including diverse community-based roles and informal spaces to reach those involved in and affected by conflict at all levels who would otherwise be excluded.

Using these six key aspects, how might we evaluate the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC)*, launched in 2008 to tell Canadians about Indian Residential Schools and to address the impact of residential schools on survivors and their families? The TRC worked for 6 years, hearing from 6,500+ witnesses. Its reports include 94 *Calls to Action* to foster reconciliation. Notably, Canadians launched *Orange Shirt Day* held annually on September 30th in remembrance of this terrible legacy and in solidarity with the people of the First Nations of Canada.



How was the process, the reports, and implementation of actions? What would a US Truth and Reconciliation process look like for Native Americans?

Using the six key aspects, how should we evaluate the UUA's journey of racial reconciliation? It has been called *Journey Toward Wholeness* and now, *Widening the Circle of Concern* per the UUA Commission on Institutional Change (CIC). (See <https://www.uua.org/uuagovernance/committees/cic/widening> to review the CIC report.) You can request the study guide for it at <https://www.uua.org/widening> along with more information at <https://www.uua.org/uuagovernance/committees/cic>, including the 2021 & 2022 UUA implementation reports.

This work of many years has been a Truth and Reconciliation process. How shall we practice the promise?

Stuck in the Past?

Forgiveness vs. Reconciliation

Ryan Howes

...Many people misunderstand forgiveness. They assume that forgiveness requires making up with the person who hurt you—sitting down with the perpetrator, talking it through.... They believe forgiveness is the same as reconciliation. ...They're related, but not the same.

Can you forgive? Can you reconcile?

...You can ...forgive. Reconciliation is a separate issue.

Lewis Smedes wrote: "To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover the prisoner was you."

...Holding a grudge imprisons you. Forgiveness sets you free. In fact, the health benefits of forgiveness are so clear that holding a grudge seems self-destructive....

Forgiveness is an internal process where you work through the hurt, gain an understanding of what happened, rebuild a sense of safety, and let go of the grudge. The offending party is not necessarily a part of this process.

...Reconciliation is an interpersonal process where you dialogue with the offender about what happened, exchange stories, express the hurt, listen for the remorse, and begin to reestablish trust. It's a ...complicated ...process that includes, but moves beyond forgiveness. Forgiveness is solo, reconciliation is a joint venture.

...Smedes said: "Forgiving does not erase the bitter past. A healed memory is not a deleted memory. Instead, forgiving what we cannot forget creates a new way to remember. We change the memory of our past into a hope for our future."

Frederic Luskin concurs: "It's actually remembering differently. While lack of forgiveness is remembering something with an edge or a grudge or a sense of injustice, forgiveness means remembering it more benignly, with compassion. It involves some purpose of moving ahead, rather than just being stuck in the past."

Source: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/in-therapy/201303/forgiveness-vs-reconciliation>



Salvation by Character

(Continued from page 4) **Faith & Theology**

means losing face; it means starting all over again: and this is always painful. It means saying, 'I'm sorry.' ...These things are hard to do. But unless we turn, we will be trapped forever in yesterday's ways. Dear God, help me to turn—from callousness to sensitivity, from hostility to love, from pettiness to purpose, from envy to contentment, from carelessness to discipline, from fear to faith."

Confession is crucial in reconciliation. It involves truth-telling. Without truth, other elements in reconciliation are impossible. As truth-telling takes courage, truth-hearing requires compassion.

Admitting the truth of a transgression is significant but not sufficient. It must be paired with repentance, which demonstrates an understanding of how one's actions have caused pain and suffering, along with a heartfelt apology. It is less about showing remorse and more about feeling remorse. When appropriate, repentance may involve restitution and/or making other amends in order to try to address the wrong in the process of restoring right relationship.

The process of reconciliation may also involve forgiveness. Forgiveness is not about sanctioning or forgetting. An Old English use of the word meant "to give up desire or power to punish."

Forgiveness cannot be forced and should not be granted until and unless one is ready to do so. Yet, forgiveness allows the past to be the past. It often frees the person who forgives, while shifting the responsibility of forgiveness to the person who gave offense. Authentic self-forgiveness can be quite difficult.

The end result of the process of reconciliation is sanctification. While related to "making holy," a root meaning of sanctify from 1600 meant "to render worthy of respect." Reconciliation seeks to repair a broken relationship, rendering it worthy of respect. But there is more. A Proto-Indo-European root for holy is *kailo-. It is the same root as the word whole: holiness/wholeness. When pursued faithfully, reconciliation can result in wholeness. In the end, reconciliation is a path to salvation by character.

Source: Touchstones

Small Group Discussion Guide

Theme for Discussion Reconciliation

Preparation prior to Gathering: (Read this issue of the journal and *Living the Questions* in the next column.)

