



Spiritual Voices
Envisioning Just Peacemaking in our Communities

Cooperative Metropolitan Ministries

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First Published in 2015

Printed and bound in the United States by
Church on the Hill (Swedenborgian), Boston MA 02108

Distribution through Cooperative Metropolitan Ministries
474 Centre Street
Newton, MA 02458
617-244-3650
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Standing in the Need of Prayer

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Preface

Standing in the Need of Prayer

By Rodney L. Petersen, CMM Executive Director

Rodney L. Petersen, Ph.D. began his tenure at CMM in the summer of 2014, after serving as the executive director of the Boston Theological Institute (BTI) for almost 25 years. He has taught in BTI member schools and overseas, in addition to facilitating workshops on restorative justice, reconciliation, interfaith just peacemaking, and community engagement. He is author and editor of a wide bibliography and co-founder of the Religion and Conflict Transformation program now centered at Boston University School of Theology. He is an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., co-chair for the national committee for "An Interreligious Stance of the Presbyterian Church (USA)", and he serves on the board of several Greater Boston nonprofits.

It has been an honor to read these creative offerings: thoughtful essays, inspiring prayers, a meditation, song and poems from a variety of religious and spiritual leaders in the Greater Boston area. May these words contribute to creating Just Peace and Interfaith spirituality in our community and world. Just Peacemaking implies building the shalom, the salaam, the peace of transcendent presence. It fosters the Beloved Community envisioned by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and as found in the Beatitudes of Jesus. Writing as a Christian, I acknowledge the Interfaith realities of our community in such a way as respects the integrity of diverse perspectives. Together through this booklet we hope to encourage Interfaith cooperation and understanding.

The world is rife with challenges but we must remove the "plank" in our own eye before addressing the "sawdust" in the eyes of others (Matthew 7:4). Our community, this society and nation must focus on issues of race and economic justice. The grand jury decisions in Ferguson, Missouri, and Staten Island, New York, and the death of Tamir Rice in Cleveland, Ohio, raise the following questions: Are we a society that treats all of its citizens fairly? Or, how does the legacy of slavery, segregation, and racism still affect the institutions of our communities? The interface between our national world and the wider world is seen in the CIA Report of December 2014 and the explicit repression of the prayer traditions of others deemed suspect. What can each of us do to bring fairness and respect to all of God's children, to our neighbors in this civic order, to others who journey on the way?

Why respond in prayer? It is said that prayer changes things. Prayer at least changes us. Prayer can open the door of understanding, a deeper truth and possible acceptance, towards ourselves and towards others. It can make possible forgiveness without which there is no authentic neighbor. It can foster restorative justice without which forgiveness lacks integrity. It can make possible reconciliation without which there is no viable community. CMM envisions a politics of civility, practices of civic engagement, and a public square that allows each one to teach one, each to inspire another, and all to find healing together.

We hope that you will reach out and join us in building the kind of thoughtful community that arises through prayer. Prayer reminds us of our deepest identity. For some this identity is a dignity that arises as we encounter one another, each bearers of a divine image. For others, it may be a dignity that comes through our common work of constructive civic engagement. For still others, it may be an identity that we only partially understand as we journey on, allowing for the integrity of our neighbor's journey.

Standing in the Need of Prayer focuses on offerings for Interfaith Just Peacemaking in the Community. Each of these prayers, each of us in our diversity, draws upon inherited identities of scripture and tradition, reason and experience. Ritual gives shape to these identities. The ritual of prayer offers a foundation for maneuvering through social reality as it is encountered in spheres of relationship. Such relationships may arise through human need, social justice, mission, conflict, family, education, community, or the workplace. They may come through our understanding of the transcendent in language expressive of our spiritual or most profound intentions. Each of these spheres of relationship maps out areas through which we learn to love our neighbors as ourselves. This is Interfaith Just Peacemaking *in the Community*.

A JEWISH OFFERING

Leonard Gordon is the senior Rabbi at Congregation Mishkan Tefila in Chestnut Hill, MA. He chairs Interfaith Relations for the Jewish Council for Public Affairs (JCPA) and has been active in the Newton Interfaith Clergy Association. Previously he served on the boards of the National Council of Synagogues and the International Jewish Committee on Interfaith Consultations (IJCIC). In January 2015 he is joining a Jewish-Episcopal-Muslim group for a trip to Israel and areas under the Palestinian Authority.

In my interfaith work and in my rabbinate, I focus on issues of civility and the problem of facilitating difficult conversations. Language can build or destroy a community or a relationship. Making a commitment to civility is key for making progress on the difficult issues we all need to discuss in order to build a more peaceful world.

Particularism as a Path to Universalism: Jewish Texts on Peace:

Judaism, in its diverse manifestations, reflects repeatedly on the balance of particularism and universalism as religious values. While affirming the sacred status of Torah, Jewish texts, the Jewish people and the Land of Israel, major thinkers see in the particular a path towards the universal.

The two texts below reflect the highest expression of the hope for an era of universal peace. Rebbe Nachman of Bratslov (1773 -1810) describes the potential for the individual to achieve a universalistic mindset in our time. Rebbe Nachman founded a branch of Hassidism noted for its ecstatic worship and for introspective prayer. Rav Kook (1865-1935) was the first Chief Rabbi of the Ashkenazic (European) Jewish community in Mandatory Palestine. He was a profound scholar and mystic and was revered by people of all faiths in the Holy Land.

A Spiritual Offering from the Jewish Tradition:

Rebbe Nachman's Prayer for Peace (adapted)

“Lord of Peace, Divine Ruler, to whom peace belongs. Master of Peace, Creator of all things:

“May it be your will to put an end to war and bloodshed on earth, and to spread a great and wonderful peace over the whole world, ‘so that nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore’ (Isaiah 2:4).

“Help us and save us all, and let us cling tightly to the virtue of peace. Let there be a truly great peace between every person and their fellow, and between spouses, and let there be no discord between any people even in their hearts.

“And may it be that all people love peace and pursue peace, always in truth and with wholeheartedness, without holding on to any disputes ever again which would divide us against each other.

“Let us never shame any person on earth, great or small. May it be granted unto us to fulfill Your Commandment to, ‘Love thy neighbor as thyself,’ (Leviticus 19:18) with all our hearts and souls and bodies and possessions.

“And let it come to pass in our time what is written, ‘And I will give peace in the land, and you shall lie down and none shall make you afraid. I will drive the wild beasts from the land, and neither shall the sword go through your land’ (Leviticus 26:6).

“God who is peace, bless us with peace!”

Rav Kook, *The Fourfold Song* (adapted) from: *Orot Hakodesh II*

There is a person who sings the song of his soul. He finds everything, his complete spiritual satisfaction, within his soul.

There is a person who sings the song of the nation. She steps forward from her private soul, which she finds narrow and uncivilized. She yearns for the heights. She clings with a sensitive love to the entirety of the Jewish nation and sings its song. She shares in its pains, is joyful in its hopes, speaks with exalted and pure thoughts regarding its past and its future and investigates its inner spiritual nature with love and a wise heart.

There is a person whose soul is so broad that it expands beyond the border of Israel. It sings the song of humanity. This soul constantly grows broader with the exalted totality of humanity and its glorious image. He yearns for humanity’s general enlightenment. He looks forward to its supernal perfection. From this source of life, he draws all of his thoughts and insights, his ideals and visions.

And there is a person who rises even higher until she unites with all existence, with all creatures, and with all worlds. And with all of them, she sings. This is the person who, engaged in the Chapter of Song every day, is assured that she is a child of the World-to-Come.

And there is a person who rises with all these songs together in one ensemble so that they all give forth their voices, they all sing their songs sweetly, each supplies its fellow with fullness and life: the voice of happiness and joy, the voice of rejoicing and tunefulness, the voice of merriment and the voice of holiness. The song of the soul, the song of the nation, the song of humanity, the song of the world—they all mix together with this person at every moment and at all times. And this simplicity in its fullness rises to become a song of holiness, the song of God, the song that is simple, doubled, tripled, quadrupled, the song of songs of Solomon—of the sovereign who is characterized by completeness and peace.

A MUSLIM OFFERING

Celene Ibrahim-Lizzio, MDiv, co-directs the Center for Interreligious and Community Leadership Education (CIRCLE) at Andover Newton Theological School and Hebrew College. She is appointed the Islamic Studies Scholar-in-Residence at the two schools. She also serves as the Muslim Chaplain for Tufts University. Her publications include works on the histories and theologies of interreligious relations, Islamic religious leadership and higher education, Islam and Muslims in North America, Islamic family law, Muslim feminist theology, and Qu'ranic studies.

The business cards of one of my favorite local, artisan shops bear an adage attributed to the Taoist poet and philosopher Lao Tsu. The cards read:

If there is radiance
in the soul
it will abound in the family.
If there is radiance
in the family
it will abound in the community.
If there is radiance
in the community
it will grow in the nation.
If there is radiance
in the nation
the universe will flourish.

The adage is a reminder that radiance must be cultivated first and foremost at this innermost level, for the innermost level radiates to all of the other levels. Indeed, many Islamic teachings place a similar emphasis on the innermost dimensions of being and their ability to radiate and permeate. Islamic esoteric teachings recognize several different levels of inner-being, but the spiritual heart serves as the seat of moral consciousness and character. The Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, is reported to have said: "Verily, in the body there is a piece of flesh which if upright then the entire body is upright, and if corrupt then the entire body is corrupt. No doubt it is the heart." Prophetic sayings, such as this one, and many verses of the Qur'an, emphasize the preeminence of the heart and the necessity for its cultivation. Community exists in our relationships with one another, but it is primarily in the radiance of hearts that strength and wholesomeness find their flourishing at the levels of family, community, and nation.

Notably, this spiritual heart in Islamic teachings is much more than the locus of emotion. The heart is a seat of reason that gives a person awareness of right and wrong. Alongside using hearts to reason and discover Truth, it is in remembering the Divine Unity that hearts find calm, tranquility, and peace. Hence, Muslim scholars and communities across ages and civilizations preoccupied themselves with cultivating what came to be known as the "sciences of the heart." This domain of knowledge strove to understand how people can nourish their hearts as well as uproot the spiritual diseases that cause us to act unjustly, toward our own selves and toward one another.

Just peace within the community must begin with each of our own inward quests for earnest introspection and self-improvement at the heart level. From this perspective, one aspect of just peace within the community is people supporting one another in the pursuit of strong character, in cultivation of inner tranquility, and in the fostering of peaceful environments. Islamic teachings, drawn from the Qur'an, the Prophetic sayings, and the wisdom of the sages, have much to say about character, self-cultivation, and peace: "Do not oppress one another"; beware of suspicion, for suspicion is the most false of speech, do not seek out faults, do not spy on each other, do not contend with each other, do not envy each other, do not hate each other, and do not turn away from each other"; "speak goodness or remain silent"; honor thy neighbor"; "provide hospitality to the guest," and so on. All of these are teachings about how to act in community, but each one also has related dispositions in the heart: compassion, generosity, truthfulness, humility, contentment, love, and gratitude.

A Spiritual Offering from the Muslim Tradition:

In the spirit of the reflection above, I offer a prayer that is inspired by traditional Muslim practices and formulae for supplication. As a Muslim offering this prayer, I might ritually wash, face toward the Ka'ba, recite the prayer into gently cupped hands, ask for blessings upon Muhammad and Abraham and their families, and then gently wash my cupped hands over my face.

Oh Most Supreme One, Oh Gracious One, Oh Generous One, Oh Praised One, from Your bounty, open the doors of goodness and peace, open the doors of health and provision, the doors of blessing and strength, and the doors of compassion and perseverance. Oh Watchful One, Wise One, Bestow us with knowledge grant us discernment, pour upon us forgiveness and increase our capacity to forgive. Oh Most Merciful One, Most Subtle One, enlighten any darkness, strengthen any weakness, heal any ailment. Oh Subtle One, reconcile our hearts, mend our affairs, and guide us upon paths of peace. Amen.

A QUAKER OFFERING

*Alexander Levering Kern works in the fields of Quaker ministry, interfaith leadership, higher education, peacebuilding, and the arts. Currently Executive Director of the Center for Spirituality, Dialogue and Service (CSDS) at Northeastern University in Boston, Alex served previously as Executive Director of Cooperative Metropolitan Ministries (CMM). A widely published poet and writer, he edited the anthology **Becoming Fire: Spiritual Writing from Rising Generations**. Ecumenical and interfaith work has taken him to post-earthquake Haiti (with CMM), post-apartheid Southern Africa, the Middle East, Hiroshima, Latin America, and northern Nigeria.*

In the Religious Society of Friends (or Quakers), prayer and community-based just peacemaking have been inextricably linked for over three hundred and fifty years. Emerging during the English Civil War of the mid-seventeenth century, the early Quakers sought to embody the ancient Hebrew vision of *shalom* and enact Christ's gospel of peace as they launched a nonviolent "Lamb's War" to transform church, society, and, indeed, the whole creation.

This witness began in fervent seeking and silent "waiting upon the Lord." Friends experienced through prayer the powerful presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit and Light of Christ within each person, and sensed themselves gathered into the New Creation, the inbreaking kingdom (or reign) of God. As Quaker founder George Fox said when refusing an officer's commission in the Commonwealth army: "I told I them I lived in the virtue of that life and power that took away the occasion of all wars and I knew from whence all wars did rise, from the lusts, according to James' doctrine [James 4:1-4]. I told them I was come into the covenant of peace which was before wars and strifes were."

By 1661, the Friends peace testimony was codified in a declaration presented to King Charles II:

We utterly deny all outward wars and strife and fightings with outward weapons, for any end under any pretense whatsoever. And this is our testimony to the whole world. The spirit of Christ, by which we are guided, is not changeable, so as once to command us from a thing as evil and again to move unto it; and we do certainly know, and so testify to the world, that the Spirit of Christ, which leads us into all Truth, will never move us to fight any war against any man with outward weapons, neither for the kingdom of Christ, nor for the kingdoms of this world.

As pioneers of what we now call "nonviolent direct action" and "civil disobedience," early Friends suffered severe persecution for their refusal to cooperate with civil and religious authorities, declining, for example, to pay tithes, remove their hats before social superiors, or address them with honorific titles rather than the "plain speech" of equals. Alongside other Quaker martyrs, Mary Dyer was hanged on Boston Common in 1660. Her statue stands in front of the Massachusetts Statehouse as an abiding symbol of religious freedom.

The historic Quaker "testimonies" on peace and equality are outward ethical expressions of

inward religious experience. Friends have long sought to uncover the seeds of violence and injustice in their own lives and institutions. The first to abolish slavery in their own communities and to affirm the equality of women in ministry, Friends have also advocated fair treatment of Native Americans, workers, the mentally ill, prisoners, and religious minorities. Historically, Friends have seen care for the environment and more equitable sharing of the world's resources as integrally linked to peace, and have worked to build cultures of peace through methods ranging from Alternatives to Violence Projects in local prisons to lobbying on Capitol Hill and negotiating international treaties.

Alongside the two other Historic Peace Churches (the Mennonites and Church of the Brethren), Friends have endeavored to follow Jesus' teachings on peace in the Sermon on the Mount, often choosing alternatives to military service and initiating major war relief efforts for which the Religious Society of Friends was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize following World War II.

If the Quaker quest for just peace begins with the experience of the Light, the Seed, or "that of God in everyone," it ends in hope for the dawning of Peaceable Kingdom, where all of life is revered as sacred. This hope is depicted most memorably in Edward Hicks' many paintings of the prophet Isaiah's vision of a little child and wild animals lying down together - against the backdrop of William Penn's Treaty with the Indians at Shackamaxon in 1682. A copy of one of Hicks' "Peaceable Kingdoms" hangs in our home in Somerville, and helped inspire the following poem.

A Spiritual Offering from the Quaker Tradition:

"Everything that is, is holy"

At home on December 10, 2011, the morning after police closed the Occupy Boston encampment at Dewey Square

So the day begins with morning light
cradling the turquoise bowl which holds
within its grasp a crumpled tissue,
the remains of cereal and cherry blossoms
and all the holiness I've ever known

And yes, it's clear now that everything that is, is holy:
from our little girl sounding out letters
to speak from her Early Reader book
to the promise of rest in our far back room
beyond all menace and care

From the naked branches of December's trees
against a hungry blue Advent sky,
to the drums and brass bands of Occupy
and the statue of Mahatma Gandhi defying
the police lieutenant's order to leave

From the choir of Quakers chanting for their lives,
to the young Arab couple exchanging vows spontaneously
with a benediction of love from Rev. Steph the priest
transmitted through the human microphone
to the jubilant, defiant crowds of night

Yes, even here, in the day's news of ruin
with cluster bombs at the breakfast table
and the great food chain of beast on beast
yes even here, the bombers will bend
to ploughshares and then,
the wounded wolf shall lie down with the lamb.

-The poem's title is drawn from chapter one of Thomas Merton's *New Seeds of Contemplation*.

-Alexander Levering Kern

Monday Morning Beatitudes

Blessed are the anxious
for they shall find peace

Blessed are those whose feet are cold
for they shall be warmed by the shepherd's fire

Blessed are they who dwell underwater
for they shall come up for breath

Blessed are they who are sick and tired
for they shall know the healing hand
and they shall find rest for their souls

Blessed are you
when life smacks you around
tosses you this way, tosses you that

for you shall find a place to stand,
a place to sit
and call your own.

-Alexander Levering Kern

A BAHA'I OFFERING

Farjam Mohtadi, was born and raised in Iran to Baha'i parents. She has worked with younger children and youth for the past 25 years in various capacities as a teacher, vice-principal, social worker, and mentor - specifically as an interfaith Peacemaker. In each instance she has been impressed by the need for spirituality in the lives of young people. She observed, "Self-regard in young people is rooted in an ever expanding understanding of their spiritual nature and its expression in the world through thoughtful and selfless service." To that end, Farjam has dedicated much energy to working with youth locally, and last year she joined CMM in a successful interfaith educational and action project.

As a young Baha'i, I was always aware of the fact that most of the heroes and heroines of the Baha'i Faith, regardless of race or nationality, were also young. Their enthusiasm, optimism and their unabashed belief in equality made me want to be like them. However, over the years I have realized that these youth had the benefit of a network of older community members ready and capable to help whenever necessary. They were always present, listening, encouraging, teaching and by their own actions setting standards of excellence in education, work and family life. True excellence in that small community rested upon the belief in the oneness of humanity, love towards all regardless of religious affiliation or social class and rewarding youth that reflected these values.

In my present work with Arlington Peacemakers, a local interfaith youth group, we try to create an environment where our young people, united by the changeless principles of all Faiths that have love and acceptance at their core, can chart a course for their future. This would be for them to see humanity as one, to see all religions as one, and to work towards creating communities that reflect these ideals.

A Spiritual Offering from the Baha'i Tradition:

O Thou kind Lord! Thou hast created all humanity from the same stock. Thou hast decreed that all shall belong to the same household. In Thy Holy Presence they are all Thy servants, and all mankind are sheltered beneath Thy Tabernacle; all have gathered together at Thy Table of Bounty; all are illumined through the light of Thy Providence.

O God! Thou art kind to all, Thou hast provided for all, dost shelter all, conferrest life upon all. Thou hast endowed each and all with talents and faculties, and all are submerged in the Ocean of Thy Mercy.

O Thou kind Lord! Unite all. Let the religions agree and make the nations one, so that they may see each other as one family and the whole earth as one home. May they all live together in perfect harmony.

O God! Raise aloft the banner of the oneness of mankind.
O God! Establish the Most Great Peace.
Cement Thou, O God, the hearts together.

O Thou kind Father, God! Gladden our hearts through the fragrance of Thy love. Brighten our eyes through the Light of Thy Guidance. Delight our ears with the melody of Thy Word, and shelter us all in the Stronghold of Thy Providence.

Thou art the Mighty and Powerful, Thou art the Forgiving and Thou art the One Who overlooketh the shortcomings of all mankind.

-‘Abdu’l-Bahá

A BUDDHIST OFFERING

Joel Baehr is a pastoral psychotherapist and Buddhist teacher in private practice in Cambridge. A Fellow in the American Association of Pastoral Counselors, Joel has been an ordained Unitarian Universalist minister for over 45 years. Joel has been a student of John Makransky and other Tibetan Buddhist Lamas for 20 years. Prior to that he studied and practiced with spiritual teachers in many other traditions, including Quaker, Sufi, Advaita Vedanta and Roman Catholics. Joel teaches Buddhist practice in Massachusetts's prisons, the Natural Dharma Fellowship, and board member with the Foundation For Active Compassion.

We are surrounded by threats: ISIL/ISIS, Ebola, political enemies, loneliness, our own anger and reactivity. Of course, we try to neutralize these using appropriate tools for each threat, and are sometimes successful. But there is always a next threat. It is the nature of samsara, our ordinary world, that it is full of suffering. Today's very solutions become tomorrow's problems. In our Buddhist practice, we aim for safety and well being that is so secure it is found even in the midst of disappointment and defeat! Such a refuge is our true nature, which we discover through Bodhicitta practice: indomitable love and strength, present in our very being, no matter what the circumstances.

Training in bodhicitta is part of the Buddhist mind training tradition. Bodhicitta is the human heart awakened to its true nature, which is expressed as four innate and "immeasurable" qualities at the root of all beings: love (kindness), compassion (being with others in pain), sympathetic joy (taking joy in the joy of others), and equanimity (evenness that does not alter in good or bad circumstances). Bodhicitta practices naturally lead to active compassion: generous engagement with the world in all its messiness and blessings.

A Spiritual Offering from the Buddhist Tradition:

Mediation:

Please be comfortable. Allow the body to settle and relax in its own place. Allow the breath to settle into its own flow, relaxing into that flow – breath breathing you. Bring your mind home, release, and relax completely. Take your time.

Picture the sky above and all around you, open and boundless, with room for everything. The sky, like space itself, cannot be harmed by anything. Clouds, birds, and even pollution flow through the sky without damaging it. Imagine the spacious sky pervading everything, including your own body.

Especially sense a sky-like openness in the space of your heart. Allow the spaciousness to melt into you, so you become open space itself. Sense the innate safety in this situation.

Next, allow to arise in the sky-like space of your heart the embodiment of whatever truth you believe in. Visualize the deepest being of whatever faith you have. If you don't feel linked with any particular spiritual figure, simply imagine a pure, golden sun in the center of your heart. The important point is to consider what you are visualizing, or whose presence you feel, is the

embodiment of the truth, love, wisdom, and compassion of your deepest being, communing with what holds you and everyone. Continue to sense the safety in this situation.

Then bring to mind a pain, a difficulty, a worry that you face. It can be very personal, like a difficulty dealing with a person who harmed you, an arthritic pain in a joint, or very universal, like the fear of terrorism, Ebola, or other source of real human misery. Allow yourself to feel the physical and emotional manifestation of the difficulty. Then, as you breathe, bring those feelings into the space of your heart, the sky-like, open and spacious heart that holds the spiritual being you have been imagining. Say to yourself as you experience the pain brought into your sky-like heart, "So this is what so many others are feeling, too."

Empathize with all those who are experiencing the pain of the situation along with you – those countless people who have arthritis just like you, or who feel the same fears. Then breathe out the openness and love in your heart to the source of the pain and all those who are feeling it, and sense whatever form of relief ensues.

Repeat the actions of the previous paragraph a number of times. Let the difficulty melt with the openness and love in your heart.

The purpose of this meditation is not to get rid of pain, but to experience everything, including extreme difficulty in the light and space of all-pervasive love, the source of complete safety even in the face of difficulties. Then whatever challenges you face, you are equipped with a love that will not quit.

After practicing, wish or pray in this way:

"May all beings, with whom we are inseparably interconnected, be awakened, fulfilled, healed, and free. May there be peace in this world, and throughout all possible universes, an end to war, poverty, illness, and oppression, and may we altogether complete the spiritual journey."

(Surya Das)

AN EPISCOPAL OFFERING

Kwok Pui-lan teaches Christian Theology and Spirituality at the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge. Born in Hong Kong, she has been active in women's movements in church and society. She has participated in Jewish, Muslim, and Christian dialogues in the U.S. and abroad. With Joerg Rieger, she published ***Occupy Religion: A Theology of the Multitude***, which is a theological reflection on the Occupy Movement.

In a worship service in December 2014 at St. John's Chapel of the Episcopal Divinity School, an international student, Montgomery Tugwete from Zimbabwe, preached a powerful sermon about race as a social construct. He showed how, in the Christian tradition, Satan has been depicted as a person of dark-skinned color. In the United States, white America has a tendency to see people with dark skin as the Other. Because of this othering process, African Americans are often seen as inferior and dangerous and their lives dispensable. During his sermon, Tugwete projected images of Trayvon Martin, Tamir Rice, Michael Brown, and Eric Garner on a screen and invited us to look at their young, black faces. He asked us to imagine a world where racial boundaries are broken down and people are no longer treated as the Other.

Many in Boston still remember the busing crisis during the mandatory school desegregation in the 1970s. Now there have been numerous demonstrations throughout Boston and in other US cities in protest against the decisions by the grand juries in both Ferguson, Missouri, and New York, to not press charges against the white officers for the deaths of Brown and Garner. In Boston, the late Mayor Thomas Menino tried very hard during his tenure to promote better racial relationships in the city, though much still needs to be done.

In the struggle for racial justice among white and black communities, the voice of Asians and Asian Americans are not as loudly heard. They have been hailed as "model minorities" that other racial and ethnic minority groups should emulate. This divide-and-conquer strategy pits one group against the other, and fails to recognize that Asian Americans are not monolithic and that not all of them are well educated and upwardly mobile. In Boston, many are new immigrants who do not even know the English language. Some are undocumented people who struggle to survive, working in restaurants and other low-paying jobs.

How can we heal racial tensions in our city? How can we stand together in prayer and work toward just peace in our communities?

We are reminded of the "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" by the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. where he says that he is "gravely disappointed with the white moderate ... who is more devoted to 'order' than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice."

Another leading Christian theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, wrote that there is no *cheap grace* in his resistance to the Nazi regime. Today, Christians realize that there is no *cheap*

peace. In the Gospel, Jesus confronted the power of the Roman Empire and the religious elites of his time. He proclaimed the coming of the Kingdom of God as a counter-narrative to the imperial rule of Caesar. Instead of glorifying military might and fanfare of war, Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” (Matt. 5:9).

Unfortunately, throughout the ages, the message of Jesus has been domesticated and co-opted to serve the status quo. Time and time again, Christian doctrines and beliefs have been misused and misappropriated to justify the crusades, the conquest of the Americas, and the colonialization of the majority of the world’s people. The Christian Right and those advocating the Gospel of Prosperity have used the Gospel to bolster the 1% and to discriminate against the 99%, especially women and children; the working class; racial minorities; and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered people. Middle-class churches proclaim peace, where there is really no peace.

Just peace requires nothing less than a collective *metanoia* (repentance) of our own complicity in supporting the violence of an unjust system. Our economic system, which condemns one out of every four young children to live in poverty, is unjust. It is shameful that more Boston residents are living in emergency shelters than in any of the other 25 major cities nationwide.

The pursuit of just peace requires us to begin to speak about divine power in radically new ways. Christian images of God are commonly shaped by dominant images of power and might. In the past, God has often been envisioned as a heavenly patriarch or monarch. This divine power, understood as hierarchical, patriarchal, and one-sided, has been used to reinforce the oppressive powers and principalities on earth.

Just peace requires us to see divine power in relationships and working among us. We need to see beyond the false dichotomies of black and white and, instead, embrace the dignity of all human beings, and celebrate the diversity of gender, race, class, sexual orientation, and religion.

As people of faith, we have to recommit ourselves to work for just peace and the welfare of the city. More than ever, we need to stand together in solidarity to proclaim the good news from our traditions and to work toward reconciliation and healing.

A Spiritual Offering from the Episcopal Tradition:

Gracious and compassionate God, we stand before you in need of prayers for our nation, city, communities, and ourselves. We pray that you will help us see the grandeur of creation and the beauty in each human being. You have entrusted us with caring for the inhabited earth, but we have destroyed the environment and other species of life at an alarming rate. You have asked us to be our brothers’ and sisters’ keepers, yet we have turned a blind eye to people in need. We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves—for this we humbly repent. Help us to pursue just peace in our communities and sustain us when we falter, for we know you alone can give true peace. Amen

A ROMAN CATHOLIC OFFERING

Fr. Michael McGarry, CSP, is a Paulist priest, originally from Los Angeles, who has served in many settings, including the University of Texas, the University of California at Berkeley, the Tantur Ecumenical Institute in Jerusalem, and now (again — he was here in the late 70s and early 80s) as director of Boston’s Paulist Center. He has worked and written extensively in *Christian-Jewish Relations*.

We Christians sometimes take our prayer pretty casually. At least that’s been my experience. Examples: “O Lord, here I am in downtown Boston: help me find a parking place!” “O Lord, let the Patriots (or Notre Dame) win this weekend!” Other times our prayer takes on a bit more weight: “Please pray for positive results for my aunt’s MRI – she has four kids under fifteen years of age.” Or more serious still: “My father has dementia. Please pray for him and his wife.”

How do we respond to each of those requests? I suspect that, if you’re like me, you do not hesitate to prioritize our prayers, from the simplest to the most profound. Samuel Wells, vicar of St. Martin-in-the-Fields in London, reflected recently on how one responds to the more serious of these prayer requests. He believes that usually we offer either prayers of *resurrection* (reversing a serious condition, tantamount to a healing miracle like in the Gospels) or prayers of *incarnation* (“It’s a call for the Holy Spirit to be with your friend and [their father, daughter]”). Wells continues: “The irony about this prayer is that while the resurrection prayer expects God to do all the work, this [incarnation] prayer stirs us into action ourselves.”

Reverend Wells’ reflections have been helpful to me as I think about “Standing in Need of Prayer,” especially as I have been attentive to the ancient warning, “Be careful what you pray for!” A Divine Response to a heartfelt incarnation prayer may well require that I – the pray-er – walk with someone down a difficult path or a protracted embodied commitment to changing an unjust situation. Am I generous enough to offer such prayers?

Furthermore, we have inherited from our Jewish brothers and sisters other ways of prayer that don’t seem to surface in our consciousness as quickly as “asking” prayers. These include prayers of praise, lament, and penance (or contrition), which are mirrored so often and clearly in the psalms and other parts of the Hebrew Scriptures. Sometimes our “politeness” keeps us from lamenting. But our gracious God hears the cry of the brokenhearted and those prayers find ample expression in the Hebrew Scriptures (and in the secrets of our hearts). Other times, for some of us, prayers of praise feel a bit awkward. And contrition? For people of my baby-boom generation, contrition can be too quickly tied to notions of guilt and self-castigation. *But we stand in need of praying in all these keys.*

So for us Christians, prayer covers a wide spectrum of human emotions and postures, some not always comfortable and others almost second nature to us. For those of us involved in Cooperative Metropolitan Ministries (CMM), I suspect that we find ourselves often at the prayer-spectrum place of praying for peace, justice, in response to events in the world or

praying for events in our more personal world, as exemplified above by illness and vocational desires.

And sometimes our prayer is a combination of lament, pleading, contrition, and entreaty, as when we bear so many enormous burdens we see, both near and far: the racism just beneath our American surface, homeless people on our streets, our country bifurcated by income inequality, massive movements of refugees in the Middle East and Africa, domestic immigration reform, global warming and climate change, wars raging and terrorism threatening. To say nothing of personal tragedies of loves gone astray, relatives bearing cancer or age-related limitations, children becoming involved with drugs, women attacked on campuses, lost jobs and lost hopes. It's enough to make anyone feel overwhelmed.

Though on a point of optimism, I will conclude these thoughts with a reflection written by Bishop Ken Untener (sometimes ascribed to Archbishop Oscar Romero) that give me hope as I "stand in need of prayer":

A Spiritual Offering from the Roman Catholic Tradition:

A Future Not Our Own

It helps now and then to step back and take a long view. The Kingdom is not only beyond our efforts, it is beyond our vision. We accomplish in our lifetime only a fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work. Nothing we do is complete, which is another way of saying that the kingdom always lies beyond us.

No statement says all that could be said. No prayer fully expresses our faith. No confession brings perfection, no pastoral visit brings wholeness. No program accomplishes the Church's mission. No set of goals and objectives include everything.

This is what we are about. We plant the seeds that one day will grow. We water the seeds already planted knowing that they hold future promise. We lay foundations that will need further development. We provide yeast that produces effects far beyond our capabilities.

We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing this. This enables us to do something, and to do it very well. It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest. We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker. We are workers, not master builders, ministers, not messiahs. We are prophets of a future not our own.

A JEWISH OFFERING

Rabbi Margie Klein Ronkin serves as the spiritual leader of Congregation Sha'arei Shalom in Ashland, MA, and also works as Director of Clergy and Leadership Development for the Essex County Community organization. She is the founder of Moishe Kavod House in Boston, a community of over 600 Jews in their 20s and 30s dedicated to Tikkun Olam. Rabbi Margie is co-editor of **Righteous Indignation: A Jewish Call for Justice** (Jewish Lights), and is a member of the Synagogue 3000 Emergent Communities Leadership Network. She has appeared in **The New York Times**, **The Boston Globe**, **The LA Times**, CNN, and **Newsweek** for her faith-based social justice work, and was invited to the White House for her leadership.

Over the past year, I have been blessed to work on two of the most successful economic justice campaigns in MA history - the raising of the minimum wage from \$8 to \$11/hour, the highest in the country, and the passage of Earned Sick Time. Both efforts owe their success to Raise Up MA, a coalition of labor, community, and faith groups dedicated to economic dignity for all.

The Five Most Important Qualities for Social Change Makers: A Lesson from the Talmud

As Director of Clergy Organizing for the MA Communities Action Network (MCAN), the leading faith-based organization in Raise Up, I regularly asked my clergy colleagues, and myself: What is the role of the faith community in building movements for justice? Beyond our participation adding a valuable constituency to a cause, what does it mean to undertake this work as people of faith?

To address these questions, I want to explore a passage from the Talmud, the vast compendium of Jewish legal discussion and ethical thought from the 2nd-6th centuries. In this passage (*Pirkei Avot* 2:10), several preeminent rabbis discuss what are the most important personal traits to develop.

[Rabbi Yochanan] said to them: Go and see what is the best trait for a person to acquire.

Said Rabbi Eliezer: A good eye.

Said Rabbi Joshua: A good friend.

Said Rabbi Yossei: A good neighbor.

Said Rabbi Shimon: The capacity to see the seeds of what is being born.

Said Rabbi Elazar: A good heart.

Said He to them: I prefer the words of Elazar, for his words include all of yours.

Though the Rabbis were discussing what makes an exemplary individual, their words can also serve as guidance for how people of faith and goodwill might approach the work of *tikkun olam*, repairing our broken world.

A Good Eye

We must cultivate our capacity to see deeply, see what is good in those around us, and help them see it. We must not avert our eyes from the suffering in our city and its injustices. In our campaign on earned sick time, we built leadership by helping people see each other's

strengths. We focused on the core moral messages common to our religious traditions: we are all created in the image of God and deserve to be treated with dignity; we are all responsible for one another and more powerful when we act together. Recognizing these truths gave our leaders the strength to speak powerfully and publicly about the moral weight of our work.

A Good Friend

We must learn how to be good friends to each other and cultivate real relationships and community. When we are excited to spend time with one another, we are not only more likely to stay involved and feel accountable to others, but we are also more likely to enjoy the work.

A Good Neighbor

We need to learn to be good neighbors. Though race and class often divide our communities, we all participate in one regional economy and are subject to one government. I believe it is the role of communities of faith to find ways to see people from other neighborhoods and backgrounds as fellow citizens, coming together around common values and beliefs.

The Capacity to See the Seeds of What is Being Born

Looking at all the problems in the world, it is easy to feel that change is impossible. For me, a big part of what it means to be a religious person is to have faith in the future, and to be humble enough to believe that God's possibility is bigger than our fear and skepticism. As Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel said in a letter to President Kennedy, we must act with "moral grandeur and spiritual audacity." To me, spiritual audacity means searching for unlikely seeds of hope, and then nourishing the seeds we find. For example, in MCAN, we see the passionate responses across America in reaction to Ferguson and Staten Island as a sign that people are ready to act. With our interfaith leaders, we are focused on a movement for long-term change.

A Good Heart

What does it mean to have a good heart, as Rabbi Yochanan taught, that encompasses all the other qualities? I believe that the Rabbis are inviting us to approach the world with love, compassion, and hope. In lovingly seeing the good in people - even those who disagree with us - we are more likely to have faith in the possibility of change.

Cultivating a good heart is the work of a lifetime. For me, it requires transforming oneself from the inside out through prayer. When I pray, I ask for God's help to become the kind of good-hearted person I imagine Rabbi Yochanan was talking about. Whenever I say the *Amidah*, the climactic section of the Jewish service, I ask for strength, and the capacity to be loving, to experience healing and kindness, and to help others do the same. Whatever our individual focus, I believe religious practice can play a powerful role in helping each of us become the change makers we aspire to be.

A Spiritual Offering from the Jewish Tradition:

Prayer for Community Organizing, Based on Pirkei Avod 2:10

God,

Grant us the capacity to see deeply,
To see Your light in the people around us
To see Your truth behind the fog of messages that dehumanize Your people

Grant us the ability to be good friends to each other
Teach us to value and support each other
Because we can't do Your work alone
Teach us to laugh with each other
Help us in pursuing justice to find joy too

Grant us the wisdom to care for our neighbors
Help us know that we are connected
Help us learn curiosity, generosity, empathy, and respect
Help us to embrace our diversity while discovering how much we share

Grant us the insight to see the seeds of what is possible
Give us courage to nourish our hopes
Even when we fear we will be disappointed
Help us to see You working in the world

Hashiveinu Adonai Eloheinu

Help us turn toward You, God
Help us to open our hearts
To see the pain behind anger and harshness
Help us become vessels of Your love
That we may be your partners in creating the World to Come

And let us say, Amen.

A UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHRISTIAN OFFERING

Rev. Mykal O'Neal Slack is the founder and lead organizer of 4LYFE, an ecumenical, consultative ministry of Metropolitan Community Churches that provides pastoral and educational resources to address sexuality and gender identity issues in schools and communities of faith and connection across a broad spectrum. Mykal also serves as the Director of Worship for The Sanctuary Boston, a community of vibrant worship and connection, grounded in Unitarian Universalism (UU) for seekers of all kinds, and as the Community Life Coordinator of First Parish in Cambridge, Unitarian Universalist, supporting their vision of becoming a multiracial, multi-faith, justice-making community

This is a deeply unsettling and transformative time. Perhaps more than any other time in my own life, I am deeply aware of the pain, uncertainty, anger and sadness we humans are carrying. The racial disparities impacting how some folks are treated compared to others have been hiding in plain sight for generations. But, as a result of the deaths of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Eric Garner and others, we are paying attention altogether differently and paying attention, in some ways, for the first time. Awareness is good; it can lay the groundwork for change and transformation on a grand scale. But awareness can also be unproductive when we don't have the tools to see beyond our own lens.

It was in Jesus's teachings that I first learned the value of engaging and learning from people whose lives and experiences are different from my own. I have also learned that this kind of intentional engagement, while deeply meaningful, can make some people uncomfortable— so much so that they would choose the extremes of complete silence or committing unspeakable acts to avoid dealing with the realities of our differences. People like my grandmother, Wylene Tookes, gay civil rights leader, Bayard Rustin, and Brandon Teena and Rita Hester, two Trans siblings whose lives were cut short for living their truth, have all been my teachers in this regard. I remain grateful, however, for the promise of covenantal relationship in all its forms because it helps me stay grounded in my call to help grow hearts and build bridges, no matter how hard it seems or how uncertain the outcome. My hope is that we can draw from all of the Sources of Love and Light in our midst to move through the difficult and distressing moments with grace. We can't afford not to; too many of us are dying.

In the midst of it all, I am constantly checking-in with myself. What can I do? What do I need? Who do I trust to hold me and hold this moment with me? However I respond to these questions, there is one driving force that keeps my eyes, ears and heart open – my faith. I have faith in the power of Spirit, Love and connection to move all people to compassionate listening and action. This action can result in sitting down and having a different kind of conversation about race (or class, ability, gender, sexual orientation, etc.), or taking to the streets demanding that we reevaluate the systems of oppression that keep us spiraling out of control and away from one another. I have faith in our human capacity to teach one another and grow together.

Our stories open our eyes to a vision for a better world, and it is up to all of us to get out of the way, so all those voices that have previously been silenced or ignored can be heard. It is

now time to hear and share some new stories. It is now time to sing some new songs. If not now, when? If not us, who?

We all have Light, and, if we keep paying attention, we will see it in ourselves and in each other. We will learn to value that Light in new ways, and in doing so, we will change the world. I wrote this song of prayer out of this belief and sing it with communities of all faiths as often as I can. May it bring a new vision of peace and hope to all of us.

A Spiritual Offering from the Unitarian Universalist Tradition:

May I Be Light

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The musical score is written on two staves in treble clef with a 12/8 time signature. The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes with some rests. The lyrics are printed below the notes.

May I be Light in You, May you be Light in Me. In - to our hearts, in - to our souls, let Love a - bide.

May I be Love in You, May you be Love in Me. Fro - m this place, out to the world, fo - r all time.

A ROMAN CATHOLIC OFFERING

MT (Maria Teresa) Dávila is an Assistant Professor of Christian ethics at Andover Newton Theological School and a laywoman in the Roman Catholic tradition. She has published articles and contributions on immigration, the use of force and just war theory, Christianity and U.S. civil society, Latina/o Theology, among others. She is currently undertaking a study of leaders of communities of faith, peace and justice practitioners, and others to examine the relationship between different understandings of discipleship and activism.

Communities today contend with the brutal effects of *othering*. Othering is one of humanity's original sins. The "other", perceived as a threat to our well-being and our favor before God, is vilified, made violent in our eyes. Her or his body is turned into both a weapon against us as well as a commodity for our benefit, and therefore exploited and terminated. Sexism, racism, xenophobia, religious hatred, oppression, and all the violence that accompany these have at their core the human tendency to classify entire groups of peoples as "other", unworthy of the image of God and outside God's love.

The "other" in American history is the brown body – and once again the nation finds itself torn around the concept of the use of force to protect against a perceived threat. Our laws rightfully provide for the use of force in self-defense. But laws hardly take into account the sin of othering, and the ways in which this deceives us. As a nation we have become dependent on using guns against the "other". We feel at a loss for viable responses when our sin of othering brings down brown bodies. Included here is the femicide in countries where manufacturing for U.S. consumption and migration patterns make women laborers vulnerable. The sexist violence of gangs, the torture of brown bodies at the hands of U.S. military and the CIA for "national security", the environmental degradation of brown people's lands in our cities and abroad, and the violent responses to brown children at the border are waves of such violence for which we feel unequipped to respond.

The Christian tradition does not shy away from the sin of othering. Our narratives are framed within the structures that legitimize the mistreatment of the religious, ethnic, and economic other. The Holy Family's journey into Egypt is framed by imperial rule. The Canticle of Mary informs us that the task of following God in history is not just that of resisting the institutionalization and legitimization of othering, but of transforming our communities into places where God's reign of preferential love for the other is actualized. The Christian story holds as its zenith the murder of Jesus as the other of the Empire, the perceived threat of a brown body that must be publicly executed in order to maintain the Pax Romana.

Jesus rising from his violent death is an affront to the legitimization of the power of privilege and exclusion. In the tearing apart of the tomb, the executed criminal Jesus is validated as the real embodiment of the Divine, and all of history is transformed. From the birth in the stable, to the criminal's execution on the cross, Jesus confronts us with our sin of making the other a threat to our existence and deserving of our violence. We domesticate these stories at our peril. Millions of crucifixions have followed. They confront us today.

Local communities respond to the call to break this sin by deep and solidary lament wherever it takes place. Their strategy is truth telling, advocacy, and collaboration with victims, survivors, *and* perpetrators. Some of the most powerful images coming from Ferguson include clergy, law enforcement, and civic leaders engaging in vigils and conversation, walking the streets together to heal a community. The conversation in Boston between the police chief and members of brown communities is a pivotal step to understanding how othering is playing out in our communities. This work is energized by resort to the Christian story of Jesus forgiving the perpetrator centurions at the foot of the cross. At the heart of our tradition is a deep and abiding hope that all hearts can be transformed for justice and peace.

Othering is not just an American trait. As I have become sensitive to the plight of those suffering from the violence of the so-called Islamic State, I feel a call to pray for conversion of hearts. I have been *fasting* on a daily basis for those I consider so other that I cannot imagine a conversation between us. I fast for conversion of heart of perpetrators of violent othering, and for our ability to respond with non-violent peace-building options. I cling to the claim that God can effect true change in hardened hearts. Fasting helps me understand the religious and ethnic other as beloved by God and within God's reach and grace. Fasting and praying for the conversion of hearts of perpetrators is not a popular option, but one deeply grounded in the Christian tradition. Through it we witness to the challenging affront of the Christian story, the life of the brown body of Jesus enacting God's reign of love amidst the violence of Empire.

