**IST2091-1-FA14 Social Change Praxis: Conflict & Religious Peace Building**

**9 am – 4:30 pm, Saturday Sept 20, Oct. 4, and Oct. 18**

**Course Overview:**

This praxis course will look at ways of constructively confronting conflicts at the interpersonal, national, and international levels.  We will start by examining our own conflicts—determining factors that “get us into trouble,” and how to navigate those challenges to avoid conflict when possible, and to transform it when it occurs.  We will then examine deep-rooted conflicts within the U.S. context as well as abroad, focusing particularly on conflict transformation strategies often employed by religious peacebuilders (and other conflict resolution professionals) that can be used in both religious and secular contexts.

**Course Goals and Objectives:**

1. The overarching objective of this course is to help students become more skilled in conflict prevention and transformation in a variety of settings from interpersonal to organizational, community, national, and international.
2. Subsidiary goals include the following:
   1. To develop an understanding of the factors that tend to create and exacerbate conflict and to develop the skills to (a) prevent minor or manageable disagreements from developing into destructive conflicts and to (b) transform potentially destructive disputes and conflicts into constructive, learning situations.
   2. To become familiar a variety of peacebuilding strategies and roles that can (and have been) played by both religious and secular actors in a variety of conflict settings within the United States and abroad.

**Required Text**:

John Paul Lederach, *The Journey Toward Reconciliation*. Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press. 1999.

**Course Schedule, Assignments, and Evaluation**

**Day 1: Saturday Sept 20. Interpersonal Conflicts and Peacebuilding**

**Topics:**

* Causes of Interpersonal conflict – understanding what gets us in trouble.
  + Differentiating between disputes involving negotiable interests and conflicts over non-negotiable issues: moral disagreements, identity and justice issues, for example.
  + Sorting out the dance between “rationality” and emotions.
* Resolving negotiable disputes – interest-based negotiation basics
* Constructive confrontation of moral and identity conflicts
  + Distinguishing core conflict components from conflict “overlays” (i.e. “complicating factors”)
  + Effectively dealing with both.

**Activities:**

Today (as well as the next two days) is very “hands on,” and experiential. There will be some lecture, but the bulk of the day will be spent in discussion and exercises where students will examine their current behaviors and expectations vis-à-vis conflict with new ways of thinking and behaving. We will practice some of these new ways and discuss how to implement them outside of the class setting.

At the end of the day, we will form teams to do a “quickie” research project on various religious peacebuilding efforts that have been or are being undertaken around the world. Each 3-4 person team will be responsible for researching a few of these organizations and their activities, and making a short (5-10 minute) presentation about those actions in class on Oct. 4.

**Before Class Preparation:** Although the class just “starts” today, you will get more out of today’s activities if you do the reading and preparatory writing assignment before class today. Although Lederach’s book probably makes the most sense if you read it in order, we will be talking today about the material in Part 2: “The Journey Through Conflict” (pp. 99 – 156). We will be reading part I for next week, but if you have time, reading the book in its proper order might be a bit more satisfying. It will also give you more time to focus on your “mini-research project” between days 1 and 2. So…

* **Readings**: Please read Lederach Part 2 at least, but before you do, read the introductory material from pages 10 – 26, including Harold Saunders’ Foreward, and John Paul’s preface. That will give you a bit of a sense of what this book is and who John Paul Lederach is even if you leave Part I for later.
* **Class Prep Essay #1**: Then, in preparation for today’s (Sept 20) activity, I’d like you to write a short essay (aim for 2-3 typed pages) detailing your own attitude towards conflict. Do you feel comfortable with it or uncomfortable? Why do you say that? What kinds of conflict do you most often find yourself in? How do you generally go about approaching such situations? Would you say the results of your actions in conflict are generally “successful” or not—and how do you define “success?” Are there some situations that you try to avoid because they might cause conflicts that you don’t want to have? If so, is that avoidance helpful? What do you gain—and lose—from such behavior? Bring these essays to class to discuss—and to turn in for your first grade. If you are unable to do this before this first class, that is okay, but you will still be required to do it between the first class and the second class, and you’ll have another “class prep assignment” for the second class. So it is better, if at all possible, to do this one before you come to class on Sept. 20.

