

2012 Consultation Executive Summary

“The Formation of Interfaith Just Peacemakers: A Working Consultation”

Executive Summary

“The Formation of Interfaith Just Peacemakers: A Working Consultation,” hosted by Boston University School of Theology, took place from Monday May 21st, 2012 to Wednesday May 23rd, 2012. The consultation brought 50 educators and peacebuilders from Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions together to discuss opportunities and strategies for multi-faith collaboration within the just peacemaking field. In addition, eleven students attended the consultation, participating in roundtable discussions and interviewing peacemakers for our oral history project. The three days consisted of panel discussions, roundtable discussions, and plenaries. The major challenge and goal of this consultation was to address the growing need for collaboration across faiths and educational institutions to support and sustain the just peacemaking movement.

The consultation opened with a welcome by Dean Mary Elizabeth Moore from the Boston University School of Theology. Thomas Porter and Rodney Petersen from Boston University School of Theology gave an introduction to the consultation while the ritual team, consisting of Rodney Petersen, Tamar Miller, and Abdel-Rahman Mohamed, led us in an opening ritual.

The first panel focused on the history and application of the ten practices of Just Peacemaking as it sought to address the question, “What is a Just Peacemaker?” The principles of Just Peacemaking offer alternatives for dealing with conflict without violence by reshaping how we think about conflict. The practices are as follows: (1) support nonviolent direct action; (2) take independent initiative to reduce threat; (3) use cooperative conflict resolution; (4) acknowledge responsibility for conflict and injustice, and seek repentance and forgiveness; (5) advance democracy, human rights, and interdependence; (6) foster just and sustainable economic development; (7) work with emerging cooperative forces in the international system; (8) strengthen the United Nations and international efforts for cooperation and human rights; (9) reduce offensive weapons and the weapons trade; (10) encourage grassroots peacemaking groups and voluntary associations. It was emphasized that these are ten practices, not principles. Rachel Mikva, Muhammad Shafiq, and Glen Stassen gave Jewish, Muslim, and Christian perspectives of the practices. After the presentation, there was time for questions and feedback moderated by Susan Hayward.

The second panel, “What is an Interfaith Just Peacemaker?” took place Tuesday morning and focused on what it means to be “interfaith” as a just peacemaker. Presenters included Reuven Kimelman, Najeeba Syeed-Miller, and Susan Thistlethwaite. Kimelman’s presentation served as a reminder that when dealing with others, we must also deal with ourselves. There are many dangers of religious thinking, but self-critique and self-reflection are critical practices when dealing with the other. Syeed-Miller gave 10 pillars for just peacemaking, emphasizing the importance of spiritual formation in interfaith dialogue and multi-religious education, and highlighting the importance of experiencing the world of the other without suspending one’s own

beliefs. Thistlethwaite raised the importance of intra-faith work in addition to interfaith work. Reuven Firestone served as moderator. Participants met in small groups to discuss and reflect on critical questions raised in each of the presentations. These roundtable discussions served an important role at the consultation, providing a place where everyone was able to share ideas, raise questions and offer suggestions.

“What are our Best Practices and Challenges in our Schools and Communities for Preparing Interfaith Just Peacemakers?” was the question addressed in the Tuesday afternoon and evening panel discussions. Justus Baird and Lucinda Mosher gave a joint presentation on their best practices at Auburn Seminary. Yehezkel Landau shared his best practices as observed at Hartford Seminary. David Anderson Hooker, from Eastern Mennonite University, shared his best practices and Homayra Ziad shared her experience from Trinity College. The panel discussion raised the issue of how to move from individual change to collective change in interfaith just peacemaking education. Pedagogical approaches to interfaith dialogue on the individual and societal level were shared. Scriptural reasoning was offered as a tool for helping to see one’s own tradition anew. The plenary session raised the need to deal with the negative use of religion and the need to prepare for religion being co-opted to serve violence or the state.

Tuesday evening, a second panel on best practices was moderated by Ed Rodman. One theme from this session was peacemaking as relationship building. Marc Gopin and Aziz Abu Sarah presented entrepreneurial insights from their creation of MEJDI, a dual narrative joint Jewish-Arab tour operator. Ellen Ott Marshal spoke of best practices from Emory and Candler. She shared ways to have students understand the various sides of an issue by having students write papers from another perspective. Jennifer Peace and Or Rose gave a joint presentation on Andover Newton Theological Seminary and Hebrew College, and Zainab Alwani spoke of best practices from within her context at Howard University. Peace and Rose spoke of the relationship building and story sharing done between Christian and Jewish students at their institutions. Students are equipped to have the difficult conversations that surround political and religious conflict. Alwani offered five pedagogical approaches for teaching interfaith dialogue.

The final panel consisted of presidents and deans of institutions across the country. The question for this panel was, “How can we shape curriculum and pedagogy to equip new generations of interfaith just peacemakers?” Heidi Hadsell, Hartford Seminary, moderated the discussion between Amr Abdalla, Professor and Vice Rector of U.N. University for Peace; President Nick Carter, Andover Newton Theological Seminary; Theology Department Chair Catherine Cornille, Boston College; President Daniel Lehman, Hebrew College; Associate Dean Pamela Lightsey, Boston University School of Theology; and Associate Dean Jane I. Smith, Harvard Divinity School. Themes from this panel include the challenge of dealing with budget issues and institutional traditions. The panel raised the need to transform institutions to provide the support for practice and proper training of students to do peacemaking work in the world.

The consultation closed with a statement from Dean Moore. She highlighted the approaches to teaching interfaith conflict transformation and peacebuilding, which included: sharing narrative, sharing our sacred practices, cultivating imagination, cultivating humility and empathy, identify strategies for collective and effective efforts, and engaging people with one another across cultures, countries and the world. She also illuminated the challenges of teaching

peacebuilding named during the consultation: defining the meaning of terms, addressing the challenges of time and budget, creating genuinely safe places for conversation and transformation to take place, and the challenge to stand with and for people who are oppressed while knowing your stance will stir conflict. The consultation ended with the commitment to collaborative efforts and the naming of four critical values of the field: companionship, compassion, change agency, and collective power.

Dissemination of the report from the consultation will be done through the Boston University School of Theology Religion and Conflict Transformation website (<http://www.bu.edu/rct>). A report will also be submitted for publication in *Teaching Theology and Religion*, a publication of the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion.