

**ROTARY DISTRICT 5440 PEACEBUILDER NEWSLETTER**  
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**TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSIONS**

William M. Timpson, Bob Meroney, Lloyd Thomas and Sharyn Salmen,  
 Fort Collins Rotary Clubs  
 Lindsey Pointer, 2017 Rotary Global Grant Scholarship Recipient

In these newsletters of the Rotary District Peacebuilders, we want to invite readers for contributions and ideas, suggestions and possibilities for our efforts to promote the foundational skills for promoting peace, i.e., nonviolent conflict resolution, improved communication and cooperation, successful negotiation and mediation as well as the critical and creative thinking that can help communities move through obstacles and difficulties. See the Rotary District 5440 website for past issues: <https://www.rotary5440.org/sitepage/peace-building-newsletters>

**ESTABLISH TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSIONS**

*William M. Timpson, Ph.D. is a professor at Colorado State University in its School of Education and a member of the Fort Collins Rotary Club. What follows is adapted from his 2009 book, 147 Tips for Teaching Peace and Reconciliation, co-authored with an international group of peace scholars that included Ed Brantmeier, Nat Kees, Tom Cavanagh, Claire McGlynn and Elavie Ndura (Madison, WI: Atwood).*

In *No Future Without Forgiveness*, South African Bishop Desmond Tutu (1999) describes the process by which those who had committed “political crimes” or had acted “under orders” from a superior, typically within the police or other state security apparatus, could apply for amnesty from prosecution if they told the truth and asked for forgiveness. Above all, Tutu, Mandela and other leaders wanted to educate the nation and the world about the horrors of apartheid. Establishing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was the mechanism.



In the outskirts of Moscow, a memorial was unveiled in 2017 at the former headquarters of the secret police, the KGB, where more than 20,000 victims of Stalin’s paranoid pursuit of threats from 1937 and 1841 lay secretly buried until Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered it built in 2014. I had the opportunity to visit this site of truth, remembrance and reconciliation in 2019 on a tour with a Presbyterian Peacemaking Project. The three-sided wall has the names of these victim inscribed for all to see.

In November of 2019, I also got to witness the conflicts and tensions over immigration, smuggling and the building of a wall at the U.S.-Mexican border. A delegation from Plymouth United Church of Christ in Fort Collins, Colorado wanted to see first-hand what the issues were. With respect to our focus in this newsletter on “truth and reconciliation,” there is a memorial in Nogales, Mexico, for example, that is dedicated to Jose Rodriguez, a sixteen-year old boy who was shot and killed by a Border Patrol officer in 2012 for throwing a rock over the border wall. Rodriguez was unarmed and hit by ten bullets in the head and back. This memorial represents a permanent call for remembrance and reconciliation.



**QUESTIONS:** What historical events in your lifetime would benefit from something like a public “Truth and Reconciliation Commission” hearing, especially during the days that lead up to Christmas and our celebration of peace in our songs, prayers and gatherings?

### **FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE**

*Lindsey Pointer is a PhD Candidate in Restorative Justice at Victoria University of Wellington and is a past recipient of the Rotary Global Grant Scholarship. She works as a restorative justice facilitator, trainer and researcher.*

Fania Davis is a leading voice on the intersection of racial and restorative justice. She is a social justice activist, civil rights trial attorney, restorative justice practitioner, and writer and scholar with a PhD in indigenous knowledge. She is also the founding director of Restorative Justice of Oakland Youth (RJOY), a ground-breaking restorative justice organization. Fania and her sister, Angela Davis, are long-time Civil Justice activists, who have done incredible work for social justice over their lifetimes (read more about them [here](#)).

Davis argues that the United States needs a Truth and Reconciliation process on violence against African Americans. I couldn't agree with her more. I hope you enjoy her opinion piece from *Yes Magazine* below.

### **THIS COUNTRY NEEDS A TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION PROCESS ON VIOLENCE AGAINST AFRICAN-AMERICANS—RIGHT NOW**

**Fania Davis**

I am among the millions who have experienced the shock, grief, and fury of losing someone to racial violence. When I was 15, two close friends were killed in the Birmingham Sunday School

bombing carried out by white supremacists trying to terrorize the rising civil rights movement. Only six years later, my husband was shot and nearly killed by police who broke into our home, all because of our activism at the time, especially in support of the Black Panthers.

As a civil rights trial lawyer, I've spent much of my professional life protecting people from racial discrimination. In my early twenties, I devoted myself to organizing an international movement to defend my sister, Angela Davis, from politically motivated capital murder charges aimed at silencing her calls for racial and social justice. Early childhood experiences in the South set me on a quest for social transformation, and I've been a community organizer ever since, from the civil rights to the black power, women's, anti-racial violence, peace, anti-apartheid, anti-imperialist, economic justice, political prisoner movements, and others.

After more than three decades of all the fighting, I started to feel out of balance and intuitively knew I needed more healing energies in my life. I ended up enrolling in a Ph.D. program in Indigenous Studies that allowed me to study with African healers. Today, my focus is on restorative justice, which I believe offers a way for us to collectively face this epidemic, expose its deep historical roots, and stop it.

The killings of Michael Brown in Ferguson and Eric Garner in New York have sparked a national outcry to end the epidemic killings of black men. Many note that even if indictments had been handed down, that wouldn't have been enough to stop the carnage. The problem goes far beyond the actions of any police officer or department. The problem is hundreds of years old, and it is one we must take on as a nation. Truth and reconciliation processes offer the greatest hope.

### **Truth and reconciliation in Ferguson and beyond**

A Ferguson Truth and Reconciliation process based on restorative justice (RJ) principles could not only stop the epidemic but also allow us as a nation to take a first "step on the road to reconciliation," to borrow a phrase from the South African experience.

A restorative justice model means that youth, families, and communities directly affected by the killings—along with allies—would partner with the federal government to establish a commission. Imagine a commission that serves as a facilitator, community organizer, or Council of Elders to catalyze, guide, and support participatory, inclusive, and community-based processes.

We know from experience that a quasi-legal body of high-level experts who hold hearings, examine the evidence, and prepare findings and recommendations telling us as a nation what we need to do won't work. We've had plenty of those.

To move toward a reconciled America, we have to do the work ourselves. Reconciliation is an ongoing and collective process. We must roll up our sleeves and do the messy, challenging, but hopeful work of creating transformed relationships and structures leading us into new futures. Someone like Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who headed up South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, might come to Ferguson to inspire and guide us as we take the first steps on this journey.

And the impact wouldn't be for Ferguson alone. Unfolding in hubs across the nation, a Truth and Reconciliation process could create safe public spaces for youth, families, neighbors,

witnesses, and other survivors to share their stories. Though this will happen in hubs, the truths learned and the knowledge gained would be broadly shared. Importantly, the process would also create skillfully facilitated dialogue where responsible parties engage in public truth-telling and take responsibility for wrongdoing.

## HEALTH AND POSITIVE PEACE

**Lloyd Thomas**, Ph.D. is a longstanding member of the Fort Collins Rotary Club, a licensed psychologist and a life coach with a long history of writing regular columns.

Worldwide peace is the critical prerequisite for the survival of humanity. We humans are facing, and fast approaching a tipping point for:

- The warming of the planet's climate;
- The decrease in biodiversity;
- The lack of fresh water worldwide;
- Overpopulation; and
- The use of violence to address or solve humanity's problems

We can no longer follow the allopathic medical model for treating disease as the best method for treating the above problems. Physician, William Osler once said, *"The good physician treats the disease; the great physician treats the patient who has the disease."* The allopathic medical model dictates that if we locate the "causes" of disease, we can then eliminate them using medicine, surgery or radiation. Following this model has resulted in many breakthroughs in the successful treatments/preventatives of many illnesses/disorders. Unfortunately, the body's *healing* is left up to the patient to do after any treatment(s) have been applied. Perhaps, we could apply the practical medical model of the ancient Chinese: The "patients" paid their health professionals as long as they remained healthy. They stopped paying whenever they got sick. Dr. Osler also wrote, *"One of the first duties of the physician is to educate the masses not to take medicine."*