A Spiritual Offering from the Roman Catholic Tradition:

I break my daily fast remembering or reading some part of that story (Jesus being tested in the wilderness: Mt. 4:1-11; and Jesus' crucifixion: Lk 23:34; Lk. 23:47) and joining it with the stories of the suffering of brown bodies in different contexts. A simple prayer to break the fast focuses on solidarity of hearts and faith, closing with a call to action:

*Ever Gracious and ever Present God,
I bring my simple offering of fasting to an end in your presence,
and in the trust that, as my body and mind are stung by hunger,
you bring my heart closer to You,
and closer to the heart of those who suffer today [specifically remember someone or a group
as a special intention].
I pray, also, and especially, for my fasting to bring my heart closer to those who hurt others
[specifically remembering perpetrators of othering and violence],
in the faith that You reconcile all things to Yourself,
and are able to change hearts of stone into hearts of flesh.
Make this breaking of my fast be a cleaving to your will, forever just and forever loving,
That I may become an agent of transformation and hope in the world.
This I pray in the name of Jesus, the Christ – perfect union of Divine and human will, Amen.*

A MUSLIM OFFERING

Imam Taalib J. Mahdee was born and raised in Cambridge, Massachusetts and currently serves as the resident Imam of Masjid Al-Qur'an in Boston. He has been a tireless advocate for the betterment of all people. Imam Mahdee participates in several community organizations that represent a diverse population such as the United Way Faith and Action, Cooperative Metropolitan Ministries, Islamic Council of New England and the Muslim American Society Northeast Region Council.

“Within the darkness the command issued ‘let there be light’ and the birth of our spiritual intelligence illuminated the world.” In the darkness we see the injustices we witness in every corner of society enveloping the world and contaminating our souls. The social network airwaves are crowded with images and words of many victims within the darkness and the searching with worldly intelligence for creative solutions that will go viral. The solutions we seek suggest that someone or something else is to blame, rather than acknowledging our collective responsibility.

When we point blame, we create even more victims, and this does not result in the peaceful change we seek. Our religious leaders must be cautious of the voice of worldly intelligence, and raise the conscience to pursue justice, therefore illuminating our collective spiritual intelligence to radiate the light of peace. Al-Islam is defined as the path of peace, and I stand firmly on this principle for building real structural change to a system that is failing those who it was intended to protect.

As religious and spiritual leaders we cannot be drawn into the darkness, but illuminate our wisdom scriptures that have blessed us with ways to embrace many in the light of peace. The signs of the times are guideposts for the faithful to a higher goal in life than our worldly intelligence can comprehend.

We must be courageous leaders, standing firmly on the spiritual intelligence with which we are blessed, and working diligently to elevate the thinking of those we can influence to the true purposes of life. Our voice should be in unison as we formulate practices and laws that will address the systematic changes committed to the work of righteous good deeds.

A Spiritual Offering from the Muslim Tradition:

In Al-Islam, prayer is a principle that keeps us connected to Allah in order to have the best life here and in the life that follows. Following is a prayer:

This will be their cry therein: "Glory to You Allah!" and "Peace" will be their greeting therein! And the close of their cry will be: "Praise be to Allah the Merciful Benefactor, the Merciful Redeemer of all systems of Knowledge!"

A HUMANIST OFFERING

Vanessa Zoltan is the Assistant Humanist Chaplain at Harvard. She has worked in the nonprofit/education sector for over 10 years as a teacher, community developer and education policy advocate. She is currently a graduate student at Harvard Divinity School and a Proctor to 34 freshmen students.

Zachary Cole is the Program and Outreach Specialist for the University Chaplaincy at Tufts University. He has worked in the Office of Student Life at Harvard Divinity School and the Humanist Community at Harvard (HCH). At HCH, he served as the Values in Action Fellow and organized interfaith community service projects in partnership with local religious and philosophical communities. He also served as a staff mentor for the 2014 Interfaith Youth Initiative (IFYI), sponsored by Cooperative Metropolitan Ministries.

Advancing human rights and interdependence is both a key practice of Just Peace in the Community and an important component of many people who possess a more humanist orientation. An approach to achieve these ideals is to treat ourselves and each another as sacred.

In Humanism, we try to focus on shared humanity, and through it, compassion and empathy. *Jane Eyre* is the story of a young woman finding her own bit of freedom and liberation in 19th century England. Our focus is trying to create a world in which everyone can live her or his best, freest life. We do not believe that anything is inherently sacred, but believe that we can treat things as sacred. It is through action that something becomes sacred. Humanists discover a call for treating each other as sacred in a wide variety of non-traditionally sacred texts.

Humanists can view literature, such as *Jane Eyre*, as being a sacred text if one treats it as sacred. Humanists encourage people to treat things they love as sacred because that is how we practice treating one another. This relates to Just Peace in that everyone's life holds value, not the privileged over the underprivileged.

We are offering two pieces of what we see as sacred writings from *Jane Eyre* that say something deeply profound and gives us something complex and beautiful to pray about.

The first reading states: "I can live alone if self-respect, and circumstances require me so to do. I need not sell my soul to buy bliss. I have an inward treasure born with me, which can keep me alive if all extraneous delights should be withheld, or offered only at a price I cannot afford to give." This phrase admits both strength and vulnerability. It is a clear statement that I am strong enough to live alone in this vast world, but vulnerable in that it admits that one deeply prefers not to live alone. It is a reminder that all of us experience loneliness and are meant to live in community and in reciprocity with the world. Reflecting on my "inward treasure", which is the sacredness within me, it reinforces the concept of the sacredness in all.

Our interconnectedness, the fact that we are not evolutionarily predisposed to live alone is

a deeply humanistic value. And as Just Peace promotes, our interconnectedness is what leads us to the conclusion that if one of us suffers, we all suffer. We are all brothers and sisters and have a responsibility for one another. The second reading, "I would always rather be happy than dignified," comes after Jane starves for a few days. Instead of saying, "I could live alone if self-respect requires me so to do", she says that happiness is what matters to her.

Putting these two seemingly contrasting prayers in conversation illustrates that there is not "one way" to pray. Different times and places require different sources of strength, resistance, or understanding. Sometimes self-respect is called for; sometimes happiness takes precedence over dignity. What is important is to notice and stay in touch with what is going on around you and within you, so that you can find the right prayer for the right moment.

A Spiritual Offering from the Humanist Tradition:

We believe that all human lives, including our own, have value. In order to take good care of the world, we also have to take care of ourselves. By practicing seeing the sacred in one another, we learn patience and understanding. We encourage love of others and love of one self. And as Humanists, we agree with the principles of Just Peace in that these practices contribute to a more peaceful world.

A GREEK ORTHODOX OFFERING

Fr. Demetrios E. Tonias, Ph.D. is Dean of the Annunciation Greek Orthodox Cathedral of New England. Fr. Tonias specializes in Jewish-Christian relations with a focus on the Eastern Christian-Jewish dialogue in general and the early church Jewish-Christian relationship in particular. His most recent book, **Abraham in the Works of John Chrysostom**, examines the numerous references to the great patriarch of the Jewish bible by the fourth century Christian preacher and bishop. Fr. Tonias is active in ecumenical and interfaith dialogue at a local and international level and serves as an ecumenical officer for the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Boston.

The liturgy is the heart of the Orthodox Christian Church and from it flows the lifeblood of the church's theology. The early church fathers were, for the most part, hierarchs and their theological understanding was formed within the crucible of the sacramental life in general and the Eucharistic rite in particular. Within the Divine Liturgy the word "peace" is ubiquitous. Indeed, the liturgy begins with a set of petitions known as the Εἰρηνικά or "Litany of Peace," which takes its name from the first petition of the service: "In peace let us pray to the Lord." These "peace" petitions are a fundamental building block in Orthodox liturgy and they are omnipresent—in the Divine Liturgy itself, in a wedding or baptism, or at the blessing of a home—prayer always begins with a call for peace.

The peace for which we pray is described as the "peace from above" and from which flows "peace in the whole world." There is a personal nature to this peace, for we pray that our day may be "perfect, holy, peaceful, and sinless." It is a peace whose fruits are "repentance" and "all that is good and beneficial to our souls" so that we may live out the rest of our lives "without shame and suffering." It is a peace that guides us along the path of righteousness. It is a peace that manifests itself most profoundly in the "kiss of peace" that follows the command that we "love one another with one mind."

At the apex of the liturgy, in the Holy Anaphora, the priest exclaims to the faithful, "Let us stand well. Let us stand in awe. Let us be attentive, that we may present the holy offering in peace." This peace offering is not simply for our own personal salvation but "for the whole world." As the liturgy begins with peace, so it ends with peace: "Let us depart in peace."

The Greek Orthodox Church understands the Divine Liturgy as a manifestation of heaven on earth. In this divine-human encounter we gain a foretaste of the paradise that was intended for humanity when the cosmos was first formed and that which awaits us at the eschaton. Put another way, in the liturgy we see the world *as it should be*—and the world should be a world of peace. If we seek to encounter God then, by necessity, our lives and our world must be one of peace. Peace is the fertile soil within which our spiritual life grows, the foundation and bedrock of our prayer life, and it is the natural state of our being and the natural condition of all humans. It is for this reason that the early Christians placed such an emphasis on peace in their language of prayer—for all that is opposed to peace is opposed to God.

The following prayer is adapted from the Liturgy of St. Basil the Great. Basil was a Bishop of

Caesarea in Cappadocia during the fourth century. He was a bishop who labored tirelessly to bring the peace of God to the citizens of his community through his philanthropic ministry.

A Spiritual Offering from the Greek Orthodox Tradition:

We pray to You, Lord, grant peace to our lives. Remember, Lord, those who bear fruit and do good works, and those who remember the poor. Reward them with Your rich and heavenly gifts. Grant them in return for earthly things, heavenly gifts; for temporal, eternal; for corruptible, incorruptible.

Remember, Lord, those who are in the deserts, on mountains, in caverns, and in the chambers of the earth. Remember, Lord, those living in chastity and godliness, in asceticism and holiness of life.

Remember, Lord, this country and all those in public service whom you have allowed to govern on earth. Grant them profound and lasting peace. Speak to their hearts good things concerning your Church and all your people that through the faithful conduct of their duties we may live peaceful and serene lives in all piety and holiness. Sustain the good in their goodness; make the wicked good through Your goodness.

Remember, Lord, your people. Have mercy on them and on us according to the multitude of Your mercy. Fill their treasuries with every good thing; preserve their marriages in peace and harmony; nurture the infants; instruct the youth; strengthen the aged; give courage to the faint hearted; reunite those separated. Free those who are held captive by unclean spirits; sail with those who sail; travel with those who travel; defend the widows; protect the orphans; liberate the captives; heal the sick.

Remember, Lord, those who are in mines, in exile, in harsh labor, and those in every kind of affliction, necessity, or distress; those who entreat your loving kindness; those who love us and those who hate us; those who have asked us to pray for them, unworthy though we may be. Remember, Lord our God, all Your people, and pour out Your rich mercy upon them, granting them their petitions for salvation.

Remember, O God, all those whom we have not remembered through ignorance, forgetfulness or because of their multitude since You know the name and age of each, even from their mother's womb. For You, Lord, are the helper of the helpless, the hope of the hopeless, the savior of the afflicted, the haven of the voyager, and the physician of the sick. Be all things to all people, You who know each person, his requests, his household, and his need.

Deliver this community and city, O Lord, and every city and town, from famine, plague, earthquake, flood, fire, sword, invasion of foreign enemies, and civil war.

A CHRISTIAN OFFERING

William E. Dickerson, Jr. has been the Pastor and Overseer at Greater Love Tabernacle in Dorchester since 1989. His work emphasizes reaching the hurting and disenfranchised of society. He has served as a youth minister, counselor, tutor, Boston Public School teacher and a loyal advocate for children and troubled individuals in courts throughout the Commonwealth. He is also the renowned author of the book, **You Too Can Be Delivered: Keys to Walking in Personal Deliverance.**

Every day that God allows you to wake up, pray to Him. All you need to do when you pray is to have breath in your body. Thank the Lord for seeing another day. Thank God for His mercy. Thank God for His grace. Give God praise, glory and honor.

My tradition holds that the Word of God, as found in the Bible, is infallible and incapable of error. We need the Word of God to cover us. The more truth, revelation, and understanding that we get from the Word of God, the stronger we become. The word of God is flawless:

“As for God, his way is perfect: The Lord’s word is flawless; he shields all who take refuge in him.” -2 Samuel 22:31 (NIV)

Psalm 119:105 says that the Word of God is a “lamp for my feet, a light on my path.” If we use the Word of God, His word guides us to walk out our faith in a positive manner. I will know what to do based on what the word of God says.

Isaiah 55:6 says, “Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near.” God is not lost. This means that we should seek the Lord while we still have sensitivity in our hearts toward Him. We do this through seeking Him in prayer and by reading His word.

God magnifies his word above his name, Psalm 138:2. He sent his word and healed them and rescued them from the grave, Psalm 107:20. The psalmist asks the Lord in Psalm 119:133 to direct his footsteps according to his word, and Job says in Job 23:12 that he “treasured” God’s words “more than” his daily bread.” The greatest offensive weapon we have against the devil is the word of God. When you pray, ask God for the understanding of His word.

As the chief enemy of Christ, the devil thought he had a plan in place to bring us under when Jesus died on the cross. This plan did not succeed to do what it needed to do to counteract Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. We see this adversarial plan in the principalities and powers, in the very evil put into place against the very things that God has established in this earthly realm.

For this, the devil is in a competitive rage. He is trying to knock out our spiritual understanding of what God is able to do in our lives. The devil also knows that the greatest offensive weapon that we have against him is the word of God. The enemy knows that if we can get enough of the word of God in our mind and in our spirit there is nothing he could do to affect us. When we get the word of God in our spirit, we walk out the word. We speak the word. We live the word. We manifest the word. This is what the devil does not want to see.

He does not want to see a full manifestation of the word of God being real in our lives.

As we walk out the word, we must learn how to have praise on our lips and joy in our hearts as we focus on the Lord and cast our cares on upon Him in prayer. When we pray, we will know how much He cares for us.

A Spiritual Offering from the Christian Tradition:

When you pray:

- 1. Pray early.** Psalm 63:1 “O God, you are my God; early will I seek you: my soul thirsts for you....”
- 2. Pray with faith.** James 5:15 “The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven.”
- 3. Pray with determination.** Luke 18:20-21 “20 You know the commandments... 21 He replied, ‘I have kept all these since my youth.’”
- 4. Pray with passion.** James 5:16 “Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.”
- 5. Pray with the word of God.** Use the word of God as your prayer. John 17:17 “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.”
- 6. Pray with consistency and without ceasing.** I Thessalonians 5:17 “pray without ceasing,...

Pray and do not grow faint. Pray and do not get weary. Pray and do not give up. Pray because there is apostasy in many churches today. Pray because the spirit of antichrist is moving in the land today. Pray because rebellion and disobedience is present. Pray because as we pray, the Lord will open new horizons.

As we pray, the Lord will position us for greatness. As we pray, we will walk in our deliverance. As we pray, we will walk in our strength. As we pray, we will walk in great joy.

YOUR OWN OFFERING:

Printed as an offering toward
Just Peacemaking in the Community

First Printing by Church on the Hill (Swedenborgian)
140 Bowdoin Street, Beacon Hill
Boston MA 02108

Second Printing by Cooperative Metropolitan Ministries
474 Centre Street
Newton, MA 02458



Cooperative Metropolitan Ministries

Faiths Uniting in Social Action Since 1966