

An illustration of several hands of various skin tones (light brown, tan, and dark brown) reaching upwards in a gesture of prayer, forming a circular shape around the central text.

Standing in the Need of Prayer, Volume III

Spiritual Voices
Envisioning Just Peacemaking Among Peoples



Cooperative Metropolitan Ministries

Faiths Uniting in Social Action Since 1966

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Standing in the Need of Prayer, Volume III

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PREFACE

Prayer for Just Peacemaking Among Peoples

By Rev. Dr. Rodney L. Petersen

Rev. Dr. Rodney L. Petersen is executive director of CMM. He came to this position 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.

This prayer booklet includes the voices of many of our religious and spiritual partners from local and distant communities who are graciously sharing their traditions and prayers that can inspire others in prayer. Many of these friends are on a journey toward “just peace,” a cause taken up by our different religious communities and, notably, by the World Council of Churches. The WCC initiated a process in Busan, Republic of Korea in 2013 that focuses on “just peace” in communities, in the marketplace, among peoples, and with the earth. It is predicated on the idea that there will be no peace without justice, that justice makes peace possible.

Prayer – invocation, intercession, and devotion – deepens the quest for just peace. After the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus’ disciples ask him, “Teach us to pray” (Matthew 6:9). That question is still with us. It was present at the World Day of Prayer for Peace in the town of Assisi, an interfaith gathering called for by Pope John Paul II on October 27, 1986 – in the very home of St. Francis whose life is a symbol of the search for just peace and reconciliation. Other agendas have called forth global efforts at prayer reaching back at least to the Massachusetts Haystack Prayer Meeting of 1806 which marks the globalization of concerted prayer.

The conflict-ridden 21st century, with seeming intractable conflict in the Middle East, Latin America, central Africa and elsewhere offers its own mandate for prayer to marshal human understanding and will. For example, the Day of Prayer, again called for by Pope John Paul II, in 1993 for peace in Bosnia, and in 2001 following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. In these days of Climate Change, indigenous tribes have promoted a World Peace and Prayer Day which has had a focus on the healing of the earth. Prayer can further the much-needed call for interfaith understanding, an appreciation of others as we seek the commonality that we share as well as the uniqueness and differences that we also hold close.

These prayers draw from a rich field of human experience, from a profound sense of the meaning of *b'tzelem Elohim* (*imago dei*) – [made] in the image of God – to fear that find its way to faith, oppression that is overwhelmed by grace, rich resources of consultation and compassion, encouragement and love. Each of the Abrahamic religions draws deeply from the Psalms of David for guidance in the life of prayer. South Asian prayer, and the prayers of indigenous peoples from across the globe, often draw upon pre-axial consciousness (before 800 BC), reflecting a sense of unity with transcendence through myth, poetry, dance, music, fertility, and nature. The prayers in this collection draw from many of these different traditions.

These voices represent a variety of religious and spiritual lay leaders from Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Buddhist, and Bahá'í traditions who believe in their faith and spiritual teachings that can inform you, the reader, in interfaith exchanges using the blessings that enrich our lives and bring us closer to the many truths and prayers. A mandate for authentic interreligious prayer and dialogue can be dated to 1965 with the Second Vatican Council's document *Nostra Aetate* (*Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christians*). A theological framework was facilitated here by grounding prayer in the "one community" of humanity – because "all stem from the one stock which God created to people the entire earth" (art. 1). A parallel idea is found in the *Quran*, "Mankind is but one community" (2:213). Based on this commonality, engagement between religions – in whatever different forms this might take – represents an exercise in mutual enrichment, critical awareness, and a means to lend added gravity to the search for "Peace among Peoples."

Three forms of interfaith prayer are outlined by Gavin Brown in "Praying Together in the Dark: Theological Reflections on Shared Prayer within Interreligious Dialogue" (*Australian Journal of Theology* 20.1; April 2013). These are "Participant-Observation of Prayer" (being in the presence of the other's prayer within an interreligious context); second, "Multi-religions Prayer" (being together in prayer); and third, "Interreligious Prayer" (praying together). According to Thomas Ryan, "Attendance at the formal prayer rituals of another faith community makes a positive statement all of its own" (*Interreligious Prayer: A Christian Guide*; Paulist Press, 2008; p. 23). It demonstrates openness to the "other" and expresses an important sense of solidarity with others as co-religionists. These are important qualities for building a just peace among potential combatants.

Interreligious interactions focus the search for peace among peoples. Such interactions are not limited to just one aspect of living. The implications of loving our religious neighbors as ourselves pervades all areas of our life together. We encounter one another in many different spheres of life in which interreligious understandings are challenging us in this century. These spheres are all-encompassing and include human needs, social justice, conflict, family life, education, community peace, congregational life, and the workplace. Prayer happens as our social life is bisected by transcendent meaning while along the horizontal plane of our lives we

move from a preoccupation with self to make room for our neighbor in spheres of hospitality, empathy, compassion, and social justice.

Meaning on the horizontal plane of our lives is found in a vertical axis. Transcendent meaning on this axis has the potential for giving the appearance of indifferentism or even syncretism. However, for Christian theologian Gavin D'Costa “interreligious prayer ... is not unlike ‘wrestling’ in the dark, an abandonment of control in an ambiguous act of love and trust, even when we are not sure who God is, crying out to God: ‘I will not let you go, unless you bless me’ (Gen. 32:26)” (*The Meanings of Religion and the Trinity*, T&T Clark, 2000; p. 150). Such “wrestling in the dark” need not equate to the difficult task of finding common images or symbols inhering within interreligious prayer.

Bahá’í, Sikh, Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Buddhist and other prayers can stand next to and benefit one another. Interreligious prayer is possible not because we can all arrive at a satisfactory resolution of questions. Jacob wrestled in the dark. Together we cry out that we will not let go without a blessing. Such activity makes room for the other in the most profound sense.

Trust between religious communities is hard-won. In our efforts to build such trust in all the spheres of life that crowd upon us on the horizontal plane, we will not always see eye-to-eye, especially on issues born from histories of conflict, but we can abide in the mystery of life itself. At times, we may unintentionally misunderstand, disappoint, and hurt one another. Within a framework of commitment to people of other religious traditions we can remain faithful to these relationships despite differences and misunderstanding. May these prayers, blessings and teachings help guide us to that end.

A JEWISH PERSPECTIVE

Rabbi David Jaffe is the author of Changing the World from the Inside Out: A Jewish Approach to Personal and Social Change, winner of the 2016 National Jewish Book Award for Contemporary Jewish Life. He is the Founder and Principal of Kirva Consulting, which helps organizations and individuals access spiritual wisdom for creating healthy, sustainable relationships and communities. David is the co-convener of Sharon Interfaith Action, a community organizing group working in partnership with Brockton Interfaith Communities on issues of racial and economic justice. He was a founder of the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization in his role as Social Justice Programs Director at the Boston Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC).

In an ancient Jewish teaching (*Genesis Rabbah 24*), the sage Ben Azzai proposes that the general principle underlying all the teachings in the *Holy Torah* is that human beings are created in the Divine Image. His contemporary, Rabbi Akiva, argues that the general principle of the *Holy Torah* is “love your neighbor as yourself.” Indeed, these are two powerful and important principles. A third sage comes along and points out the weakness with Rabbi Akiva’s principle. If a person feels degraded or insulted, he is liable to turn around and insult and degrade others. Whereas, if one bases their behavior on the fact that all people are made in the Divine image, there is no justification to treat anyone with anything less than full respect.

That all humans are created in the Divine Image resonates particularly strongly for me in this current political-spiritual moment. We seem to be in a time where it is increasingly difficult for people to see the Divine Image in those who look and sound different and who hold different political positions. Before we can get to the exalted level of actually loving those different from ourselves, we need to acknowledge that we all share a common root in Divinity. Our *Talmud* teaches us, “Why was the first human created as an individual? To teach that we are all from a common ancestor.” (*Talmud Bavli Sanhedrin 37*) Can I, as a politically liberal Jew, really acknowledge and feel that someone with opposing political views shines with the Divine Image? When we can know this fact in our hearts, we are on the way towards healing the great divisions in our country.

“Who is it you feel you have nothing in common with, can’t stand and think is a danger to the well-being of the country? Now try to feel in your heart that this person is made in God’s image, just like you.”

Rabbi Dr. Jonathan Sacks, former Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom, claims that this principle is the key towards ending religious violence. In his book, *Not in God's Name: Confronting Religious Violence*, he describes the tension between tribalism and universalism in human cultures. We have a need for both and when these two impulses do not live in balance, terrible, religiously-motivated violence can result. There have been many attempts to impose a universal religion or belief system on humanity and all have resulted in violence. On the other hand, unbridled tribalism leads to endless battles over territory and resources. Rabbi Sacks

argues that to practice the idea that all humans are created in the Divine Image offers the way to balance tribalism and universalism. We live in tribes – cultural, ethnic, religious and political tribes. Sometimes those tribes have colors – like blue and red. Although, we need our tribes to fight for our beliefs, we must never forget that every human being, especially those in the other tribes, is made in the Divine Image. This awareness can help us treat with dignity those who we might otherwise shun as different and threatening.