Our bodies have a great capacity for healing and remaining healthy, and if we "treat the patient who has the disease," we are much more likely to *heal*. There are no known illnesses from which our bodies have been able to heal spontaneously without outside intervention. Today, medical science is finally learning how to strengthen our naturally occurring healing systems. We are learning a lot about "spontaneous remission" and "the placebo effect" and "immunotherapy" etc.

How is all the above relevant or analogous to treating our global problems peacefully? Thankfully, there is an organization that has been doing such research for several years. That organization is called the *Institute for Economics & Peace* (IEP). [Check it out online.] Every year IEP sends out a *Positive Peace Report: Analyzing The Factors That Sustain Peace*. IEP's report for 2019 includes a great distinction between "negative peace" and "positive peace." This distinction was initially made by Norwegian sociologist, Johan Galtung, *"negative peace, which is the absence of violence, [the] absence of war...and positive peace, which is the integration of human society. Peace does not just mean the absence of something. After all, an authoritarian regime could have peace. Peace is also the presence of something."*

Negative peace can only be described as the absence of war. A vacant city destroyed by war is extremely peaceful. The absence of microbes, bacteria, viruses or accidents does not describe a healthy person. That which “causes” an illness has been destroyed but may not sustainably heal the person. Sometimes people die from the side effects of the “medicine, surgery or radiation.” I have known patients who have done so. War has never been *curative* of the problems to which it is supposed to sustainably address. The terrible side effects of war are very long-lasting unless the creation of “positive peace” is employed *after* war has ended. Lasting, sustainable peace must be created and applied to the problems stated above...without additional (new) warfare. Healing/Health is created by the application of many lifestyle changes in the absence of microbes, viruses, bacteria and accidents.

The Institute for Economics & Peace has identified eight key factors they call Pillars, which are essential to the creation and sustaining of Positive Peace. They are:

- *WELL-FUNCTIONING GOVERNMENT – one that delivers high-quality and civil services, engenders trust and participation, demonstrates political stability and upholds the rule of law;*
- *SOUND BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT – The strength of economic conditions as well as the formal institutions that support the operation of the private sector. Business competitiveness and economic productivity are both associated with the most peaceful countries.*
- *EQUITABLE DISTRIBUTION OF RESOURCES – Peaceful countries tend to ensure equity in access to resources such as education, health, and to a lesser extent, equity in income distribution.*
- *ACCEPTANCE OF THE RIGHTS OF OTHERS – Peaceful countries often have formal laws that guarantee basic human rights and freedoms, and the informal social and cultural norms that relate to behaviors of citizens.*
- *GOOD RELATIONS WITH NEIGHBORS – Peaceful relations with other countries are as important as good relations between groups within a country. Countries with positive external relations are more peaceful and tend to be more politically stable, have better functioning governments, are regionally integrated and have lower levels of organized internal conflict.*
- *FREE FLOW OF INFORMATION – Free and independent media disseminates information a way that leads to greater knowledge and helps individuals, businesses and civil society make better decisions. This leads to better outcomes and more rational responses in times of crisis.*
- *HIGH LEVELS OF HUMAN CAPITAL – A skilled human capital base reflects the extent to which societies educate citizens and promote the development of knowledge, thereby improving economic productivity, care for the young, political participation and social capital.*

- *LOW LEVELS OF CORRUPTION – In societies with high levels of corruption, resources are inefficiently allocated, often leading to a lack of funding for essential services and civil unrest. Low corruption can enhance confidence and trust in institutions.*

Focusing your attention to creating a healthy lifestyle and engaging in those behaviors that generate that lifestyle is the first step in creating a sustainable, healthy body along with its naturally occurring healing system. Attending to the development of positive peace and engaging in those actions, attitudes and behaviors that create such a sustainable, peaceful culture is “the critical prerequisite for the survival of humanity.”

