

**ROTARY DISTRICT 5440 PEACEBUILDER  
NEWSLETTER FALL 2017 NUMBER 3**

**William M. Timpson and Bob Meroney  
Fort Collins Rotary Club  
and  
Lindsey Pointer, 2017 Rotary Global Grant Recipient**

In this third newsletter of the Rotary District Peacebuilders, we want to continue our invitation for contributors 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.

These are the same skills and ideas we are nurturing with our Global Grant in Burundi, East Africa at the University of Ngozi. By sharing more of this project in what follows, we hope to spark new thinking about what can be done locally, on college campuses, elementary and secondary schools, in churches and other organizations—wherever people are looking for new and constructive ways through conflicts.

**PEACEBUILDING IN THE WEST  
Lessons learned from infusing sustainable peace studies  
at the University of Ngozi in Burundi  
Bill Timpson**

The following material is adapted from my 2002 book, *Teaching and Learning Peace* (Madison, WI: Atwood), a text that is being used for the infusion of sustainable peace studies into the curriculum at the University of Ngozi and other campuses in Burundi. These ideas are equally relevant for schools, colleges and universities in the U.S. as well as in our churches, organizations and businesses. Everyone can benefit when conflicts are resolved through improved communication.

**Empathic Expressing**

In the case of Andrea, empathy played a part. From her perspective, this class bordered on a waste of time; her frustration was rising. In our own small group section of a first year seminar, a class dedicated to helping students make a successful transition from high school to college, we took quite a bit of time to discuss this case. It proved to be a wonderful case study that had meaning for everyone. I encouraged Andrea and the others to approach this instructor with some forethought, to understand the problem from her point of view, to offer a clear analysis based on their own experiences and then to make a clear and responsible request. This model of “empathic expressing” offers students some structure for discussing difficult issues or conflicts with someone else. It builds on mutual understanding, empathy and trust as a foundation for effective communication.

When her chemistry class met again, Andrea walked up after class and repeated what she had practiced in our small group discussion section, “*Hi. You know, a lot of us are*

*struggling in this class and some examples would really help. I like it when you explain what's in the book. I read the material outside of class but I need help with understanding it.*" The teacher smiled and said, "Sure. I can try to do that."

In subsequent classes, Andrea reported that she could see some improvements. So she went up again and told this teacher how she appreciated the effort, that it was making a difference. What a mood shift for Andrea. From being just another whiner, she took some initiative, identified her needs and frustrations, expressed some empathy and offered a solution. Her whole attitude about this class changed as well. Not that everything turned around immediately, but she did move off the negative and toward a positive, constructive and assertive approach to the problem she was having. Empathy helped her make this shift and build a better communication bridge with her instructor.

**Description of the problem:** What's the communication model here? It begins with a clear description of the problem. Andrea was bored with a mere repetition of what was in the text. She usually was up-to-date for class with her readings. She needed explanations, concrete examples to make sense of the theories, concepts and principles but didn't know how could she get any level of individual responsiveness in such a large lecture class. Although it took some time in our own class and with the collective help of her classmates, we did finally get through her frustrations and identify the problem affecting her learning.

**I-message:** The next step was to practice with language which would keep the ownership of the issue with Andrea and her experience. Instead of leading with criticism-- "*You know, the way you teach is boring*"—we shifted to a statement of feelings: "*When you just review what is in the book, I get really frustrated...*" or "*...I feel bored.*" No one can argue with Andrea's experience and feelings here. It's not as if there is some objective line beyond which a class automatically becomes boring for every student. An I-message is more honest and personal; you have to own your own feelings, but you also understand that no one can take those feelings away or judge them as "wrong."

**A reason why:** The next step is to give a reason for your feelings, an explanation. The immature child will pout, "I'm bored" but have no explanation of why or idea about a solution. "Fix it, mom" or "Entertain me, dad" is the underlying message. For Andrea, giving a reason meant saying, "When you just lecture from the text, I do get bored and frustrated because I read the material already. However, I do have questions and I need some help."

**Express empathy:** The next step for Andrea was to show some empathy for what this instructor might be feeling. We discussed a number of possibilities. Because this was a young teacher, we thought about using the following response: "I know you must be nervous and want to stay close to the assigned readings. I know this is your very first teaching assignment." This instructor was right out of graduate school and wanted to do well as a stepping stone to a permanent position somewhere else. She was commuting sixty plus miles each way and was largely cut off from other faculty. And, she was advised by the course coordinator to "stay close to the text." Andrea's attempt at empathy was right on target—the instructor was anxious--and, in return, Andrea got a better understanding about why. This instructor was a real person with real feelings.