I am constantly challenged to remember this teaching in our current, polarized environment. As a religious person with a deep belief that God created this world for good and breathes into all of us a holy Divine Soul, I practice making space in my constricted heart for people who are different and with whom I disagree. I believe this practice reveals my own Divine image and makes God's presence more real in this world.

A Jewish Prayer Offering:

Rebbe Nachman of Breslov (d. 1810 Ukraine) taught his students to make spontaneous, personal prayers out of our holy teachings. After learning something inspirational, the practice is to take that inspirational idea and turn it into a prayer to God for help internalizing that idea and making it real in your life. In that spirit, I want to offer that practice to you, the reader. Below is a teaching from Rebbe Nachman about peace, and my own short, spontaneous prayer in response. Take what touches your heart from the teaching; I encourage you to make your own prayer.

*“When there is true peace down below,
within the individual,
there is peace on high—in G-d’s heaven above.
And when there is peace on high,
abundance and mercy fills the world below.”
(Likutei Moharan I:39)*

My prayer:

God, please let me integrate the dark parts of myself into one whole. Let the light of my soul heal these parts and bring them into a unity inside. Let me not act out what I do not want to see in me on my opponents and enemies. Let my heart be unified and hospitable – to all the parts in me and to others. Please God, bring your mercy and unity into this world and help us have mercy and love for each other. Let our open, whole hearts meet each other and create a world that is whole.

Your prayer:

A MUSLIM PERSPECTIVE

Salma Kazmi holds a Graduate Certificate in Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations from Hartford Seminary and a Master of Theological Studies from Harvard Divinity School. From 2001-2006 Salma served as the Associate Director of the Islamic Society of Boston Cultural Center. During this time, Salma designed interfaith dialogue programs, particularly with the Jewish community, eventually co-founding the Center for Jewish-Muslim Relations with a colleague at a neighboring synagogue. Salma has been an adjunct professor at Merrimack College, where she developed and taught a class entitled “The Theology and History of Jewish-Christian-Muslim Relations” and was also the Clinic Co-Director at Boston University’s Center for Religion and Conflict Transformation. She is currently serving as the Executive Director of the Boston Islamic Seminary which is under development.

Living in “Interesting” Times

There is a saying, often referenced (perhaps incorrectly) as a Chinese curse, that goes: “May you live in interesting times.” Today, it certainly seems that we live in “interesting times,” but I am not convinced that we should see this as a curse.

Late on Election Day, 2016, I came to the startling realization that I had not even considered the possible consequences of a Trump victory. History seemed to be taking a sharp turn and I had no idea what was around the bend. On November 9th, as I went through my normal morning routine, I was greeted by meaningful, sympathetic looks from passers-by and a pointed, “How ARE you?” by the barista at my local café. Everyone in my liberal bubble of Jamaica Plain seemed to be collectively mourning. As I tried to process the new state of things, I sought out advice from religious leaders I respect, and was struck by their even-keeled demeanor in the face of a future that seemed hazy and very likely tumultuous.

“Everything is as it should be.” one person said to me, “Better people [than us] had worse leaders.”

Another well-known Imam reminded the Muslim community that the people who were our neighbors and fellow citizens on November 8th are the same people who were our neighbors on November 9th. Many things may seem to have changed, he said, but many things were also the same.

In spite of those balanced responses, 2017 was every bit as tumultuous as we might have expected. From the Women’s march and the first Muslim Ban in January, to the #MeToo campaign starting in the fall. The year just ended brought us every manner of “interesting” events in many sectors of society and continue still. I was frequently absorbed by just trying to stay abreast of the most recent scandal or almost-scandal, captivated by the drama in spite of myself. But in saner moments, I realized that it is in “interesting times” that a broad view of history and a vision for something better are most vital. And it is our religious traditions that

perhaps best provide the sweeping perspectives of the past and the resources to develop a vision of what is possible for the future, grounding us and giving us something new to build towards when daily events serve only to pull us towards frustration, anger and despair.

The Qur'an offers stories of the Prophets of God who preceded Muhammad (peace be upon them all) as reminders and sources of inspiration to those who have read it over the past 1400 years. *The Qur'an* reminds us of the similar struggles of Abraham, Moses, Jesus and many others, always with the message that God is present and able to help those who work towards what is good. It encourages us to not be deterred by the circumstances we might find ourselves in, but to regard every moment as an opportunity; an opportunity to turn to God and draw closer to Him, to remember the good He has done for us, to continuously refine our individual characters and our spiritual hearts, to build relationships of trust with the individuals and communities around us, and to work towards justice in the world. Social turmoil and struggle serve as a means of testing our mettle or seeing what we are made of. They may draw out darker parts of ourselves, but they are also an opportunity to draw out something beautiful and potentially transformational. And it is with the hope of drawing the good from within all of us that I offer this prayer:

Prayer for our Times:

In the tradition of all of God's prophets may we all stay hopeful when the world seems to be in turmoil. May we rely on the One who has authority over all of creation, and may we work together to envision and build a future that is better for all of us.

In the spirit of the Hadith (Prophetic Tradition), which says,

“Amazing is the affair of the believer, verily all of his affair is good, and this is so for no one except the believer. If something good befalls him, he is grateful, and that is good for him. And if something harmful befalls him he is patient, and that is good for him.” (*Sahih Muslim*)

May we be all be patient in adversity and may we see every moment as an opportunity to grow closer to God.

Oh, Guardian Lord, Our Protector, the One who Responds, you have told us:

“And when My servants ask you concerning Me, [Say] Indeed, I am near (to them): I listen to the prayer of every supplicant who calls upon Me.” (*Qur'an 2:186*)

And so, we call upon you with sincerity and hope.

Oh God, Most Beneficent and Most Merciful, comfort us in times of difficulty as you comforted Muhammad, peace be upon him, through *The Qur'an*, reminding him:

“By the Glorious Morning Light,

And by the Night, when it is still,
Your Guardian-Lord has not forsaken you nor is He displeased.
And verily the Hereafter will be better for you than the present.
And soon will your Guardian-Lord give you that with which you shall be well-pleased
Did He not find you an orphan and give you shelter?
And He found you wandering, and He gave you guidance
And He found you in need, and made you independent
Therefore, treat not the orphan with harshness
Nor repulse the petitioner unheard
But the bounty of the Lord report and proclaim!" (*Qur'an 93:1-11*)

So, let us also remember the favors you have bestowed upon each of us, and help us serve those I need around us.

Oh God of Truth, you have told us that all of humanity is in a state of loss "except those who have faith, and do righteous deeds, and join together in the mutual teaching of Truth, and of Patience and Perseverance." (*Qur'an 103:3*).

So, let us be among those who have faith and do righteous deeds, and help us work together towards what is good.

Oh, Loving God of Justice, you have asked us:

"Let there arise out of you a band of people inviting to all that is good, enjoining what is right, and forbidding what is wrong. They are the ones to attain felicity." (*Qur'an 3:104*)

So, let us be among such people that call to goodness.

Oh, You who are All-Knowing and All-Seeing, we know that success and failure are in your hands, and that the future is in your hands, so grant success to those who work towards good, and give us a future that is better than the conditions we find ourselves in today.

A PROTESTANT, UCC PERSPECTIVE

Rev. Dr. David Steele is a United Church of Christ pastor who is adjunct faculty in a Graduate Program in Coexistence and Conflict Resolution at Brandeis University. He has 26 years' experience working with governmental, political, religious, and other actors to facilitate conflict transformation, interfaith coexistence and peacebuilding in many locations around the world. Much of this has been performed within unstable, violence-prone situations of inter-ethnic and sectarian conflict, integrating faith-based and secular practices and utilizing both indigenous and Western approaches.

2017 has been a difficult year for peace. Threatening trends that emerged in previous years have become even more salient today. It is easy to conclude that there is no good in the world when all we are watching and hearing is today's news, filled with one injustice after another. Natural disasters, cyber threats, fake news, harassment, bullying and derogatory name calling, divisive politics, virulent and mindless violence, limbo status and displacement of immigrants, and the weakening of national and international systems – all these have taken a terrible physical and emotional toll on intended victims as well as bystanders. As someone motivated by my Christian faith to serve as an agent of reconciliation, I am particularly worried about the growing acceptance of “enemy imaging” as both cause and consequence of these trends. Labeling of “good guys” and “bad guys” is leading to increasingly fixed “in-group”/“out-group” identity alignments - whether formed around racial, gender, ethnic, national, political, class or religious distinctions.

Yet my faith as a Christian tells me to look further. First, I am reminded that all of us are sinners, people who have fallen short of *Imago Dei*, the image of God, in which we were created. Can we acknowledge our own fallibility – the presumed certainty of our biases, enforced by our sense of superior perspective? (Yes) Just as it is important to accurately discern the nature of the storms raging around us, it is also essential to evaluate our response. Are we driven by fear into an angry modus operandi that only strives to defend “us” and attack “them?” If so, then where then is faith and hope? Are they tied entirely to our ability to win the fight? Scripture reminds us to watch long enough to see that there is more than evil to be opposed, to look closely enough to experience more than despair, to discover the ground of our hope in the grace and love of God. Can we wait with imagination, watching for the good, not the awful, while living in reality? Can we dedicate our lives to living out and enlarging this vision? Can we hear the voice of the Spirit coming to us in the midst of life's turbulence, through the events and the people in our pathway? Whenever the living God is involved, anything can happen.