### **IRELAND’S PEACE, TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION WITH THE UNITED KINGDOM**

**Sharyn H. Salmen** *has been a health care consultant and is a long time Rotarian. You can contacting her at this email address: [ssalmen@q.com](mailto:ssalmen@q.com).*

On a trip to Ireland in June and July of 2019, we found that different regions had different viewpoints about past conflicts. However ordinary citizens are finding agreements about the peace process still holding after more than twenty years. Various investigations have sought to determine the truth about the past “Troubles”, those years of violence after 1972 when British troops fired on a civil rights march in Londonderry killing fourteen and injuring another fourteen.

While the Good Friday Peace Accord in 1998 led to a withdrawal of British forces and a decommissioning of weapons by paramilitary forces on both sides, both Catholic affiliates with the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and Protestant loyalists, efforts at reconciliation have continued. However, it seems that many are nervous about the responsibility needed to admit to violence and whether they will be exonerated or persecuted further or whether the region will be engulfed in conflict, blame and retaliation once again.

An historic milestone may have passed in May 2007 when the Reverend Ian Paisley, the firebrand Protestant preacher and leader of the Democratic Unionist Party, and Martin McGuinness, a Sinn Féin Member of Parliament and former commander in the Irish Republican Army—the best of enemies for decades—laughed and smiled as they were sworn in as first minister and deputy first minister of a new power-sharing government. Both men have since passed away.

Coming to the truth is always difficult. In the case of armed conflicts, reconciliation requires a search for that truth along with a commitment to finding justice, practicing forgiveness and seeking accommodation. For example, in a dramatic 2010 Speech in the House of Commons, then British Prime Minister David Cameron apologized to the people of Derry in a televised speech, saying “What happened on Bloody Sunday was both unjustified and unjustifiable. It was wrong.” A series of painted murals commemorates the events of 1972, allowing people to remember, learn and hopefully heal. A pedestrian Peace Bridge was built over the River Foyle and opened in 2011, linking Catholic and Protestant neighborhoods long divided by that River. A statue of two men reaching out their hands toward each other stands proudly near the downtown area. In addition, the city of Londonderry has now agreed to alternate Nationalist and Unionist mayors.

Other examples of the truth of different perspectives exist in Belfast. Tourists can take conventional taxi rides to the historic sites and hear one viewpoint or go with ex-convicts and former IRA fighters to hear a very different interpretation. The murals in different parts of the city that cover the sides of building commemorate very different heroes and events. The “peace wall” cuts through the heart of Belfast allows for ongoing public expressions of reconciliation.

On July 2, 2019, in Portrush in Northern Ireland, a strongly conservative Protestant community, we had an unplanned first-hand experience with local citizens about the prospects for reconciliation there in the context of a discussion about Brexit. Over dinner we chatted with two older women, one a Protestant and the other an ex-Catholic nun. Both had experienced the “Troubles” that started in 1972 and the 20 years of subsequent peace that followed the Good Friday Agreement of 1998. They drew on their friendship to discuss the issues and their ideas for solutions. Neither wanted conflict or hard borders anywhere between the north or south of Ireland. They wanted a unified Ireland. They desired peace and peaceful solutions. They said that it appears “only extremists want a hard border to replace the soft and cooperative one than now exists.”

### **FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION**

*Robert N. Meroney, Ph.D. is a Rotarian and an Emeritus Professor of Fluid Mechanics and Wind Engineering with a long career at Colorado State University.*

Reconciliation, forgiveness, and truth, possibly followed by transitional justice, restorative justice, retributive justice, reparative justice, and conflict management are all intertwined and affect one another. Some people think reconciliation and forgiveness are the same. Some question whether it is truly possible to have reconciliation without forgiveness. Others point out that even if you achieve forgiveness, reconciliation is not guaranteed. It is necessary to define terms, so everybody understands the dilemmas.

