

6. helping to recognize God's presence in difficult circumstances of life
7. encouraging service in behalf of others
8. offering opportunity for people to orient and find strength for their lives
9. inviting people to consider their values
10. accompanying acts of courage
11. encouraging people to consider their life plan
12. instilling courage and hope, and
13. fostering engagement, relationships and a sense of community.

We organized the characteristics into a simple study guide, one page per characteristic, in which we present an excerpt of a refugee's testimony, a related biblical text, and an activity to deepen the learning experience. We then published the guide and shared it with local congregations.

What we have found is that using the guide has made possible personal healing and community strengthening, not only for refugees but for many others for whom experiencing their own sorrow and strength is equally healing and inspiring. The implication is that this material is helping churches address profound needs common to our human condition while enhancing their ability to receive people whose life experience has brought particular pain, and, by doing so, helping them find hope and vision for fullness of life.

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Constructing the Path of Reconciliation in Colombia

As a majority population in Colombia, and historically victims as well as caregivers and agents of life, women in Colombia have developed their own

forms of resistance to violence and have made important advances for gender equality. Women of faith, in particular, are a spiritual and psychosocial support for promoting values aligned with the construction of peace and reconciliation, having the capacity to offer safe spaces for encounter, for acknowledgment of suffering, and for fostering nonviolent responses to conflict. The cooperation of women of different faith backgrounds is a clear example of a reconciling power capable of generating profound transformation in Colombian society, which is so wounded by war.

GemPaz is an association of women of faith, begun in 2007 with the purpose of reflecting together on Biblical texts, praying together and practicing peacemaking, dialogue, and reconciliation in various regions of the country. As of 2017, we number about 250 women: pastors and religious leaders, defenders of human rights, community leaders, and others with interdisciplinary backgrounds. Together we learn, reflect, encourage each other, and otherwise join forces to build peace in Colombia, which has experienced a conflict of more than 50 years' duration but is now on the threshold of a peace accord with one of the guerilla groups.

We see that women still carry much pain and suffering, and we expect that healing this pain will take time. It will be necessary to walk alongside these women, and important that their pain and suffering be honored, that confidence in the State and its agencies be restored, and that collective agreements be re-established to guarantee human rights and to guard against a return to the past.

For two years now, we have been implementing a contextual Bible study method (seeing, judging, acting) that has helped women to identify themselves with the text and thus to open themselves to forgiveness and reconciliation as a natural rather than a forced process. These encounters enable them to understand their local contexts, to analyze the realities of their regions and territories, to embark on a communal reading of the Bible in workshops, and, by means of exercises exploring their emotions and personal stories, to give new meaning to their pain and to process the suffering caused by the war.

Currently, I am part of the steering committee of GemPaz in Colombia. As a therapist, I bring a perspective of reconciliation in supporting groups of women to enhance their capacity to understand their own pain and to

accompany others in their communities seeking to overcome the trauma caused by the war. These spaces, called “circles of women,” are safe spaces for women—victims and now ex-combatants of the guerilla groups—to come to know each other and to show solidarity with one another. This is one way in which we build peace in Colombia and show that churches can become circles of peace and reconciliation where all are included. We must continue to enable ourselves in various ways—as women and members of these churches—to help restore the dignity of both victims and aggressors; to strengthen trust in the communities by actions contributing to restoration of the victims and reconstruction of the social fabric; and to establish the role of churches as places of peace that encourage dialogue and the practical expression of reconciliation.

I understand reconciliation to be a journey, a process that requires creating spaces of encounter for the various actors—antagonists and adversaries, victims and victimizers. These spaces generate conditions for conversations that are otherwise improbable, almost impossible, where victims are placed at the center, where those responsible make reparation for damages caused, and where the truth is recognized as one and the same by all parties, something indispensable to re-establishing trust. In Colombia our greatest desire is that our communities are never violated again, but we recognize that we are a country of historically great economic inequality, with wealth and land concentrated in the hands of a very small group. We want to contribute to equality and to the overcoming of poverty and illiteracy, still encountered in high numbers. For this to occur, reconciliation also requires us to revisit our own prejudices and to overcome social, cultural, and political boundaries. If it is to support a lasting peace, reconciliation also implies a change to our own preconceptions.

Once the peace accords with the FARC have been signed, our work as a civil society living in a historic moment, a unique moment, will be to uphold the peace by our participation and articulation, in such a way as to make peaceful coexistence and nonviolent conflict resolution possible. We believe that the outcomes will flow from the factors already described above:

- As victims of armed conflict and custodians of life, women have developed their own forms of resistance and have brought about significant advances in terms of gender equality, advances

that require continual consolidating and reinforcing in order to guarantee the empowerment of women.

- The participation of women of faith—by encouraging dialogue and the practical exercise of reconciliation—reaffirms the church’s place as a space for the construction of peace, despite the current reality of division.
- The cooperation of women of different faith backgrounds clearly exemplifies the reconciling power that can generate profound transformation in a society wounded by war.
- The diverse capacities for, and forms of, encounter and celebration proper to women support the restoration of the dignity of victims of the armed conflict, the inclusion of ex-combatants, and the strengthening of spaces for articulating and consolidating trust in our communities.
- Women of faith provide spiritual support for promoting values that create the conditions for peace and reconciliation; they have the capacity to offer safe spaces in which differences are respected and nonviolent responses to conflict are fostered.

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Translated from Spanish by Rene Baergen, Pastor of Hispanic Ministries, First Mennonite Church, Kitchener, Ontario.

Interreligious Peacebuilding in Indonesia

In 2010, Duta Wacana Christian University, an interdenominational institution in Yogyakarta, owned by twelve Indonesian synods (two of which are Mennonite), was asked by the United Board to carry out a project entitled Interreligious Understanding and Peacebuilding. The United Board is an international agency for the empowerment of Christian higher education in Asia.