My faith and my experience tell me that breaking a cycle of distrust and animosity, due to hostility and aggression, is possible through a faith-based, people-to-people reconciliation process. The starting point is the telling and hearing of personal stories, and learning the narratives, which help adversaries to understand the “whys” and “hows” that underlie each other's perspectives. When the stories include experiences of significant hurt and loss, a way needs to be found to address those grievances. I have found the use of prayers of lament to be

helpful at this point that assists all sides to bring their complaints before God, calling upon the Holy One for protection, and depending on the Almighty, to bring full justice. In this way, we can facilitate a shared catharsis that remembers and empathizes with everyone's experience yet points towards hope. Coupling this with appropriate acknowledgements of the shared responsibility of all parties, engagement can also be facilitated utilizing a practice developed by the *Old Testament* prophets. To address very complicated scenarios involving shared accountability, they constructed a parallel motif. To the complaint about "the other," added confession of one's own sin and that of one's people. To the petition for protection, was added a request for trans-forma-tion i.e. "Save us from our sins." To the assurance of God's justice, was added assurance of God's for-give-ness.

Experiencing the promise of God's forgiveness and justice enables people to envision human-to-human restoration of morally right relationships, in which one is no longer bound by oppressive past experiences and where justice is no longer primarily punitive. I have had the privilege of watching people, previously unable to listen to one another, begin to focus on ways to address each other's concerns and needs. This kind of restorative justice is a positive vision, calling for joint efforts to meet the basic moral and just needs of each group within a society. It is the embodiment of the prophetic "Yes" which can overcome barriers that separate, and can break cycles of victimhood and retaliation, leading to personal, interpersonal and social transformation.

A Protestant, UCC Prayer Offering:

O God, we know that, whatever our circumstances, You are always searching for us. May we hear the voice of your Spirit, calling in the midst of today's turbulence. Help us to wait with imagination, so that the signs of this time help us find our way to You, our redeemer and reconciler. Empower us, by Your grace, to become welcoming bridge-builders who know how to address conflicts of values and worldviews. Help us to recognize our own motivations, assumptions and rationalizations and to acknowledge that "full truth and justice" is greater than "our truth and justice." Enable us to listen with our hearts, so we can understand the perspective of the "out-group" - as they do rather than as we imagine. Give us the ability to see them as equals in any encounter, coming ready to jointly share our hurts and our hopes, offer our confessions and our forgiveness, and address our common needs and justice concerns. May we utilize the wisdom from our various traditions to stretch everyone's perceptions and stimulate exploration of a creative reconciliation.

In the words of St. Francis:

“Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console;
to be understood as to understand;
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive;
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life,

Amen”

A BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE

Dr. Yenkuei Chuang is a mindfulness-based licensed psychologist and an ordained member of Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh's Order of Interbeing. Dr. Chuang is keenly interested in helping people transform their suffering across life transitions, sensitive to cultural, gender, racial and other perceived differences and separations. She has a private meditation and psychotherapy practice in Newton - "Everyday Mindfulness Everywhere". She also enjoys being a mother to her four children, and being involved in writing, cooking, yoga, and dancing.

Love Thy Neighbor

We are experiencing tough times - politically, culturally, and personally. We can rant and protest, or we can become numb and ignore this new reality because it is just too overwhelming. We are feeling "This is not my country," "This is not my president," and even, "This is not my home."

At the bottom of all these feelings is fear, and what manifests externally is anxiety, ill-will, and greed. We react as if we are in crisis; we amass the goods and name them, "me and mine"; we search for safe spaces and wall ourselves within them; we are quick to react with anxiety, busyness, and criticism.

Can we pause for a moment to breathe...and as we deepen the moment with full body presence, we remember that *THIS IS IT!* This is the present, and now is the time, so that once we have returned to greater calm and more stability, we can ask ourselves, "What is this agitation all about? Is there generosity in my action? Is there kindness?"

This is how we make peace with the present moment. We start with ourselves - recognizing our own agitation and allowing equanimity and compassion to arise within us in our very human but reactive states. Equanimity and compassion are two of the four states of true love taught by the Buddha to help his monks deal with their fears of going into the forest. The story goes that when the monks practiced successfully, they befriended all the previously terrifying creatures of the forest.

Can this be our aspiration? Can we practice in such a way that we do not flee and separate ourselves from the current difficulties? Instead, can we transform our fears and make peace with the present moment? Every time that we get reactive, that is the time to practice our compassion. That is our learning edge so that each difficult situation, and each difficult person then becomes our teacher.

Furthermore, we can check our perception and ask, "Are we sure?" When we bow to the limits of our own thinking and meet the situation with kindness and humility, our heart grows with greater understanding and sensitivity. Equanimity and compassion arise naturally all on their own. This is the miracle of mindfulness, and "mindfulness is the miracle by which we master and restore ourselves." (*The Miracle of Mindfulness* by Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese

Buddhist monk and peace activist who lives in the Plum Village Meditation Center in southwest France. He has travelled internationally to give retreats and talks; he coined the term "Engaged Buddhism"). *"In gratitude, I bow to this land and all of the ancestors who made it possible."* - Thich Nhat Hanh

I see that I am whole, protected, and nourished by this land and all the living beings that have been here and made life worthwhile and possible for me through all of their efforts. I see Chief Seattle, Dorothy Day, Cesar Chavez, Martin Luther King, Jr., and all the others known and unknown. I see those who have worked hard to protect human rights and to fight for freedom and social justice. I feel the energy of this land penetrating my body and soul, supporting and accepting me. I vow to cultivate and maintain this energy and transmit it to future generations. I vow to contribute my part in transforming the violence, hatred, and delusion that still lie deep in the consciousness of this society, so that future generations will have more safety, joy, and peace. I ask this land for its protection and support.

May mindfulness be yours. May it protect you from fears and reactivities. May the deepest wisdom and love protect you always. May the goodness of your practice bring peace and freedom to all neighbors near and far.

Five Mindfulness Exercises (Excerpts from Thich Nhat Hanh's book, *Fear: Essential Wisdom for Getting Through the Storm*):

1. **Breathing in the Present:** *Breathing in, I know that I am breathing in; breathing out, I know that I am breathing out.* The moment you begin to practice mindful breathing, your body and your mind begin to come back together.
2. **Stopping and Calming:** Stop the habit of running, being tense, busy and distracted. Train yourself to relax and be at peace. To do something meditatively means to unify your body and mind into the present moment.
3. **Deep Looking:** When your mind is still, you see things deeply. You are no longer carried away by wrong perceptions and the negative emotions. Clarity and insights arise as you see the causes and conditions of the current suffering.
4. **Heart as a Bridge:** We have to act with loving kindness, because when hatred and anger are running rampant, we cannot resolve anything. We cannot remove violence with hatred and anger. We can only remove violence and fear with compassion and love.
5. **Sangha, a Beloved Community:** Happiness is not an individual matter. In Buddhism, this beloved community is called sangha, a group of people who together practice to generate mindfulness, peace, and wisdom. With our combined energy of mindfulness, we are able to recognize, embrace, and transform the pain of isolation and fears.

A PROTESTANT, BAPTIST PERSPECTIVE

Rev. Darrell R. Hamilton, II is a graduate of Wake Forest School of Divinity where he attained his Masters of Divinity Degree May 2017. Darrell is originally from Edmond, Oklahoma, and in 2012 received his Bachelors of Arts in Political Science from the University of Central Oklahoma. Darrell is impassioned by the ways politics and faith merge together in the Christian theological traditions of justice and liberation. Furthermore, Darrell believes that through the Christian values and ideals of diversity and inclusiveness, advocacy for the vulnerable and marginalized, the Christian tradition has within itself the means necessary to inspire our nation and world toward greater justice and love for all. Therefore, it is necessary that the gospel message and traditions of justice and liberation be taught and proclaimed in order to spread a deeper and fuller appreciation of the power and Spirit of the Christian faith.

The Gift of Grace

Grace is a perplexing, yet quintessential doctrine of the Christian tradition containing virtues that can offer us much amid turbulent and strife-laden times.

In his book, *The Cost of Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer provides a helpful understanding of grace, not as a cheap, low cost gift of unmerited favor that costs nothing, demands nothing, and permits us to diminish our value and the value of any of God's creation. Instead, grace is costly because it obliges us to honor the continuous work of God in the world and compels us to recognize the intrinsic God-likeness present in all creation. In this way, we are enabled to overcome the breakdown of dialogue that exists between diverse and polarized groups of people.

As a Baptist preacher, I am convinced of the principle of grace, and the need for a renewed commitment to it, because in grace resides all the tenets of love, compassion, and long suffering, reflective of the life of Jesus and the establishment of the beloved community.

Contrary to popular opinion, grace is not a sweeping pardon of egregious wrongdoing between groups in power and those outside of power. Grace does not offer us a clean slate with which to harm the vulnerable by making healthcare inaccessible, removing social safety nets, or passing tax bills that immorally widen the economic gap between the rich and the poor.

Rather, grace is the lens through which we see as sacred what has been deemed ordinary and obscure by the world. Additionally, grace humbles us to perceive as blessed what the world has made marginalized, disinherited and oppressed.

