



PEACEMAKING

A COMMUNITY WORKBOOK

A workbook for people who are willing to discuss the problems of hidden violence and denial of complicity in our community.



Matt Balcarras

PEACEMAKING

A COMMUNITY WORKBOOK

A workbook for people who are willing to discuss the problems of hidden violence and denial of complicity in our community.



Matt Balcarras

SMALL CHANGE PUBLISHING

Small Change Publishing
info@smallchangepublishing.ca

© 2016 Matthew Balcarras
All rights reserved.

Anabaptist core convictions listed in the Afterword are from *The Naked Anabaptist: The Bare Essentials of a Radical Faith* © 2010 by Stuart Murray, Herald Press, Scottsdale, PA.

Design: by Lee Kosa
Image: Dove of Peace: © istock.com/martinussumbaji

ISBN 978-0-9953352-0-2

Unless noted otherwise, all Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), Copyright 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of churches of Christ in the USA. Used by permission.

CONTENTS

Preface	5
Introduction	7
The Gospel of Peace.....	7
Peace & the Body of Christ	8
From Humility & Truth to Gardens & Groceries	9
1. Conflict, Peacemaking and Humble Listening	13
Conflict and the Creation of Enemies.....	13
Peacemaking Requires Honesty about Complicity.....	15
We Don't Know How to See	16
Recognizing our Fallibility	18
Opposing Coercive Power.....	19
A Kingdom of Conflict.....	20
2. Telling the Truth About Violence	25
Living in a Story.....	26
Stories & Origins.....	27
Dynamics & Healthy Stories	28
Context & Hidden Violence.....	29
Telling Truthful Stories Enables Truthful Action	32
Jesus: Story Editor.....	33
Hiding in Plain Sight.....	35
3. Protest and Getting in the Way	41
What Would Jesus do?.....	41

Limiting our Obligations	43
We Begin in Listening, and Never Stop Listening	45
Witnessing to the Absence of Peace	46
CPT and Getting in the Way.....	47
Being Willing to Lose	49
4. Imagining an Alternative Community	53
Reading as a Community	54
Constantly Re-interpreting	54
The Prophets as Artistic Visionaries.....	56
Swordless Justice and Radical Visions.....	57
5. Peace-making as Place-making	63
Liturgies and Rhythms.....	63
Bodily Decay and the Community of Baptized People	65
Isolation Versus Vulnerability and Availability	66
The Power of Small Things.....	68
Communities and the Economics of Peace.....	69
Communities of Refuge.....	69
Embodying Prophetic Imagination.....	70
6. Peacemaking in your Home	75
Some Helpful Ideas for Planning	76
Questions for Change.....	77
Afterword	79

PREFACE



MENNONITES, like all of Jesus' followers, have particular theological priorities, and chief among these priorities is our emphasis on peace. Mennonites love to talk about peace. Thankfully, our talk about peace takes place within a living tradition of people who try to do the hard work of being peaceful people. Many Mennonites choose to follow the path of Jesus even when that means getting in the way of armed conflict, risking ostracism and incarceration for objecting to military service, and doing the hidden hard work of forgiveness and truthful communication.

As a living thing, made up of ordinary living people, our tradition grows in much the same way that plants do. Every season brings with it the continuation of a cycle, with new growth pushing up out of the growth that came before. But the continuity of growth is the continuity of change. Each season has its ups and downs of rainfall, drought, sunshine and darkness, and these regular irregularities are what gives us uniquely shaped trees and uniquely shaped communities.

In this season, as people grafted onto the spiritual rootstock of our foremothers and forefathers, we are exposed to the elements of our own particular environments, and some of the elements we experience – the wind and rain of our culture – are very different from that of our predecessors. How should we respond? What needs to be cut back, uprooted or fertilized as we pursue peace? A living tradition needs new growth.

And so it is with this sense, that all living things continually re-grow and adapt, that we set out to write a little community-centric workbook on peacemaking. In this small booklet we attempt to puzzle over the problems of conflict and violence, destructive patterns of living, and our participation in all this in such a way as to both draw from our roots and bring new life to the little bit of soil where we live in Southwestern British Columbia. Pretty much everything here is derived (stolen!) from others, but we know that to learn anything – to change anything – often requires many cycles of ingestion and digestion. Keeping this in mind will help you read with grace, knowing you may be reading only partially processed truths.

For the six weeks of Lent 2016, a small group of people at Cedar Park Church in Ladner, BC gave up some time on Sunday morning gathering together to consider what it means to be people of peace. As we anticipated Easter, and embraced the life breathed into the world via God's redemptive creating, we gathered together to be shaped by each other and by God's presence among us. We are people who depend on each other to hear God and to do what we should. This workbook is the fruit of that time and anticipation.

Matt Balcarras
Easter 2016

INTRODUCTION



The Gospel of Peace

ANABAPTISTS believe that peace and peacemaking is at the heart of the gospel. The good news of Jesus is that God's resurrecting power is present here and now, and his resurrecting power frees us from the death-logic of violence. We can live without violence, free from the burden of self-preservation at the expense of others, because in his death and resurrection Jesus publicly exposed the lie of violence disarming its power. Violence does not produce the safety and security it promises. Violence – subjugation and control through coercion – never brings life; it always brings death.

Through his life and teaching, Jesus shows us how to receive the resurrection life we have been given: love being merciful, be vulnerable with your needs, do not take more than you need, give freely without concern for your own comfort. If you allow the active work of God's presence in the world (the Spirit) to help you imitate Jesus' example of a peace-filled life, you will have it. But, for the most part, we don't. We don't see as much peace as we would like. We don't feel as peaceful as we would like. For the most part we continue to live by trying to secure our own future and our own comforts. But the good news about the good news is that it is not a one-time-offer. The season of resurrection life never ends. If we let go of our self-damaging beliefs and desires, we will become the fertile soil where resurrection life flourishes. If we let go of our need to coercively secure our own comfort, peace will grow up in and amongst us.

Peace & the Body of Christ

Living a life that pursues the peace of Jesus is far less comfortable than some would have you think, but it is also far more satisfying and strange. It means all sorts of up-side down thinking about how conflict is resolved (turning the other cheek); it means uncomfortable admissions about our role in the perpetuation of violence (we use language to distance ourselves and look the other way); and it means commitment to an alternative community (the community of the baptized) that together resists systems of exploitation and destruction.

Commitment to the alternative community is also known as membership in the body of Christ. So while the life of Jesus imitation is not very comfortable, at its very core it is a life that resists isolation, which is another one of its upside-down characteristics. We are bid to leave all that we have and come and follow Jesus, but in doing so we are given something back. Along with all of the uncomfortable separation that comes with this life, we become part of a new family, a new body, and it's only together with this family that we are able to walk the path that Jesus walks.

There are many reasons why we don't see as much peace as we would like and don't feel as peaceful as we would like, but near the top of the list is the loss of interconnectedness. We are not very interconnected with the land where we live or with our neighbours. And unfortunately, despite our best efforts to retain some of the language of community in our churches, we are not very interconnected with the people we see on Sunday either. The body that gathers is a strange body indeed, and not the good kind of strange, but strange in its distinct lack of 'whole body-ness.' Our membership in the body of our church family does not seem to require that we live as a body, i.e. as deeply interconnected parts of one organism.

However, if we can regain a sense that we deeply need the transformative relationships found in the body that has Jesus at its head, we will find that while the discomforts of our lives do not disappear many of them are transformed. We might find when we give up some of the distance from each other we find so comfortable, that we learn valuable truths about ourselves and our lives that would otherwise be lost to us. Resurrection power usually seems to work in these strange kinds of ways.

From Humility & Truth to Gardens & Groceries

It is not possible to write a program outlining the definitive steps for producing a peaceful life, community, country or church, and this text certainly does not even attempt to do so. What this workbook aims to do is to draw attention to some of the barriers to peace that are most problematic for our time and place. We have focused on a few issues that live close to our homes, and hope that discussion of these will be useful for those who live in contexts and traditions similar to ours, as well as for those who do not.