**Day 2: Saturday Oct. 4: Peacebuilding Around the World – Religious and Secular Approaches**

**Topics:**

* An examination of the goals of peacebuilding: balancing peace, justice, truth, and mercy in theory and in practice.
* An examination of the various ways that different actors and organizations have become involved in actual peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts.
* The consideration of how such efforts could be expanded to different arenas and/or more actors
* The interplay between religious peacebuilding /reconciliation efforts and related secular efforts.

**In-Class Activities**: Today we will start with an exercise examining the interplay between peace, justice, truth, and mercy (you will read about this exercise, actually, in the Ledearch book, but we’ll do it ourselves, applying it to contemporary conflicts) and much of the day will involve considering how these concepts “play out” in a variety of settings—from the personal to the international. (Some of you may have done this with me before if you came to my workshop on this topic which I did at DU last fall. But we will go farther with this than we did then, and will apply it to a different situation. So I hope this will be valuable for everyone, regardless of your past experience with this exercise.)

We will then review a variety of peacebuilding activities and roles and will examine particularly those that have been effectively used by religious peacebuilders in international (meaning outside the US) conflicts. Student groups (formed during the previous class) will present a summary of several peacebuilding efforts that they will have researched in the two weeks since the last class, presenting a bit of background about the context of the peacebuilding effort (the nature of the conflict being addressed), what was done, by whom, and what the results were. (For details, see the “class prep assignment” below.)

After comparing all of the cases presented with some more that I will present, we will try to elicit a set of “take aways”:

* Things that religious and secular peacebuilders can do well – and how these strengths can be maximized.
* Challenges that religious and secular peacebuilders face
* Challenges and opportunities for religious and secular actors (including governmental actors) to work together to further peace goals.

I will also present William Ury’s notion of “The Third Side” and we will do several “third side” exercises to get a sense of what third side roles are useful in what situations and how you can act as third siders in many different conflict contexts.

**Day 3: Opportunities for (Religious) Peacebuilding within the U.S.**

**Before Class Preparation**:

**Reading:**

* If you didn’t read it earlier, please go back, now, and read Part 1 *of Journey Toward Reconciliation,* pp. 29 – 96.

**Group Presentation:**

* In addition, work with your previously assigned team to research the organizations and activities assigned to your group at the end of day 1. Prepare a short (5-10 minute) presentation to be given in class today. Visual aids (powerpoints) are encouraged, but are not mandatory.
* This presentation should address as many of the following as *possible (note: you may not be able to find information to answer all of these questions, plus you do not have all that long a time to make your presentation, although we can go up to 15 minutes each if people need/want to do that.)*
  + What organization(s) did you research?
  + Where do they work?
  + What are the peace and reconciliation challenges they are facing there (in other words briefly explain the nature of the conflict situation(s) they are addressing)
  + How are they going about addressing these challenges?
    - What are their goals? (Are they primarily working for peace, justice, truth, mercy, hope, or some combination thereof?)
    - What are their approaches? (In other words what do they do and how do they do it?)
    - Who is involved? (Who are the facilitators? Who are their “clients?”
    - What results have they achieved?
  + What are the strengths of their approach(es)?
  + What are the weaknesses, if any?
  + What similarities do you see between the organizations you studied? What differences?
  + What about similarities and differences between your organizations and others presented today? (This will have to be a spur of the moment discussion as presentations are made.)

**Topics:**

* The nature of US conflicts that are in need of religious peacebuilding
* An examination of the various ways that different religious actors and organizations have become involved in actual peacebuilding efforts.
* The consideration of how such efforts could be expanded to different arenas and/or more actors
* The interplay between religious peacebuilding efforts and other secular efforts.
* A consideration what these ideas mean to class participants personally, and how they might take them forward in their future lives and work.