**Identify a positive:** Important in communication about a problem is to hold out the expectation that a solution is possible. In this case Andrea said the following: *“I know the lectures can work better for me. When you gave examples or stopped to answer questions, it made a real difference. It helped me could get the idea better.”* Here, Andrea was providing a concrete example herself of something that helped.

**Make a clear request:** Instead of simply asking this instructor to “do better,” instead of just leaving it up to her to figure out a solution, Andrea then offered the following. *“I would like you to add more examples in your lectures. These help a lot. I’d also like you to stop and ask for questions more often. And I’ll try to see you after class or during office hours if there is something I am still confused about.”* Although it took some time to work through these steps and although the very idea of approaching an instructor in a big lecture class to say all this seemed frightening at first, taking this kind of initiative made a big difference for Andrea. She learned some important lessons about advocating for herself in a responsible and effective manner.

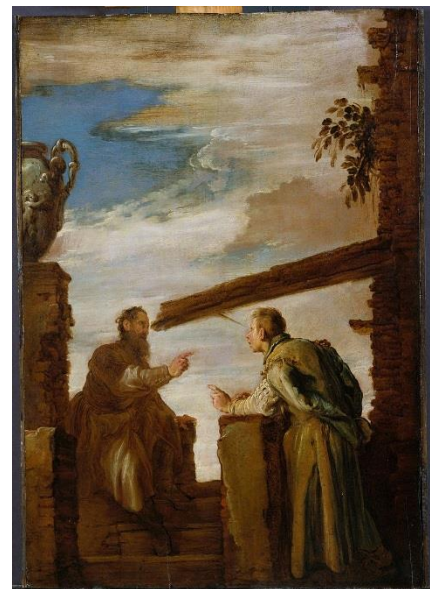
**Local applications where you live:** Again, we pose the challenge: What and where can you imagine these ideas working effectively in your community? How can we work together to infuse these kinds of basic peacebuilding ideas and skills in your schools, on your campuses, and in your organizations?

## **SELF-EXAMINATION AS A MEANS TO BETTER COMMUNICATION**

### **Prepared by Bob Meroney**

Sometimes as we search for reconciliation we are so focused on the problems and defects in the other person’s behavior, that we fail to see how our own actions destroy communication and the opportunity for peace. This is an old problem in human relationship. We rush to judgement, we point the finger, and we have difficulty seeing ourselves as others see us.

In the King James Version of the Christian Bible Matthew 7:5 is stated *“Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.”* If “mote” is not familiar then one can use synonyms like “plank, log, beam, speck, splinter, chip, or piece of sawdust”. The intent of these words is not to suspend any judgement at all about wrong doing, nor is it condemning mutual aid and assistance to others to correct failure, rather it is to acknowledge that hypocrisy and self-righteousness may endanger any progress toward understanding and peace.



*1619 painting by Domenico Fetti entitled  
The Parable of the Mote and the Beam*

Robert Burns made an even more dramatic contribution to this theme in his poem “*To a Louse, On Seeing One on a Lady’s Bonnet at Church*” written in 1786 in his favorite Scots dialect of standard six-line Scottish Habbie. In the final verse one finds:

***Burns original***

*O wad some Pow'r the giftie gie us  
To see oursels as ithers see us!  
It wad frae mony a blunder free us,  
An' foolish notion:  
What airs in dress an' gait wad lea'e  
us,  
An' ev'n devotion!*

**Standard English translation**

And would some Power give us the  
gift  
To see ourselves as others see us!  
It would from many a blunder free us,  
And foolish notion:  
What airs in dress and gait would leave  
us,  
And even devotion!

In this poem Burns tells how the narrator notices a lady in church, with a louse that is roving, unnoticed by her, around in her bonnet. The poet chastises the louse for not realizing how important his host is, and then reflects that, to a louse, we are all equal prey, and that we would be disabused of our pretensions if we were to see ourselves through each other's eyes.