Thus, grace is what compels us to live the gospel truth that we are to love our neighbors as ourselves, to do justice unto "the least of these," heal the brokenhearted and the wounded, and set free those who are oppressed and in need of liberty. Moreover, grace is what grounds us to "produce the fruits of understanding," to reach across the lines of polarization, and to respond to

our neighbors with justice and love, peace and cooperation, because we recognize that it was God who loved us first.

It must be stated, however, that grace is not meant to make life perfect and void of all hardship, struggle, and pain. Nevertheless, grace is the good gift which claims us as good and moves us to value the inherent good in all creation, working in community to minimize hardship, and striving individually not to compound people's pain.

Thus, in the light of the Christian tradition, grace is the good gift and good news of Jesus Christ who, as the only begotten of the Father, transforms humanity's relationship with God and God's relationship with us. In this way, all people can celebrate our divine parentage, our cosmic genesis, and our messianic lineage that we may give and receive the good gift of grace to everyone, every day, and for every new day to come.

“Because we are God's children, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, ‘Abba, Father.’ So, you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are God's child, God has made you also an heir” (*Galatians 4:6-7*)

A Protestant, Baptist Offering:

To God, who is our Creator,

We give thanks for the good gift of grace, and the good gift of a new day to bask in Your creativity. Thus, we pray that You help us to look into the chaos of the darkness in our world and see a broad and rich canvas on which to paint beautiful and long-lasting life.

We give thanks for the way You look on all of Your creation with love and long suffering, for it was You who declared us as good, blessed, and sacred in Your sight. Thus, with the brush of grace, guide us to make a vibrant work of art with all the diversity of Your marvelous paint.

We give You thanks for the Love with which You guide and inspire us, so that we are empowered to share Love with others in reverence for the Love You have for us all. Thus, infuse us with Your Spirit so that we may go forth into the world to continue the gift of reconciling difference which You began so long ago.

We give You thanks for it is You who is the bringer and sustainer of life - the mender of brokenness and the healer of pain. Thus, we pray that You move us to go forth creating community with our neighbors, and that You make our hands stronger to reach out across difference in order to help mend the bonds of fellowship.

Amen

A BAHÁ'Í PERSPECTIVE

Donna Hakimian is the Bahá'í Chaplain at Harvard University. From 2012-2015, she served as the Representative for Gender Equality and the Advancement of Women at the U.S. Baha'í Office of Public Affairs in Washington D.C. Ms. Hakimian holds an Ed.M. from the Harvard Graduate School of Education, a M.A. in Women's Studies from the University of Toronto, and a B.A. from McGill University.

There are so many entry points into the subject of, “Just Peacemaking Among Peoples.” As individuals, communities, and members of the global community we are impacted by, as well as personally impact, structures and systems that generate peace. I also believe that we are all spiritual beings, that each of us has within them the tools and potential to create and manifest peace internally, and in the world at large.

Two specific topics that I believe are integral to any discussion of “Just Peacemaking Among Peoples” are consultation and love. Within the Bahá'í writings, there are extensive references to both of these topics. The first, consultation, as outlined in Bahá'í scripture, is the bedrock of communities, families and really any human relationship. It allows for, and aspires to, sincere and unbiased listening, combined with an openness and willingness to hear different perspectives. It honors diversity of belief, experience, and ideas.

Bahá'u'lláh, the Prophet Founder of the Bahá'í faith, has written extensively about consultation. The following are two excerpts from His writings:

“The Great Being saith: The heaven of divine wisdom is illumined with the two luminaries of consultation and compassion. Take ye counsel together in all matters, inasmuch as consultation is the lamp of guidance which leadeth the way and is the bestower of understanding.”

“Consultation bestoweth greater awareness and transmuteth conjecture into certitude. It is a shining light which, in a dark world, leadeth the way and guideth. For everything there is and will continue to be a station of perfection and maturity. The maturity of the gift of understanding is made manifest through consultation.”

The son of Bahá'u'lláh, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, also writes about the topic of consultation:

“Man must consult on all matters, whether major or minor, so that he may become cognizant of what is good. Consultation giveth him insight into things and enableth him to delve into questions which are unknown. The light of truth shineth from the faces of those who engage in consultation. Such consultation causeth the living waters to flow in the meadows of man's reality, the rays of ancient glory to shine upon him, and the tree of his being to be adorned with wondrous fruit. The members who are consulting, however, should behave in the utmost love, harmony and sincerity towards each other. The principle of consultation is one of the most

fundamental elements of the divine edifice. Even in their ordinary affairs the individual members of society should consult.”

Hopefully we can all recall a time when we have experienced the gift of true consultation. I know in moments where there has been a posture of openness and willingness to honestly dialogue and exchange, the very experience transformed me into a more peaceful, noble being.

As to the topic of love, I have been long inspired by the depictions of love in Bahá'í scripture, as well as in many of the world's great spiritual, ethical and literary traditions.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the son of Bahá’u’lláh, writes the following about love:

“What a power is love! It is the most wonderful, the greatest of all living powers. Love gives life to the lifeless. Love lights a flame in the heart that is cold. Love brings hope to the hopeless and gladdens the hearts of the sorrowful. In the world of existence there is indeed no greater power than the power of love.”

Elsewhere, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá writes:

“Love is light in whatsoever house it may shine, and enmity is darkness in whatsoever abode it dwell.”

In my personal spiritual practice, in the ways I live and move in the world, and in the institutions I am a part of, I strive to have at the core of my being a loving heart. I have long been inspired by the idea that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá speaks of, “...there is indeed no greater power than the power of love.”

To me it is a power that can build just and inspired civilizations and communities. From my conversations with people from around the world, the power of love is one that transcends so many barriers; it is a force that has a generative, galvanizing impact. I recall regular visits with an elderly neighbor when I was living in Toronto. She and I did not share a common language, but the love she showered upon those she met was real.

While there are many more topics that constitute “Just Peacemaking Among People,” such as justice, humility, forbearance and patience, the two that I focused on here, consultation and love, are an excellent foundation from which to build.

A PROTESTANT, METHODIST PERSPECTIVE

Rev. We (Hyun) Chang is a Methodist pastor serving in the Belmont-Watertown United Methodist Church. He received his education from the Boston University School of Theology. He facilitated two General Conference/Judicial Council delegations as first elected clergy, chaired subcommittee at two General Conferences, organized and launched the New England Justice for Our Neighbors. He also led an urban congregation to begin homeless outreach ministries in the city and worked with ecumenical and community partners to open a day service center for the homeless. Rev. Chang led a four-year Korea Peace Plan for The United Methodist Church during 2012- 2016 and was a teacher at a night school for factory workers in Seoul, Korea Office. He is endorsed by the New England Annual Conference and the National Federation of Asian American United Methodists.

The hallmark of the Methodist movement, in my opinion, is its unwavering conviction that grace is available for and to all people. This conviction has been the catalyst for Methodists to respond to the calling of each generation for the sake of God's peace and justice even in times of their own limitedness and failures. Grace is in all who are waiting to touch lives and change the world. It is an invitation that is forever present in us and in our world asking us to respond. An individual experiences the power of salvation when responding to this grace called *Love*. A church becomes the living body of Christ when her people respond to this grace called *Compassion*. A society is transformed when its people respond to this grace called *Justice*.

Just peacemaking happens only when people come together in order to respond together. When people begin to see the same grace calling for the same justice for all people regardless of what categorizes and divides them, peace becomes a reality for all people. Grace in me needs to recognize and connect to grace in others. This is why the grace of empathy is at the heart of just peacemaking. It is the gift and power of empathy that has been bringing people together to respond to the injustice of sexism, racism, homophobia, anti-immigrant forces and other oppressive "isms."

The Chinese characters meaning peace 平和 depicts the truth of just peacemaking. 平 means "equally" or "widely." 和 is the character composed of two Chinese characters meaning "rice" and "mouth." So, peace means when (cooked) rice is in everyone's mouth." Peace is possible when we recognize together that no one goes without rice - the basic source of life and of living with dignity. For me, rice is grace; the gift from heaven waiting for human hands to work together to sow, tend, harvest and prepare for all to live by and through grace and doing so with dignity.

Growing inequality has been the unfortunate and unjust hallmark of the past fifty plus years of globalization that is growing wider and faster, depriving the great majority of people of the source and dignity of their lives. The future of human civilization depends on whether people will come together to mind more than their own rice and grace and to make sure all have

enough rice, enough dignity, enough respect, and enough liberty. People of faith have to be at the forefront of this movement toward justice and peace. We are the people who believe in the power of grace.

For a prayer, I would like to share a poem written by a Korean resistance poet named Kim Ji Ha, who is also a Christian. He lived through the darkest time of dictatorship in the 1970's and 80's in South Korea.

“Rice” by Kim Ji Ha

Rice is Heaven.
Rice is to be shared by many
As no one can possess Heaven alone

Rice is Heaven.
Rice is to be eaten together
As we gaze upon stars on heaven together

Heaven enters into our body

A JEWISH PERSPECTIVE

Maxine Lyons, a retired community educator, has been a CMM board member and co-facilitator of CMM's Interfaith Ruah Spirituality Program for many years. She is an active member of Temple Beth Zion, Brookline, a joyful wife of 41 years, and mother of two accomplished and wonderful adult children. She is exploring the inspiring resonances between the practices of Jewish Mussar and Buddhist mindfulness meditation both of which inform her service to social justice activities. She is also involved in spiritual accompaniment with homeless individuals locally and with Jewish inmates in several prisons around the country.

In considering the focus in writing about what constitutes a true just peace from both my personal and a Jewish perspective, these important words surfaced: curiosity, open mind, open heart, exploring. Living in community and working for peace requires an attitude of curiosity—seeking to find the inherent humanity in everyone we encounter; open mindedness implies a willingness to listen, to suspend judgment and being receptive to others' stories; an open heart encourages leaving aside assumptions and conscious biases in order to more deeply hear and feel the pains of others; and a willingness to explore offers the opportunity to appreciate the life experiences and the narratives of others that can contribute to building peace in a more sustained and meaningful way.

Reflecting now as an activist through interfaith activities and programs involves engaging in meetings on a grass roots level in intentional group discussions. The intention is facing and learning from each other as we bring our most authentic selves forward to listen to the perspectives embedded in each other's stories and experiences. In other words, the goal is to grow as a group to witness and hear about the difficulties and injustices that challenge many.

I easily turned to many sources that represent Jewish views on what it means to create just peace. Rabbi Jeff Goldwasser, Temple Sinai, RI, believes that "we are divided by a widespread belief that 'the other side' is hopelessly corrupt and malevolent beyond redemption. {He asks}- Can we adopt an action stance that could affect a national shift allowing us to engage in honest dialogue, addressing issues that have been hidden or covered up?"

Goldwasser offers a positive way that is derived from Jewish tradition. "We call it *t'shuvah* 'repentance or turning' - the call to turn away from the broken and turn toward the whole. It is the call to let go of the need to be right and to embrace the need to be kind. It is the minute shift in our soul that takes us from unappeasable self-righteousness, and to turn instead to yielding and open-hearted peace. It takes us from a place where we see other people as enemies, and begin, instead, to see them as fellow, flawed human beings and to turn toward working together to build a better society and a better world."

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, former chief rabbi of Great Britain, summarizes in his book, *The Dignity of Difference* - "the test of faith is whether I can make space for difference. In thinking about religion and society in the 21st century, we should broaden the conversation about faith from

doctrinal debates to the larger question of how it might inspire us to strengthen the bonds of belonging.”

Rabbi Sharon Brous of Ikar, a congregation in Los Angeles, provides another Jewish view of peacemaking... “the heart of our tradition doesn’t want us to be comfortable in the world as it is. It’s a rebellion against that world. The goal is not to be quieted; it is to be awake and to fight—with love—for the courage we need, for the family we yearn for, for the (peaceful and just) community we’re called to be. Our *spiritual inheritance* is to be awake. To see. And – *la’asot tzedakah u’mishpat* – to be pursuers of justice and righteousness. The your-struggle-is-my-business-people. We are the bearers of ‘holy-chutzpah’. As much as Judaism is about obedience to God and observance of mitzvot, the central moments of Israelite and Jewish history are characterized by defiance against unjust power structures. Our heroes are those who stood up for the vulnerable, who risked everything to fight for what is just and right—like Avraham did. That’s what gives our lives purpose.”

I will end with the most shining example of someone who “prayed with his feet” for peace and justice- Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel. “What is a religious person? A person who is attuned to the agony of others; aware of God’s presence and needs; a religious person is never satisfied but always questioning, striving for something deeper and always refusing to accept inequalities, the status quo, the cruelty and suffering of others.”

I gleaned from these inspiring rabbis, following, tzedek, tzedek tirdof- justice, justice we must pursue, (Deut. 16:20) Rabbi Waskow from the Shalom Center comments, “Why do we repeat ‘justice’ twice? To teach us: Pursue the goal of justice through means that are just, and (practice) justice for ourselves and justice for the other.”

I am deeply motivated to continue to do the hard work of turning to the just peacemaking causes, committing to add my part: to strengthen the connections that can re-create an order that is respectful and that nourishes the best in each person to grow towards and actively strive for peace and justice. The “holy chutzpah” that Rabbi Brous has named hits that internal nerve, and profoundly propels us to act in ways that honor our tradition and our basic humanity as we connect with others in peace and justice through love.

Jewish Prayers for a Just Peace Among People
Rabbi Rachel Levy, Mishkan Shalom, PA
A Way In

We commit to acting even when so much lies in ruin.
We will act for the sake of the rightness of the action itself.
We will act for connection. We will act for the sacred.
We will act in honor of all that we love and value.

Kindly ask yourselves these questions:

How can I best be of service? What can I do to bring love, goodness, justice and peace into the world?

We place these questions upon our hearts with gentleness and love and openness.

We remind ourselves that we are all here together, and each of us brings A blessing into the world by living the fullness of who we are. **May we find:**

the humility and strength to respond – **“Hineni”** – **Here I am,**

I am willing and able to be of service

May we see a year of mending and healing, a year of strength and courage,
a year of devotions and love

Let us rise together for the well-being of each other and our country
and all people of peace. And let us say, Amen.

A MUSLIM PERSPECTIVE

*Omar Abdul-Malik is a graduate of Southern Illinois University where he was a founding member of the Black American Studies Program. Omar is also a graduate of The Kennedy School of Government at Harvard, where he was a Public Service and Research Fellow. Mr. Abdul-Malik currently serves as Executive Director of the Cambridge Center for the Study of Religion and Public Policy. He was previously a Board Vice-President for the Cooperative Metropolitan Ministries of Boston and member of The Black Policy Conference at the Kennedy School of Government. He is a regular speaker at interfaith forums and is currently completing work on a history of Islam in America entitled, *The Western Sunrise: Islam, Slavery and American Exceptionalism* and a documentary entitled *The Rastafarian Movement and Abrahamic Monotheism* featuring Professors Harvey Cox, Rodney Peterson, Allan Callahan and Dr. Charles Finch.*

Allah Hates Oppression, so do not Oppress One Another

An early definition of justice sees the exercise of authority in vindication of right by assigning reward or punishment; thereby indicating the existence of a victim, a perpetrator, a judge and a verdict. *The Qur'an* states that the most horrendous injustice that can be meted out to an individual or group is that of oppression, stating that death is preferable to oppression.

Individuals and groups often find it easy to be just to those close to them such as kindred or intimate acquaintances ...but they find it difficult to extend the same level of fairness to those considered the other, the outsider or the stranger.

The scriptural strangers of the Abrahamic texts were those who suffered oppression in a strange land, Egypt for a period of 400 years after which divine intervention and judgement occurred resulting in a reversal of fortunes: the strangers are made whole and compensated for their labor, pain and suffering described in both the *Bible* and *Qur'an*.

In the West, the oppressed strangers were the millions of black slaves brought to America beginning nearly 400 years ago as part of a lucrative enterprise known as the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. Up to 40% of these Africans were said to be Muslim. The horrors of slavery such as the treatment of those merchandized in that system was of such appalling magnitude that the theological metaphor of America's "Original Sin" was used to categorize it. Today, the effects of this historical offense are still felt among the black descendants of slaves and has left them in the position where they are behind in nearly every category such as socio-economic income, single heads of household, housing and educational achievement. There are now more black males in prison than there were enslaved on plantations prior to and during the Civil War.

It is imperative that the nation atone for its original offense to God and mankind by making those who were oppressed in cruel bondage whole again. Such might include forms of reparation to the black descendants of slaves. Reparation Activists Attorney, Randall Robinson

and Harvard Law Professor Charles Ogletree, base their argument for financial reparations in part on Abraham Lincoln's statement that labor precedes capital, and therefore unpaid slave labor, is transformed into wealth. Theologians use an exegesis of Exodus 12:35-36 to bolster this position.

The status of Black America today is a political and moral embarrassment to the nation both at home and abroad leaving the US open to charges of racism internally and hypocrisy globally.

Thomas Jefferson who was familiar with Islam and the *Qur'an*, prophetically stated in 1781, that, "...liberties are the gift of God...not to be violated but with his wrath...Indeed, I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just; and that His justice cannot sleep forever...The Almighty has no attribute or quarter which He can take side with us (as slaveholders) in such a contest."

The implementation of Reparations can remove this source of tribulation from the soul of America, completing our centuries old national Jihad for Justice and transforming our nation into a truly great one, as envisioned by the Messiah, Isa bin Mariam (Jesus) and echoed in 1630 by Jonathan Winthrop – to be "a light unto the world...A city set on a hill so... that others may see our good works and give glory to our Father who is in heaven."

A Muslim Prayer Offering:

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful

Oh Allah, I seek refuge in Thee from the Evil of what I have done and the Evil of what I have not done.

Oh Allah, I seek refuge in Thee from the Knowledge which does not benefit and the heart that does not entertain the awareness of Allah

Oh Allah, I seek refuge in Thee from the Soul that does not feel contented and the prayer that is not answered.