The word **reconciliation** generally means making one view compatible with another, but it can have specific meanings when applied to accounting (bank statements), theology (redemption, penance, atonement), legislative (expedite bill passage), political (repairing damaged political relationships and acceptance of the rule of law), between nations (agreement to stop hostilities and through diplomacy search for a mutually acceptable solution), and personal (reestablishment of relations or communications). The Greek word *katallage* is often used as a synonym and specifies an exchange of one thing for another, e.g. exchange enmity, wrath, and war with friendship, love and peace.

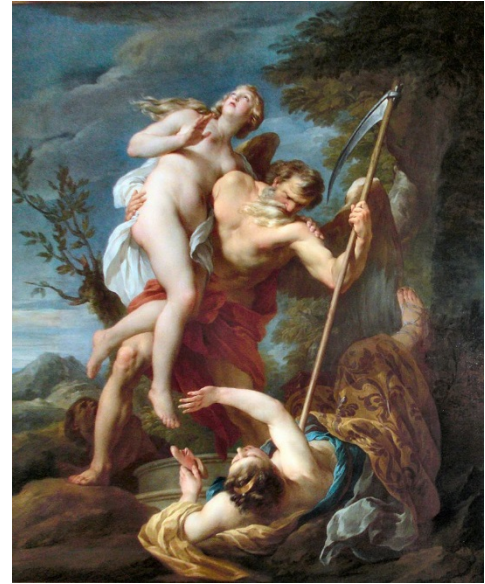
**Forgiveness** is an internal personal process; hence, it can involve a single person. Lewis B. Smedes, who wrote the book “Forgive and Forget: Healing the Hurts We Don’t Deserve” suggested “*To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover the prisoner is you.*”<sup>1</sup> The forgiveness process may not involve the offending party at all. Forgiveness does not necessarily mean reconciliation can follow for sometimes the mental and physical injuries are too stark. Some will forgive but expect apology, remorse, or reparations before reconciliation.

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<sup>1</sup> Lewis B. Smedes, ThD (1921-2002), Professor of Theology, Fuller Theological Seminary, author of 15 books.

Forgiveness does not equate to forgetting. Again, Smedes said *“Forgiving does not erase the bitter past. A healed memory is not a deleted memory. Instead, forgiving what we cannot forget creates a new way to remember. We change the memory of our past into a hope for our future.”* Ryan Howes wrote that *“the process of forgiveness and reconciliation can be a long, grueling process. Making up may not be possible due to obstacles including participation by the offender. But forgiveness involves only you.”*<sup>2</sup>

**Truth** is also tricky. **Truth** is defined as being in accord with fact or reality, or fidelity to an original. It is usually held to be opposite to falsehood. Some would argue that the only sure proof of truth is passage of time. The figure to the right is titled *Time Saving Truth from Falsehood and Envy* (Francois Lemoyne, 1737). Philosophers have debated the reality of truth for centuries, and various theories would suggest a) truth is relative (to language, to culture, to perception of reality), b) truth requires consistency in all its facets, d) truth is dependent on how it is constructed (e.g. the winners write the history), e) truth is what the majority consensus agrees (thus it can change with time), f) truth is pragmatic in that it survives time and tests, g) truth reflects the agreement with some statement, and h) just saying something is true is a redundant activity. Thus, in a forgiveness or reconciliation activity judgements about the “truth” of what participants say or feel may need to be held in abeyance.



Some would also argue that **Facts** should be used to define **Truth**. **Facts** are important to me as a scientist/engineer. Some are verifiable by scientific experiment, others are documented by unimpeachable records, sources, artifacts, or producible evidence. Concerning facts, I think there are different kinds.