**RESTORATIVE JUSTICE**  
**Restorative Justice Offers an Opportunity for**  
**Self-Reflection and Repairing Harm to Self**  
**Lindsey Pointer, 2017 Rotary Global Grant Recipient**

When we speak of restorative justice, we often speak of the opportunity for a person who has committed a crime or otherwise caused harm to hear about how other people have been affected by the act. This is a central feature of the restorative justice process and often has incredibly positive impacts for all involved. However, often harm has been experienced by the person who committed the offense as well, and the restorative justice process can provide a space for self-reflection. One case in particular comes to mind that demonstrates the opportunity for reparation of harm to self.

“Brian isn’t a bad kid. His brother was always in trouble and struggling, but Brian is not that kid.” I heard the worried urgency in Brian’s mother’s voice when we spoke on the phone during our first intake call. “It’s really no big deal, just a curfew ticket. He isn’t a bad kid.”

Brian’s charges were a big deal though. When the officer stopped Brian for a curfew violation, Brian began yelling at the officer and tried to run away. When the officer grabbed his backpack to stop him, he spun around, squaring up on her in an intimidating manner. Brian was 15 and about 6 feet tall, significantly larger than the responding

officer. She later shared that, in that moment, she feared that he would be violent and she would have to use a weapon. Brian was ultimately charged with resisting arrest.

In lieu of court, Brian's case was handled by diversion and was referred to Restorative Justice by his diversion officer. When I met Brian, it didn't take long to see that this incident was not a full representation of who he is. Brian is bright-eyed and polite. He loves math and science and was already looking at summer internships in engineering. He sings in the school choir and was trying out for the a-cappella group next year. He told me he sings everywhere, from the shower to the lunchroom, no matter who is around. Brian is a good kid who made a mistake and acted in a way he shouldn't have.

During the conference, Brian spoke clearly and apologetically about the incident. He listened carefully while the officer who he had encountered that night spoke about her thought process in that moment, choking up as she described preparing herself to pull a weapon if necessary. The two community members spoke about their concern for Brian's safety and their fears that a similar explosion of anger could result in him being hurt or killed in a number of situations. Brian listened, and responded with remorse. He shared that he was touched by the care of the people in the circle.

When Brian's diversion officer spoke, she spoke of Brian's older brother. She had known Brian's older brother when he was an adolescent. "I worked with your brother, Brian, and he got in a lot of trouble for a long time. But this isn't like you. Having gotten to know you, I don't think this is what you're like at all." Brian started to cry and said, "After this happened, I was really nervous that I have the same problems as him, that I'm as angry as him." Hearing this, his mother began to cry as well. This interaction illuminated another major harm: harm to Brian and his sense of self.

There are a number of reasons that being arrested, put through the court system, and in extreme cases, through juvenile detention, is harmful to youth. The process requires time and energy away from normal educational and social activities and is a landmine of intricacies that need to be followed exactly. Perhaps most harmful though is the impact of the traditional justice system on self-perception. By treating youth like criminals, we teach them to think of themselves as criminals. The stigmatizing shame experienced by those in the criminal justice system often leads them to reject the rejector (mainstream society) and the rules of the rejector (laws). A solution to this isolation and shame is to turn to criminal subcultures, which provide a culture of pride in delinquency. In this way, failing to properly address harm to self can perpetuate criminal behavior and ultimately make communities less safe.<sup>1</sup>

In Brian's Restorative Justice process, we had the chance to address harm to self. One of the community members suggested that Brian make a list of qualities he likes about himself. Brian took that idea and ran with it. By the end of the conference, he had described an elaborate music-based art project, decorated with things he likes about himself. Perhaps more important than the specific contract item that arose to address the harm, Brian had the opportunity to sit in a group of people who were there to hear about

---

<sup>1</sup> For more about the dynamic of shame, see [Crime Shame and Reintegration by John Braithwaite](#).

his mistake, while still seeing him as a whole person and caring deeply about him. He had the opportunity to be embraced and supported by the community, flaws and all.

**PROPOSED GLOBAL GRANT FOR PEACEBUILDING  
WITH ISRAEL AND PALESTINE:**

**The Challenge: Organize a group of Rotarians in Fort Collins and District 5440 and beyond to develop a Global Grant proposal that would connect to willing Rotary Clubs in Israel and Palestine to implement one or more of the ideas in the report summarized below.**

For more information contact Bill Timpson: [william.timpson@colostate.edu](mailto:william.timpson@colostate.edu)