Business: Deal with any housekeeping items (e.g., scheduling the next gathering).

Opening Words: “I’m saying people change.” She held up her hands to ward off Clara’s protests. “I know, it’s easy to say. And it doesn’t undo the damage. But we’ve seen changes of heart. Changes of perception. It happens. Racists, homophobes, misogynists, they can change. And some do.” “Truth and reconciliation,” said Clara. “Yes. The truth must come first. And then, ...reconciliation. Maybe.” *Louise Penny*

Chalice Lighting: (James Vila Blake) adapted (In unison) *Love is the spirit of this church, and service is its law. This is our covenant: to dwell together in peace, to seek the truth in love, to serve human need, and to help one another.*

Check-In: How is it with your spirit? What do you need to leave behind in order to be fully present here and now? (2-3 sentences)

Claim Time for Deeper Listening: This comes at the end of the gathering where you can be listened to uninterrupted for more time if needed. You are encouraged to claim time ranging between 3-5 minutes, and to honor the limit of the time that you claim.

Read the Wisdom Story: Take turns reading aloud the wisdom story on page 1.

Readings from the Common Bowl: Group members read selections from *Readings from the Common Bowl* (page 3). Leave a few moments of silence after each to invite reflection on the meaning of the words.

Sitting In Silence: Sit in silence together, allowing the *Readings from the Common Bowl* to resonate. Cultivate a sense of calm and attention to the readings and the discussion that follows (*Living the Questions*).

Reading: “A great many people believe that reconciliation boils down to dialogue: a conference on race, a lecture, a moving sermon about the diversity we’ll see in heaven. But dialogue is productive toward reconciliation only when it leads to action—when it inverts power

and pursues justice for those who are most marginalized. Unfortunately, most ‘reconciliation conversations’ spend most of their time teaching white people about racism. In too many churches and organizations, listening to the hurt and pain of people of color is the end of the road, rather than the beginning.”

Austin Channing Brown

Living the Questions: Explore as many of these questions as time allows. Fully explore one question before moving on.

1. How are reconciliation and forgiveness different? Similar? Intertwined?
2. What are some of the challenges of reconciliation? Of forgiveness? Why might you choose one over the other?
3. What do you think is most important in reconciliation? Why?
4. Have you or someone you know participated in a process of reconciliation? What was it like?
5. How can storytelling facilitate reconciliation?
6. How can gently correcting each other’s misperceptions promote reconciliation?
7. What has prompted you to build fences? Bridges?
8. What for you is salvation by character?
9. What issues do you think need to be addressed by Truth & Reconciliation Commissions? Why?
10. How can our congregations facilitate/support reconciliation? Within the congregation? Within society?

Deeper Listening: If time was claimed by individuals, the group listens without interruption to each person who claimed time.

Checking-Out: One sentence about where you are now as a result of the time spent together exploring the theme.

Extinguishing Chalice: (Elizabeth Selle Jones) (In unison) *We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment.*

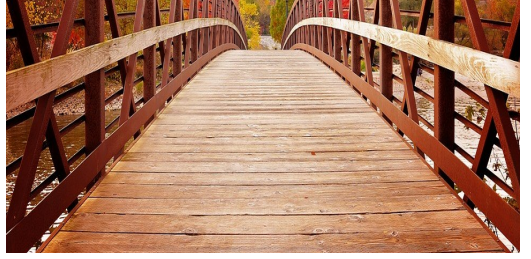
These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.

Closing Words: (In unison) *May the quality of our lives be our benediction and a blessing to all we touch.* Rev. Philip R. Giles



More Fences to Build

(Continued from page 2) **Wisdom Story**
middle of the fence, the carpenter had built a beautiful bridge over the creek to connect the two farms.



Amanda was shocked. Why had the carpenter built a fence and a bridge? Beth was amazed. Why had Amanda had the carpenter build a fence and a bridge? Looking at the bridge, Beth’s heart softened, and she began crying. She remembered all she had shared with Amanda over the years. Beth ran to the bridge and began crossing. Amanda, who had been inspecting the fence, saw her coming. When Amanda saw Beth’s tears, she also started crying and met Beth in the middle. They stood there for a long time, just hugging each other. No words were necessary. They had reconciled, and both were grateful.

Finally, they turned toward Amanda’s farm and went to talk to the carpenter. Amanda spoke first. “You sure know how to build a fence. It’s not what I expected, but I am so grateful.” Then Beth added, “What you built is so beautiful. I have some carpentry work if you are interested.”

The carpenter replied. “Well, ma’am,” he said to Amanda. “I’m glad you are pleased with my work.” Then he turned to Beth. “Thank you for the offer of more work, but I must move on. You see, I have more fences to build.”

Source: Touchstones, inspired by *A Repair Job*, from *Building Bridges at Tapestry of Faith*

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