

BUILDING BRIDGES AND PEACE BY SINGING

By Dr. Herm Weaver and the URI-Moral Imagination Project

Overview

Herm Weaver is described by his friend John Paul Lederach, in the book The Moral Imagination, The Art and Soul of Building Peace, this way: {For his PhD thesis} “he (Herm) embarked on a journey to take his music as seriously as he took his intellectual studies and to focus more on music in the process of healing and reconciliation. In essence, he wrote songs and paid attention to how the creative process might be related to the process of healing.”¹

The fruit of Herm’s explorations was enjoyed at the URI-Moral Imagination Program led by John Paul and Herm aimed to help URI CC members become more effective as peacemakers in conflict zones. This seminar invited CC members to “grow in character, personhood and vision.”

Activity

Time was spent creating music and sharing each other’s songs. A new song each day made room for creativity in learning about peace building. Groups from different countries were invited to teach a favorite song from their culture or faith tradition. The words of the song were written on a flip chart for all to read together. People mimicked the lead singer, learning words - often in new languages, and learning often foreign sounding melodies. A few drums and rhythm instruments were close by to be used as the spirit moved. Patiently, with practice, the entire group warmed to each song. Songs already learned were practiced every day and a new song was introduced. Timid starts soon gave way to uproarious “home-made” music and fun.

Songs were usually simple, sometimes sacred, sometimes fun, and often rooted in the story of a particular culture. By the end of the week, feelings of respect and appreciation, bonds of joy and unspoken meanings were effortlessly shared by this group of religiously diverse people coming from Northern Uganda, South India, Ethiopia, the Philippines and the USA.

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Whatever YOUR purpose is in bringing diverse people together, the same insight applies: creating music and sharing songs can bridge chasms of difference and build sincere and seemingly unbreakable bonds of mutual respect, friendship and care. Creating music together helps people heal and live into new and brighter visions.

Herm offers six elements that music can offer in opening pathways between art and reconciliation. In setting the context for creating music and sharing songs as a regular CC activity, feel free to keep in mind Herm’s insights:

1. Music is to be guided by an internal standard rather than external.
2. Music is to be honest.
3. Value simplicity
4. Make space for the listener to participate
5. Create music that arises from the heart as much as from the head.
6. Be committed to having fun!²

^{1.} The Moral Imagination, The Art and Soul of Building Peace, John Paul Lederach, Oxford University Press, New York, New York, 2005. p.159.

^{2.} For more information about the work of John Paul Lederach, go to: http://kroc.nd.edu/faculty_staff/faculty/lederach.shtml