There is an arc to this workbook that moves from the internal to the external, from language and narratives to protest and communal living. There are a few reasons why this arc was chosen. Beginning internally with a focus on truth and truth-telling is meant to ground everything that comes after in humility. Rushing to solutions, especially when we are keen to offer those solutions to others, only perpetuates systems (usually in subtle ways) that continue to undermine peace. And not only that, but by beginning with truth and the exploration of our inner contributions to conflict, we remind ourselves that our perspective of conflict is not always accurate, and that we can never fully extricate ourselves from the unhealthy conflict we find ourselves in.

We do not stay focused only on the internal thought, we also ask ourselves questions of response. With (hopefully) humility, we ask about how we should respond when we see actions and systems that exploit people, damage our communities, and create the conditions that produce violence. This is the second part of the arc of this book, moving from listening to protest and then on to the imagination and construction of communities of peace.

If there is a single theme through this arc, it is that you cannot be a person of peace on your own. To be a follower of Jesus is to connect yourself to God with and through all the people who witness to him, and without this connection via the living body of Christ we cannot 1) know what peace looks like, and 2) we do not have the ability within ourselves to push back against all the systems and entrenched powers that oppose us. This is not a new idea, but one that we would probably do well to take more seriously, or take seriously in new ways.

There are six sections to this workbook, and each combines a small essay and some questions for discussion along with directions for watching and discussing some associated visual media. The essay portion is not written to be an exhaustive thesis on each topic but instead provide a starting point that connects some of the assumed framework of our local church and geographical context with the problems we face in being people that imitate Jesus. The six sections are briefly summarized:

1. Conflict, peacemaking and humble listening

Conflict and peace might seem to be opposite sides of a coin: if there is conflict there is no peace. Consequently, the omnipresence of conflict seems to be the best evidence that pacifism is for the naive. No one lives without being

in conflict, so why pretend like peace is even something that we should aim for? Despite popular images of peace as the quiet enclave free from noise and mess, real peace – the peace of Jesus – is different. The peace of Jesus is rich and deep with room for human difference, human failure, and human conflict. Exploring the nature of conflict as people seeking the peace of Jesus, we can learn to see that conflict is not the antithesis of peace and that there are ways to live in peace despite the inevitable friction we find in our lives.

2. Telling the truth about violence

It is easy to believe that because we have not had a hand in directly contributing to the abuse of other people, that the violence of the world is not part of who we are. We see ourselves as living in a story that only involves the events and actions we have clearly chosen. But to be people that pursue peace for ourselves and others means that we need to see ourselves as participating, often unknowingly, in systems that destroy the lives of other people. We cannot work for peace if we do not understand why people, our neighbours, do not have peace.

3. Protest and getting in the way

Our overt responses to the violence of the world are often limited because we don't know what to do and because we have a hard time imitating Jesus. We are very good at limiting our obligations to other people because we dislike the discomfort that comes from abandoning the status quo. Being peacemakers means that we cannot remain silent. When we choose comfort over speaking out about the violence we see, we participate in systems that silence victims and perpetuate violence.

4. Imagining an alternative community

It is almost impossible to conceive of how we might live differently than we do. Our imagination is tied to our experiences and the world we experience works very hard to make us believe that there really are no alternative ways to live. Historically the bible has been a repository of stories and letters that play the role of ‘imagination-shaper’ for the Christian community. Reading the stories of the Hebrew people and their responses to exile and oppression can shape our imagination and give us a picture of alternative ways to live under the totalitarian regimes of capitalism and colonialism.

5. Peace-making as place-making

Being people of peace means working to build places of peace. Peace flourishes where there is room for it and it withers where there is none. Building communities of peace is hard though. It is hard because there is overt opposition, powers that push back against peacemaking with violence, but also because in order to have peace we have to give things up that we enjoy having.

6. Peacemaking in your home

The usefulness of any study, including the study of peace, is found in how well and how much it changes our lives. The final stage of reflecting on peacemaking is to work out specific plans and commitments for moving forward. Even if the steps taken are small, it is important to do something and to do something together.