Oh Allah, I seek refuge in Thee from ignorance, poverty, and the oppression of men

Oh Allah, I seek refuge in Thee from Evil thoughts and Evil companions

Oh Allah, forgive us our weaknesses and make us more conscious of Allah

Oh Allah, I Seek Refuge in Thee from the Evil of Oppression and the Evil of being an Oppressor

Oh Allah, set right for me my religion which is the safe guard of my affairs and set right for me the affairs of my world that determine my sustenance

Oh Allah, bless our Efforts and make us Successful and grant us the Best of this Life and the Next...And make this life a source of Abundance for every good and make death a source of comfort and not grief

Oh Allah, let us be a Nation that encourages Justice and forbids Injustice

Oh Allah, make us examples for our Nation and make our Nation an example of Justice for All of Humanity to emulate

Ameen

**Prayer based on Hadith, Qur'an, Bible and personal supplications*

A SIKH PERSPECTIVE

Sarbpreet Singh is a playwright, commentator and poet, who has been writing while pursuing a career in technology for several years. He is the author of Kultar's Mime, a poem about the 1984 Sikh Genocide. His commentary has appeared on NPR's Morning Edition and Worldview, The Boston Herald, The Providence Journal, The Milwaukee Journal and several other newspapers and magazines. He is the founder and director of the Gurmat Sangeet Project, a non-profit dedicated to the preservation of traditional Sikh music and serves on the boards of various non-profits focused on service and social justice. He is very active in Boston Interfaith circles and serves as a spiritual advisor at Northeastern University. Look out for his podcast called The Story of the Sikhs.

A few Muslims gather together to pray and break their fast during the holy month of Ramadan. They kneel on sparkling white sheets, neatly spread on the lawn of a place of worship. Hardly a remarkable sight during the Muslim holy month, except the place of worship is a Gurdwara, a Sikh church in Milford, Massachusetts.

Today is no ordinary summer's day. Inside the sanctuary a solemn Sikh service is in progress. Hymns from the Sikh tradition have been sung and a reading from the Sikh scripture has been received by the congregants. Speaker after speaker from every possible religious tradition addresses the congregation, commiserating with it, speaking words of comfort, courage and compassion.

It is one day after the shootings at the Oak Creek Gurdwara in Wisconsin (August 5th, 2012).

“The worst of times bring out the best in us.” “What binds us together is much more profound than what divides us.” How many times have we heard words like these and echoed them, not entirely believing that they are true? Today, however, these are not shibboleths. Every Sikh who hears these words, spoken by Protestants and Catholics, Jews and Muslims, believers and non-believers, in the wake of the Oak Creek shootings feels comforted by them.

In the insanity that followed the horrors of 9-11, Muslims all over America were the target of much violence and rage. Sikhs, with their very visible identity, which seemed to proclaim their otherness, suffered collateral damage in the surreal days that followed the attacks, when it felt like the tolerant fabric of our society was starting to come apart at the seams.

Yet, eventually, sanity prevailed.

The times that we are living though, as we are bombarded daily by images of spitefulness, bigotry, xenophobia and hate, eerily bring back echoes of both 9-11 and Oak Creek. However, I refuse to despair. There were profound lessons in how ordinary people responded to both 9-11 and Oak Creek: the Muslims who came to pray at the Milford Gurdwara, and the Sikhs, who upon being mistaken for Muslims and violently attacked in the wake of 9-11, responded not by

distancing themselves from Muslims, but instead using the attention to unequivocally condemn attacks on anyone based on their identity. And who could forget about the fifteen hundred who packed Trinity Church in Boston for a Sikh service in the wake of Oak Creek to condemn bigotry and express solidarity?

My personal faith as a Sikh takes me away from a place of cynicism by reinforcing a belief in the inherent goodness of humanity. At the same time, it exhorts me to avoid the trap of passivity and reject the naïve belief that somehow everything will eventually be fine. It will not, unless all of those who reject the bigotry make common cause and simply refuse to accept it as the new norm.

Compassion comes naturally to people of faith. It is a powerful force that has sustained us in the darkest days of human history. It will surge once again and will bring us to a place of love and mutual understanding. We just have to stand strong. In these troubled times, the grand gesture of those who stood in solidarity with the Sikhs needs to be repeated. A thousand times over! Wherever we see injustice and intolerance we have to step forward and create sanctuaries for the oppressed and the set upon, no matter who they are. If we can find in our hearts to do this, these dark days will pass.

A Sikh Prayer Offering:

These are the words of Kabir, a fifteenth century mystic, who was beloved by Hindus and Muslims alike and whose writings appear in the Sikh Scripture, *The Guru Granth Sahib*:

Prabhaatee || Aval Aleh Noor Aupaiaa Kudharat Kay Sabh Ba(N)Dhay ||
Ek Noor Tay Sabh Jag Aupajiaa Kaun Bhalay Ko Ma(N)Dhay ||1||

Logaa Bharam N Bhoolah Bhaaiee ||
Khaalik Khalak Khalak Meh Khaalik Poor Rahio Srab Ttaa(N)Iee ||1|| Rahao ||

Maattee Ek Anayk Bhaa(N)T Kar Saajee Saajanahaarai ||
Naa Kachh Poch Maattee Kay Bhaa(N)Dday Naa Kachh Poch Ku(N)Bhaarai ||2||

Sabh Meh Sachaa Eko Soiee Tis Kaa Keeaa Sabh Kachh Hoiee ||
Hukam Pachhaanai S Eko Jaanai Ba(N)Dhaa Kaheeeai Soiee ||3||

Alah Alakh N Jaaiee Lakhiaa Gur GuR Dheenaa Meettaa ||
Keh Kabeer Mayree Sa(N)Kaa Naasee Sarab Nira(N)Jan Ddeettaa ||4||3||

Raga Prabhatee (one of the musical measures of the Sikh Scripture)

He lit the lamp of light divine; did every mortal soul create
From this light the world emerged; dare not ye slander or fete

Brethren and sisters, gentle folk; rid yourselves of doubt and fear
In Him creation, in it He dwells; verily He is far and near

Starting from just one mound of clay, he fashioned forms many a kind
The clay is pure, beyond reproach; a finer potter you will not find

In all creation the Lord abides; with his hands is everything made
The one who fathoms this truth divine; in His thrall is he gently laid

Allah divine forever unseen; with your sweetness you bless me
O Kabir my fear has fled; everywhere my Lord I see

A PROTESTANT, BAPTIST PERSPECTIVE

Rev. Dr. Walter Earl Fluker is the Martin Luther King, Jr. Professor of Ethical Leadership, the editor of the Howard Thurman Papers Project and the Director of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Initiative for the Development of Ethical Leadership (MLK-IDEAL) at Boston University School of Theology. As part of the MLKIDEAL, Professor Fluker has developed a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) entitled Ethical Leadership: Character, Civility and Community that initially launched on May 24, 2016. He was founding executive director of the Andrew Young Center for Global Leadership Center and the Coca-Cola Professor of Leadership Studies at Morehouse College. Dr. Fluker is a featured consultant, speaker, lecturer and workshop leader at foundations, businesses, corporations, colleges, universities, governmental and religious institutions, nationally and globally. He earned a Ph.D. in Social Ethics from Boston University, a Master of Divinity degree from Garrett-Evangelical Seminary, a bachelor's degree in philosophy and biblical studies from Trinity College; and received the Doctor of Humanities, Honoris Causa, Lees-McRae College, Banner Elk, North Carolina.

“In This Week of Passion, I Startle Myself!”

The Week of Holy Passion *startles* us; it throws us off guard and *scatters* our contrived notions of the everyday conundrums of normalcy. It breaks in upon us and drives us deeper into the mystery of our own hearts—the troubles that afflict us in private places; and the horrors of the public square where we see again the lacerated flesh and the mocking laughter of derision from those who feast on the suffering of others. Like the Roman soldiers and marauding crowds, there are those among us who feed on the suffering of the weakest and most despised among us. Our world of gadgets and playthings create fictitious scenarios that hide the truth of the suffering around the globe. Our self-absorption with acts of piety call us away from the startling spectacles of the mass movement of peoples in search of food and water, refugees from war and poverty, the strained bodies of mothers carrying children across borders, and the harsh surveillance and bloody masses of human carnage.

The Messianic figure depicted in Isaiah is “a man of sorrows acquainted with grief. *And like one from whom men hide their face.*” Why is it so difficult for us to see that He still suffers among us? Are we not startled by the travesty of young black bodies lying in their own blood, the victims of poverty, poor handgun legislation and the perverse availability of drugs? What kind of people have we become so that our encrusted hearts no longer feel the sheer agony and dread of life being wrenched away from the poorest of the poor in homeless cardboard shelters hidden from sight under highways and in the shadows of gargantuan skyscrapers?

What strange ghost has manipulated our minds into a vain proclamation to “make America great again”? While we speak of peace, our political leaders are making plans for war on the poor. While we stand on the sidelines as onlookers watching the poor suffer from inadequate healthcare, the deterioration of our public schools, and human beings are shot down by police

for walking or driving or being while black— does it not suggest that we are in a deep apathetic trance that has rendered us into a stupor of silence?