**In-Class Activities:**

Today we will start by examining a smaller set of religious and secular peacebuilding efforts that have been and are being carried out in the U.S.A. This is a much smaller set of activities, as most peacebuilding work is focused abroad. But it does not take much imagination to understand why we need such activities here.

In lecture and discussion, we will examine the ways in which U.S. conflict is similar to—and different from—the identity conflicts that are going on in other areas of the world.

We will then look at the much smaller set of organizations and activities that are addressing these challenges and will consider what more could be done to apply the skills of international peacebuilding at home. Student teams will again make presentations about US peacebuilding activities they have researched, addressing questions similar to those addressed last week (and detailed below in the “Class Preparation” section.)

We will conclude the course with an exploration of Part III of the *Journey Toward Reconcilation*. We will explore our own “wandering, wondering, waiting, and dreaming” by discussing such questions as:

* What are the biggest challenges each of us—as individuals—face as we confront conflict in our own lives, in our community, and in our world?
* What do each of us wonder about when it comes to peace, truth, mercy, justice, and reconciliation—of any conflict—personal, national, or international?
* Where have we wandered—or do we hope to wander—in an effort to find answers to our wonders?
* What are our dreams? Our hopes?
* Where do we hope to go in the future to help create a better world for ourselves and our children?
* What first steps might we take in those directions?

**Before Class Preparation**:

**Reading:**

* Read Part 3 *of Journey Toward Reconciliation,* pp. 159-202.

**Group Presentation:**

* Work with your previously assigned team to research the organizations and activities assigned to your group at the end of day 2. Prepare a short (5-10 minute) presentation to be given in class today. Visual aids (powerpoints) are encouraged, but are not mandatory.
* This presentation should address as many of the following as *possible (note: you may not be able to find information to answer all of these questions, plus you do not have all that long a time to make your presentation, although we can go up to 15 minutes each if people need/want to do that.)*
  + What organization(s) did you research?
  + Where do they work?
  + What conflict challenge(s) are they trying to address?
  + How are they going about addressing these challenges?
    - What are their goals? (Are they primarily working for peace, justice, truth, mercy, hope, or some combination thereof?)
    - What are their approaches? (In other words what do they do and how do they do it?)
    - Who is involved? (Who are the facilitators? Who are their “clients?”
    - What results have they achieved?
  + What are the strengths of their approach(es)?
  + What are the weaknesses, if any?
  + What similarities do you see between the organizations you studied? What differences?
  + What about similarities and differences between your organizations and others presented today? (This will have to be a spur of the moment discussion as presentations are made.)

**Final Thoughts Essay.**

* Lastly, after you read part 3 of the Journey toward Reconcilation, think about your own wanderings, wonderings, waiting, and dreaming. Where have you wandered, searching for peace and/or reconciliation? With whom? Where might you wander? What about these topics do you wonder about? What do you think you (as an individual) or as a group or a nation can accomplish towards peace or reconciliation with any chosen “enemy” or “opponent.”? What is your dream? And what are you waiting for? How can you start making the “Journey toward Reconciliation?”

Grading:

This class, like all other S/C Praxis classes, I gather, is only graded Pass/Fail.

In order to receive a Pass, students must complete the following:

1. Attend all three classes, unless specific alternative arrangements have been made regarding the absence from one class. (Such absences are strongly discouraged, but can be accommodated if absolutely necessary.)
2. Active engagement in all class activities. That means attentive participation in interactive lectures and exercises, and effective participation in group presentations.
3. Careful and thoughtful completion of the first “class prep essay” and the “final thoughts essay.”

While none of these activities will be graded with letter grades, all elements must be completed with at least an “adequate” (B-level) level of care and attention. Sloppy or missing work or chronic inattention during the class period will jeopardize the passing grade.