

Peacebuilding Initiative Profiles

Mennonite peacebuilding occurs in a range of formats and contexts. The authors of the ten short pieces that appear below presented and discussed aspects of their work at the Global Mennonite Peacebuilding Conference and Festival held at Conrad Grebel University College in Waterloo, Ontario, from June 9 to 12, 2016. The editors of this special issue of The Conrad Grebel Review invited them to write a profile that outlines particular features of a particular initiative and reflects on the challenges encountered or the lessons learned. The authors are speaking from their own experience of the project. While they have all participated in the work they describe, they do not speak in an official capacity, or on behalf of the organizations or partners involved.

– Editors

Mittaphab (Peace) Group, Laos

As a university student studying social work, I was first introduced to peacebuilding through the *Mittaphab* (Peace) Group, sponsored by the Mennonite Central Committee. This initiative began in 2006 with gathering youth from different contexts who had similar visions of peace. After the team members had developed peacebuilding skills, they expanded the project by promoting peace to secondary school students in the Laotian capital city of Vientiane, using a peacebuilding curriculum they developed together as an after-school activity. The curriculum taught students about friendship, understanding each other, and building stronger relationships among students, teachers, and volunteers. It also addressed issues that youth in Laos are now facing, including drug and alcohol use, materialism, and cultural and religious discrimination.

The key element of this initiative is the opportunity for young adults, ages 18 to 30, to learn, share experiences, and explore peacebuilding, something that is considered new in Laos. The project also provides a safe space for secondary school students and teachers to learn together when *Mittaphab* offers an activity in the school on the weekend, an alternative to students spending their time on entertainment or consuming social media. As well, the project assists young people in thinking about, and generating, their vision of peace, whether with their friends or family, or in life generally.

Global Mennonite Peacebuilding: Exploring Theology, Culture, and Practice, ed. Jeremy M. Bergen, Paul C. Heidebrecht, and Reina C. Neufeldt, special issue, *The Conrad Grebel Review* 35, no. 3 (Fall 2017): 386-411.

In a regular school setting, they gain knowledge only from the teacher and a required curriculum, but this is not sufficient for daily living. They need to gain other life skills and peace skills that can be valuable for their future.

Mittaphab Group has created a learning space for peace, developed peace resources for Laos, produced young peacebuilders, and helped to prevent conflict or violence especially with young adults in the school environment.

I have learned many things from implementing this project for almost a decade. One is an understanding of the concept of peace, something that obviously needs to be appreciated by me as a leader and that requires taking responsibility to accomplish peace, and promote it, among the participants. I have also learned that bringing together youth from different faiths, ethnic groups, and backgrounds is very useful. It can bring peace for them, because they have a space to share their voices, fears, beliefs, and insights, and thus can construct new understandings and peace among and between groups. To represent my learning, I came up with this poem:

THE ROAD TO PEACE

The road to peace and justice is not an easy one,
and it takes a lot of wisdom, energy, resources and hard work to see peace.
Peace is not a habit for your vacation, and if you are a natural peacebuilder,
then it's harder for you know how to bring peace to the world.
Peace is not for tasting and throwing away if you do not find it delicious;
it is life for humanity and the earth.
Peace is about the soul: to learn from people and from past experiences,
connecting them to the future with love and compassion.
The road to peace is not only half way but is the full way of human life;
if you take only half, there will be more suffering and injustice,
which we have enough of already.
If you see that learning and building peace is too difficult,
then please stay miles away and do not even touch any piece of them.
If we need good roads, we will build and develop them,
and if we need peace and justice, why don't we build them?

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