During this week, Holy Week, when we fast and pray, give up meat and drink of which we already have too much, and bow at altars made of the finest wood and cushioned kneeling pads, let us remember his suffering and the *via dolorosa* of our contemporary hurried and cellophane-packaged abundance. Shall we be astonished? In the misery of his passion, shall we not see our own little lives? Let us remember the homeless beggar at our doorsteps, the poor women and children who have nowhere to turn except to us, the formerly incarcerated who seek work with dignity, the youth of our cities who sit in the shadows of post-modern genocide, the original peoples of this nation who protest our country's incursion on their ancestors' sacred burial grounds in search of oil, and so many others who have surrendered to lives of anonymity and shame. Shall these who suffer in the richest nation in the world astonish us, startle us and move us from our complacency and indifference? In the misery of their faces, shall we not see our own little lives? Perhaps, if we take a look, a deep inventory of our own hearts, our fears and become one with Him in his suffering, we shall understand the price that must be paid for the awakening from the dead.

A Protestant, Baptist Prayer Offering:

How strange that on the Way to Calvary
We should meet so many faces of strangers
Beggars, lepers, thieves
And those who would destroy us

How grotesque
The sordid horror of one
Who startles oneself on the Way!

O how deep the agony of one—
Betrayed by none other than oneself?

On the Way to Calvary there are many doors
And streets and winding paths
But not one is the Way
Do not follow them
For they lead us away from Him

O traveler,
Remember the Way
It is not far from you
Just at thy beckoning
He appears
At your heart's reach
He is summoned
Yes, closer than breathing
Nearer than hands and feet
See Him there
Mercilessly damned
Cursed and resurrected
Smitten and healed—
There, in your face
He startles you!

Readings: *Isaiah 52:14-15; 53:3; and Mark 15 (NASB)*

A MUSLIM PERSPECTIVE

Shua Khan Arshad has had the opportunity to participate actively in various events at the Center for JCM Relations at Merrimack College and has always been fascinated by cultural diversity, as she has spent time living and traveling throughout South Asia, the Middle East, North America and Europe. These experiences inspired her to take steps in creating an Intercultural and Interfaith Organization. She is a Cooperative Metropolitan Ministries (CMM) Board Member, President of the Groton Interfaith Council (GIC), and a Muslim Chaplain at Groton School. She has also worked as a mentor for the Interfaith Youth Initiative (IFYI, 2013 - 2014) and holds a M.A. in Intercultural Relations from Lesley University. Look out for her podcast called lightupwithshua.

According to the Islamic faith, all human beings arrive in the world with a clean and untainted slate. They are given some realizable possibilities, the development of which is the purpose of this life. In Islam, it is believed that life does not go in circles but advances in a straight path. Therefore, human beings are worthy of respect simply by virtue of being human. This is one of the foundational values crucial to Islam and requires our full attention because if we are not aware, or do not keep a close check on ourselves, we are in danger of committing injustices of all kinds such as racism, hatred, and other such ills of society. Hence, according to the *Quran*, all human beings are equal: “...*Who created you from a single life-cell...*” (4:1).

From birth, all human beings deserve equal respect, and this is justice given by the Creator. The whole process of Nature is the same from conception to birth for all people, so we have no reason to cause divisions or disputes amongst ourselves which waste our time and energies.

As the *Quran* states: “*Verily, We have honored every human being*” (17:70).

All human beings are equal, and every single person possesses a precious, individual the human self. This is the basic guiding principle of the Islamic order of society. It may sound idealistic, but this way of living can happen if our intentions are pure and clear. No person has the right to exploit another person or to use them as a means to further their personal, individual interests. No one (man or woman) is permitted to compel others to obey him or her. It is only through our deeds that make us more or less elevated in comparison to others.

There are several permanent values described in the *Quran* for our guidance, of which Justice is one. According to the *Quran*, if we can follow the permanent values, then I believe that justice will prevail among all human beings.

One must refrain from misusing or taking away the rights and dues of others. They must make decisions on all matters based on justice and according to the laws ordained in the *Quran* and Islamic tradition, as is stated, “*Surely, Allah commands justice...*” (16:90).

The hold of this permanent value should never be released from your hand at any time, under any circumstance, since it is essential to bring about justice to those people who act with enmity towards us. But since justice is a permanent value in the Islamic tradition, someone's friendship or enmity can never influence it. To act with justice means to step away and give space to others and to avail them opportunities. This is a highly virtuous act according to the *Quran*, which teaches human beings to act justly as a way of life.

The framework of Islamic society is based on a set of certain principles, in which justice has many facets. For example, "not to judge," is one of them. The *Quran* forbids human beings the right to judge and rule over other human beings, and at the same time, does not advocate lawlessness in a society. It lays down the principles that all human beings are equal and only Allah/God can rule over the Her/His creation. *These principles are mentioned in chapter 12:40 and 18:26 of the Quran.*

The Quran affirms the unity of mankind and disapproves of any attempt to divide mankind into superior and inferior groups on the basis of color, race, caste or creed. It tells us that: "*Mankind is but one community*" (2:213).

What I have ultimately learned in of all my journeying is that in learning and understanding who I am, I can have greater harmony, health, and sustainable relationships with other human beings. I strive to shape my environment and community into getting more involved, which will benefit the society I live in. In this way, I can better serve, love unconditionally and let go of things holding me back. I know it is challenging, but that is the personal struggle, or as *The Quran* refers to it, the Jihad. To do justice, whatever the situation, is the real purpose.

In the first chapter of the *Quran*, *Al Fatihah*, humans are taught this very Dua (prayer): "*Guide us to the straight path*" (1:5).

And let it be so.

A PROTESTANT, UCC PERSPECTIVE

Rev. Kate Layzer is the Minister of Street Outreach at First Church in Cambridge, Congregational, United Church of Christ. She is the Founder and Director of the Friday Café, a weekly gathering space where homeless and housed neighbors can share a meal and get to know each other in an informal, judgment-free setting. She serves on the Board of the Cambridge Continuum of Care, a network of homeless service providers, and is also the author of many hymns.

“Love casts out fear, but we have to get over the fear in order to get close enough to love them.” — Dorothy Day

How did we get to be so deeply divided as a nation? We are living in a time when age-old differences among people seem heightened to the point of unbearable tension. How are we to bridge the chasms dividing rural from urban, rich from poor, black from white, citizen from immigrant, male from female, Muslim from non-Muslim, straight from queer? What will help us move from an atmosphere of anger, reactivity, and finger-pointing to compassion and constructive conversation?

When I think about my own reactions to people who see the world very differently from me, I recognize the origins of this unbearable tension in my own gut. Fear, blame, and anger are all active there. I have no real desire for dialogue with people whose views on guns, government, and social norms differ sharply from my own. I just want their views to change. Then we can talk.

The Christian tradition tells the story of a God who confounds us by taking exactly the opposite approach. What gulf could possibly be wider than the gulf between God and humankind? Between spirit and flesh, holiness and sin, between the realm of the transcendent and infinite — and the earthbound and mortal? Yet Christians say God was willing to put these daunting divine qualities aside in order to come close to us, being born into this world as human so that God could look us in the face, speak to us person to person, and, by being with us, change us. The story of Jesus is the story of a God who steps quietly across a vast gulf, inviting us to follow suit.

Imagine if we were able to take this kind of risk with people who seem to be “from another world” from us—socially, politically, or religiously. What if we were to practice laying aside our “rightness” in order to get closer to neighbors who feel just as threatened by us as we feel by them, allowing ourselves to get to know them in a human way?

In my own work as a community minister, bringing together people whose lives would otherwise rarely intersect — chronically homeless and housed, affluent or low-income — I have learned and experienced over and over that there can be deep satisfaction and even healing in being willing to get over our fear and simply be together as people: sharing a meal, telling our

stories, chatting about and listening to deep or everyday things, and just being ourselves, with no other role or agenda. In safe and caring community, the world of homelessness can become humanized and understandable to people who have never lived it. In this kind of intentional community, people with sharp ideological differences can grow to care about one other.

Perhaps getting over our fear of each other is a spiritual discipline for our time. What kind attitude of heart would one need to begin this work? Where would one start?

A Protestant, UCC Prayer Offering:

Holy God, I want to be right,
but even more, I want to be whole.
Draw near to me, just as I am—
Fearful, sad, outraged.
Let me be quiet in Your presence.
Let me know that You are God.
You heal the brokenhearted,
You seek out the lost,
You bind up the wounded,
You lift up the fallen,
You bring justice to the nations.
God of mercy, breathe new life into me today,
so that I may turn to the world not in fear
or cynicism or anger,
but in faith, hope, and love.
Help me, by Your grace, to forgive others
as You forgive me.
I ask in the name of Jesus, who is love made flesh.
Amen.

A JEWISH PERSPECTIVE

Tamar Miller, MSW, MPA, currently works with the Center for the Study of Jewish-Christian-Muslim Relations at Merrimack College on two initiatives: the Abdelkader Education Project and the Goldziher Prize for Journalists, countering anti-Muslim sentiment and amplifying nuanced stories in media about the Muslim-American experience. These efforts are in honor of her Jewish grandparents from Odessa, Litzhensk, and Lodz, who immigrated to the U.S. committed to their religious tradition. Though their traumas heightened Us and Them, they communicated deep dignity and respect.

Recently, with Israeli and Palestinian representatives of the Alliance for Middle East Peace – a coalition of over 100 peacemaking organizations – I worked with Chené Swart, a colleague from South Africa and an expert in “re-authoring.” Chené’s methodology helps reshape and add texture to narratives that keep us stuck. In order to create and live into new stories, we also had to account for our disempowering, hopeless, even toxic narrative strands. At the same time, Chené helped us embrace and use what she calls, “the sparkly pieces” of our old stories.

