

interfere with academics and lead to bigger social-emotional challenges.”³

Conflicts are part of life, and each individual as well as society have to face them. MBCI has dual responsibilities: first, to solve conflicts; and second, to proclaim the message of peace and to participate in peacebuilding programs at large. In a world ravaged by violence, it is not easy to be a Peace Church, a church dedicated to the ways of Christ’s peace. These ways require much intentionality, persistence, and even sacrifice. The Bible reminds us that every Christian needs to sow in peace in order to see the fruit of righteousness, which is closely related to the principle of justice (James 3:18; Matt. 5: 9). Moreover, in this world of chaos and conflicts, we are called to be peacemakers, not peacebreakers!

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Emergency Preparedness Response Teams: Jos, Nigeria

Four days before the “the world changed” on September 11, 2001, the state of “peace and tourism” in Plateau State, Nigeria, and particularly in its capital, Jos, was broken. Latent tensions between communities defined simplistically but effectively along religious lines (Christian versus Muslim) erupted into several days of violence. During this period of bloodletting and property destruction, hundreds of people were killed. The city’s former mixed neighborhoods of Christians and Muslims became ghettos of people from one tradition or the other, separated by fear. Conflicts flared up both in the city and countryside in the years following, displacing many people from their homes. Gopar Tapkida, a Nigerian Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) peace worker recently returned from graduating with an MA in Conflict Transformation from Eastern Mennonite University, felt overwhelmed by the task at hand.

Father Anthony Fom suffered deep personal losses in the conflict.

³ Interview with Emmanuel Masku, Hyderabad, Telangana State, India, August 5, 2017.

Nevertheless, he almost immediately took on a role in the Catholic Church's Justice, Development, and Peace/Caritas (JDPC) initiative, beginning the long, hard, work of finding entry points that could ground the process of rebuilding broken relationships. In the process he connected with MCC. Training programs were set up to create safe spaces for key people from both deeply affected and fearful communities to understand together the reasons for the conflict. Drawing on Gopar Tapkida's peacebuilding training and the knowledge and skills of others, including former MCC worker Yakubu Joseph, the workshops sought to imagine what rebuilding peace in Jos and Plateau State might look like.

By 2005, as the conflicts continued throughout the state, emergency relief became an important aspect of helping affected people. Deliberate thought was put into developing a relief delivery mechanism that would involve volunteers—both women and men, and Christians and Muslims—to deliver aid in a non-biased way to hurting communities. JDPC, the lead organization, drew on relationships with NGOs and Muslim organizations to form Emergency Preparedness and Response Teams (EPRTs). Support came largely from Catholic Relief Services, with some relief supplies from MCC. Eventually more than 270 carefully selected individuals formed EPRTs of educated community leaders, equally male and female, Christian and Muslim. Team members serve as early warning systems for potential flare-ups and share information with local security forces hoping to contain impending violence. They involve themselves in many other local issues, such as rural disputes between agriculturalists and cattle herders, and they have helped during election periods.

Recently, EPRT tackled conflict prevention through a peace club project for secondary schools. Conflicts will remain between Christians and Muslims unless youth are offered alternative frames for understanding the issues and resolving them. After attending training in the peace club model developed in Zambia at the African Peacebuilding Institute, Boniface Anthony, EPRT coordinator since its inception, returned energized to adapt the Zambian materials and to start a program. Schools all over Plateau State were strategically chosen to pilot the program.

Key learnings from this experience are the following:

- It was important to focus on practical responses to human

suffering in the initial stages. EPRT built up its integrity in the community by its non-biased way of delivering relief materials.

- It took great bravery and courage for the initial EPRT volunteers and leaders to come together amidst the polarizing tension and violence in Jos. The tenacious commitment to interfaith, interagency, and intergender participation made it a unique contribution, and reveals the resilience needed in peacebuilding.
- MCC's unique way of building relationships with grassroots actors made a big difference. MCC became a bonding agent by holding all the EPRT partners together. MCC achieved this because it earned the trust of Muslims and Christians by demonstrating impartiality, conveying mutual understanding, and maintaining direct partnerships with most of the organizations.
- Long-term partner relationships bring value to both the international organization and the local partner. The arc of the MCC and EPRT relationship over its twelve years has yielded concrete results, not the least of which is the web of 270 community peacebuilders spread throughout the state. While the nature of the projects changes, the stability of connections makes it possible for the local partner to trust that its international counterpart acts out of a level of local knowledge and commitment. In turn, the international partner builds its own understanding of peace practice.
- The move from emergency relief to conflict prevention (peace clubs) may appear to be a natural progression that happens in many areas of peacebuilding and development. At the same time, the many facets of EPRT's program are clearly deepened with each new initiative. Just because a new tool is added, that does not negate the value of an old skill.

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Synergies towards Change in the Philippines

On Saturday morning, June 11, 2016, a panel discussion on “Mennonite Peacebuilding Approaches on the Ground: The Philippines and Grassroots Peacebuilding Efforts” took place at the Global Mennonite Peacebuilding Conference and Festival. It created a conversation with three peacebuilders who have significant experience in the region: Myla Leguro (Program Manager, Peace and Reconciliation Program, Catholic Relief Services-Philippines), Dann Pantoja (President, PeaceBuilders Community, Inc. [PBCI]), and Wendy Kroeker (former MCC service worker in the Philippines, and current Mindanao Peacebuilding Institute facilitator).

This group of peacebuilders has intersected many times in the past decade over issues of relevant peacebuilding strategies, the role of faith in the work, and areas for change and challenge. The intent of the panel emerged as a way to struggle with foundational strategies and tools that have guided many peacebuilding efforts in the Philippines, and to ask where some of the growing edges might be for the challenges faced there. Specifically, the quest was to push at Western frameworks that have been helpful guides over the past decade and to assert insights that have emerged directly from peace work in the Philippines. The ongoing struggles of conflict due to militarization, political processes, and natural disasters have made it a significant context for examination. The panel served as a springboard for Myla and Dann (with Wendy hosting) to express the synergies of change occurring in many peace organizations and the themes that have pushed at their practice.

The three practitioners agreed, first, that peacebuilding is a “dialogue of life” and that, in the Philippine context, one does not separate one’s peacebuilding efforts into the dichotomy of the professional and personal—the kind of distinction often made in the Western context. Peacebuilding in Mindanao is an everyday reality, and requires both a vigilance and a