- There are facts that are "true" and "matter." These facts are the kind you are a fool if you ignore, and ignorance can kill you. Gravity is a FACT, ignoring it is stupid.
- There are facts that are "true" but enforcing or emphasizing them doesn't necessarily lead to goodwill, better friendships or beneficial results. A child's painting may be both ugly and unskilled (TRUE) , but telling him/her so doesn't help anything.
- There are facts that are "true", but others just don't care and will not act upon their reality. Sometimes the refusal to accept some facts can be related to religion, culture, politics, or just plain stubbornness. People who become entranced with evil cult or political leaders (Warren Jeffs, L. Ron Hubbard, Charles Manson, Sun Myung Moon, Ayn Rand, Jim Jones, Hugo Chavez or Adolph Hitler), people who have a sick child and are convinced some alternative medicine is the cure, people who are committed "foodies" (anti-GMO, anti-meat, etc.), are immune to considering possible alternatives.

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<sup>2</sup> Ryan Howes (2013), Forgiveness: Fact and Fiction, *Psychology Today*, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/in-therapy/201303/forgiveness-vs-reconciliation>



- There are facts that are "true". but people have agendas that overwhelm one reality in favor of another. Achieving their own "truth" is more important than contradicting an inconvenient falsehood.

There are also "facts" which are stated without attribution or reference, so I follow a fact-check model to consider a) the source of the information, b) the supporting evidence for the information both historical and logical, c) the moral position that the opinions or ideas hold, and d) the position about the information taken by other people I respect. I find these four filters to be very helpful in deciding whether to accept or reject facts/opinions proposed by others.

The **Process of Reconciliation** may have different models, i) mutual forgiveness combined with agreement on corrections or ii) restoration of mutual respect with restoration of rules of law and behavior. In both cases some level of trust is required between parties. Reconciliation is an interpersonal joint process where dialogue with the offender is necessary. Typically, there is an exchange of views, expressions of hurt, and active listening on both sides. There may or may not be forgiveness, expressions of remorse, reparations, and hugs all around. Consequences of the reconciliation process may vary.<sup>3</sup> Participants in a formal reconciliation process may often have different expectations.<sup>4</sup> Proponents of T&R Commissions must work to include reparations for victims, formal apologies, indications of remorse, and a chance for a new beginning. Critics of T&R Commissions claim that the process can allow crimes against humanity and genocide to go unpunished, promote impunity among rulers, traumatize victims, and provide only selective justice.<sup>5</sup> Hence, T&R Commissions must be prepared to encourage true and honest communication, universal participation, and build trust that bridges barriers of suspicion ,

Despite the admitted confusion and difficulties, there is no question that forgiveness is the correct medicine for individual health, and reconciliation among the parties involved based on a joint or even partial understanding of truth will lead toward peace and better solutions to discord than acrimony, war, and continued hate.

### PRIORITIES OF THE ROTARY FOUNDATION

See the RI website: <https://my.rotary.org/en/learning-reference/about-rotary/our-priorities> If you would you like to respond to one of the pieces in this newsletter, check out our blog [www.rotarypeacebuilder.com](http://www.rotarypeacebuilder.com) and join the conversation! If you would like to contribute to a future newsletter, visit [www.rotarypeacebuilder.com/submit/](http://www.rotarypeacebuilder.com/submit/). See the Rotary District 5440 website for past issues: <https://www.rotary5440.org/sitepage/peace-building-newsletters>. Future issues may explore the following: January—Spirituality and Healing; February—Coping with Stress; March—Nuclear Weapons, Use, Probabilities and History.

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<sup>3</sup> Colleen Murphy (2007), Political Reconciliation, the Rule of Law, and Genocide, *The European Legacy*, Vol. 12, No. 7, pp. 853-865.

<sup>4</sup> Joanne Laucius (2017), The meaning of reconciliation: 'We're not anywhere near that word called forward. We're not even on the first syllable', *Ottawa Citizen*, Postmedia Network, <https://ottawacitizen.com/news/local-news/the-meaning-of-reconciliation>

<sup>5</sup> Some see Truth and Reconciliation Commissions as a "weak-minded establishmentarian alternative to the real task of justice and structural change." Crying peace when there is no peace.