During a break in the seminar, Chené wanted to go to visit the Old City of Jerusalem for the first time. When we got to the Wailing Wall, she watched women swaying, praying, crying, imploring, and walking backwards from the wall so as not to dishonor the *Shekhina*.

“Every country should have a Wailing Wall,” she exclaimed, giving me new perspective. “What a gift to have a dedicated place to wail.”

My religious community taught me that Jewish prayer at this wall, and the 1967 6-Day War that made it possible, was “*the beginning of the age of redemption*.” Redemption remains hardly complete because in the intervening 50 years, Israel has had six wars with Arab neighbors and violence continues. 2017, the Jubilee year of the Occupation, brought many of us good reason to wail.

I was also taught, “*God planted fossils to test our faith*.” These days, however, I am more likely to take my cues from Robert Sapolsky, a neuro-endocrinologist and biological anthropologist, than from Rabbi Lipsker from Beth Jacob School for Girls or from the settler Rabbi Levinger who introduced me in grade 12 to pray in the Cave of the Patriarchs, unintentionally inspiring my life-long curiosity about other’s “sparkly” sacred stories.

There is good news here: peacemaking is informed by some of the things we now know about human evolution. A powerful part of our genetic legacy is: Us and Them. Merely grouping people (“green-beard effect”) creates immediate biases – mostly that “we” are superior. But Robert Sapolsky says that, “It is not meaningful to ask what our [propensity for tribalism and therefore violence] genes do, just what these genes do in a particular environment.” This suggests that our citizen diplomacy and people-to-people interventions in Israel and Palestine, and in Jewish-Christian-Muslim peacemaking in the United States, are on the right track.

We have examples where fear evaporates or transforms. The terms “Us” and “Them” often unravels with direct experience of the “Other”; especially with sustained contact in the presence of supportive allies. Being protected by someone or a group that was seen as a monolithic “Them”, can turn hate into a new “Us.” The Parents Circle for bereaved Israeli and Palestinian families, who have lost loved ones to political violence, and, I Am Your Protector, using public art campaigns to shift perspective, have both hit on something powerful that is supported by this latest evolutionary research.

A while ago, I invited Rais Buihan to another seminar in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Rais, an Indonesian-American high-tech professional, was shot in the face soon after 9/11 at a gas station in Texas. Others died, but Rais survived. Notwithstanding immense psychic and physical trauma, Rais took his would-be killer’s case to the Supreme Court, asking that he not be executed for his crimes. Rais lost the case, and the night before Mark Stroman’s execution, he asked to speak to Rais, who recounts: “He saw me as a human being and he said, ‘I love you, brother. 10 years ago, his heart was full of hate.’”

And my favorite organization, Peace Players, generates opportunities for high school athletes, and has such ingredients to create a new “Us.”

Still cynical like so many naysayers? Here’s a nice thought passed down recently from my Rabbi/father. It’s a *Halakhic* tidbit. If a menorah candle on *Chanukah* accidentally goes out, the *Rambam* says we are not obligated to re-light it. Why? Because, for now, the effort is enough.

I pray to be enough
To say less
To know for sure less
To open more
To quiet
To be
To wail
To lessen fear
To lighten regret
To calm angry fire
To sing louder
To sway
To quiet
To be
To become
To say I’m sorry to everyone and everything
To sing

To pray for the Others I know:
Sameh, Basil, Walid, Rashad, Amany, Alia,
Ali, Alaa, Ahmed, Mohammed, Mohamed,
Muhannad, Nadeem, Noor, Ramzi, Imad,
Kareen, Huda, Souli, Hala, Muhsen, Zeina,
Randa, Nabil, Abdallah, Abdullah Sadiqua,
Bassam, Mazen, Yousef, Hind, Adeeb,
Bashar, Daoud, Afif, Muin, Anisa, Dana,
David, Mehdi, Fadi, Karma, Aziza, Laila,
Meshal, Sabine, Sameera, Tarek, Waseem,
Yamilla, Nafez, Anwer, Aziz, Bishara,
Omar, Daisy, Farouk, Hassan, Ibrahim,
Maysa, Sami, Kamal.
Goodnight.
Sweet dreams.
I pray you are well.

AN INTERDENOMINATIONAL CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

Shelton Oakley Hersey was born and raised in Alabama but has found invaluable homes in Memphis, Los Angeles, Mexico and South Africa before moving to Boston. A former graduate of the ecumenical seminary, Fuller Theological Seminary, Shelton continues to draw spiritual nourishment from various streams of Christianity and traditions of different faiths. She currently serves as the Program Director for the Interfaith Youth Initiative, a program of Cooperative Metropolitan Ministries, creating spaces of leadership development, healthy dialogue and personal formation across differences.

We are all in relationship with one another. For years, this African concept of Ubuntu continued to baffle and challenge me. How can this be? What might God be inviting me to if I believe this to be true?

“Ubuntu is very difficult to render into a Western language. It speaks of the very essence of being. It is to say, ‘My humanity is inextricably bound up in yours.’ We belong in a bundle of life.” – Desmond Tutu, No Future Without Forgiveness.

These words of Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu describe an ideal invitation for life in community. When we provide a safe space for one another, encourage a friend, make decisions to positively impact the brother or sister across the world, forgive and listen, or find space to collaborate – we create community or better yet – Ubuntu. We believe that the central place to experience Ubuntu is the development and care for peace in our everyday relationships, those far and those near.

How we think about, relate to, and interact with one another is of utmost importance. The vitality of a relationship depends on two persons committing to trust one another, their thoughts, motivations and interactions. And sadly, entrenched in the wounds of this world, trust among us can be easily questioned or broken. Pope Francis reminds us that communication is central to healthy and fruitful relationship, and his prayer (included in this booklet) demonstrates how we can be communicating to build greater peace amongst all peoples.

In recent years, no other source has described what it means to offer peace to other people than a beautifully written children’s book called *Peace is an Offering*. I read this many a night to my daughter as she grew in my womb, praying God would humble me to think, speak and act peacefully toward her, demonstrating the transformative power peaceful communication holds. The simple words and illustrations offer us timeless and invaluable proactive ideas and thoughtful questions concerning the way of a true peacemaker.

“Peace is an offering... A muffin or a peach.”

“Peace is holding on to another. Peace is the words you say to a brother.

‘Will you stay with me? Will you be my friend? Will you listen to my story till the very end?’”

“Will you wait when I’m slow? Will you calm my fears? Will you sing to the sun to dry my tears? Will you keep me company when I’m all alone? Will you give me shelter when I’ve lost my home?”

“Peace is a joining, not a pulling apart. It's the courage to bear a wounded heart.”

As a follower of Jesus, I have read about many a moment during his tenure on earth when he was challenged to cast judgment or speak with hostility and pride against someone and ignore those on the fringes. Jesus, God Incarnate, represented the life of a true peacemaker by making a way where there was no way for the ultimate joining together in this life and beyond. And Jesus walked his talk every step of the way, calming fears, offering solidarity, listening and speaking truth, providing company, serving and being served, trusting and asking to be trusted. Jesus understood that the world’s brokenness would truly heal one relationship at a time and lived peacefully by example, **loving his neighbor as himself** (Matthew 22:39). Our charge is to do the same and experience God’s gift of glorious and much-needed healing from the inside out.

Pope Francis’ prayer from World Communications Day, March 13, 2018:

Lord, make us instruments of your peace.
Help us to recognize the evil latent in a communication that does not build communion.
Help us to remove the venom from our judgments.
Help us to speak about others as our brothers and sisters.
You are faithful and trustworthy; may our words be seeds of goodness for the world:
Where there is shouting, let us practice listening;
Where there is confusion, let us inspire harmony;
Where there is ambiguity, let us bring clarity;
Where there is exclusion, let us offer solidarity;
Where there is sensationalism, let us use sobriety;
Where there is superficiality, let us raise real questions;
Where there is prejudice, let us awaken trust;
Where there is hostility, let us bring respect;
Where there is falsehood, let us bring truth. Amen.

Prayer of Peace written by David Tonghou Ngong

Dear God, we hear of peace only as a faraway dream;
we long for it in our lives, in the lives of our families,
our friends, and our countries.

But with each passing day
the prospect for peace
seems to be increasingly tantalizing.

Restlessness seems to be
the order of our present existence:
our inner restlessness rooted in various anxieties,
our societal restlessness rooted in
the evils that go on around us,
the restlessness of our world
plagued by conflicts of all sorts.

Dear God, we hear of peace only as a dream;
a dream we would love to be part of,
a dream we long to have in our hearts, in our neighborhoods,
in our countries, and even in our churches and faith communities.

We pray that we may experience that peace
that passes all understanding,
we pray, O God, that we may experience You,
the Peace of the world.

Penetrate the grieving heart,
accompany the lonely one,
remember the forgotten,
reclaim the strayed,
make music out of the
disharmony of conflict and chaos.

Let our restless hearts rest in you, O God.

This we pray in the name of the Christ,
who beckons us into the vision of Peace. Amen.

PLEASE WRITE IN YOUR OWN PRAYERS:

