

UNITING *for* PEACE --- Scotland Programme

Annual Inter-Faith Occasion for World Peace

St. Mark's Unitarian Church - Edinburgh - July 4 2017

"Reflections on Peace-Making Now"

A Personal Statement by REV.BRIAN COOPER, UfP Churches/Inter-Faith Secretary

MOTIVATIONS:

We get drawn into inter-faith, and peace concern and activism, for many different reasons. It may be our own faith community takes these concerns seriously - and we feel impelled to be involved. Or perhaps our faith community is not so concerned, but we think it should be, and decide to do something about it. We come to deep concern for peace for many reasons and from many sources of motivation: faith commitment; humanitarian concern; some political or philosophical stance; moral revulsion against war and conflict; desire to help create a better world for our children. It may be the inspiration of a Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King, Dalai Lama, Oscar Romero or another modern-era apostle of non-violence. It may be the inspiration of a faith-founder: Jesus, Buddha, Mahommed, Bahu'allah and others. For myself it is Jesus, Prince of Peace, the Man for Others, the Man of Compassionate Love.

Such motivations and inspirations drive us to seek and work for common goals: co-operation and harmony of different faiths, harmony in our local communities and our nation, an end to strife on the global scene and the building of a lasting peace, with justice, for all humanity. The United Nations' founding aim to free succeeding generations from the scourge of war sums it up. All are lofty aims, but not at all easy to achieve, *but unless we are part of the striving to achieve them, we leave society and the world to all the negative forces that cause disharmony and conflict. We cannot be neutral.*

THE PAIN OF BRITAIN AND THE WORLD:

A friend in Oxford recently said to me "all my friends are in despair" about the situation in UK and the wider world. I certainly understand that - but as a Christian, believing in the Risen Christ, I cannot surrender to despair. Yet these are certainly dark times in UK. When the Westminster Bridge terrorist incident happened, I thought to myself, "Oh No! Just what I feared might happen has actually happened." Then Manchester happened. I found myself weeping uncontrollably at the TV news report, as I thought of all those young girls having their lives suddenly torn away, and of the terrorist himself, ending his own life and those of his victims because of a perverted version of a great religion, when he could have devoted himself to doing. I thought of my Muslim friends, feeling sadness and outrage at the misuse of their religion and anxious over a backlash. Then London Bridge happened, and I wondered "Is Britain now being targetted by some Jihadist master-mind?". Then the Islamophobic terror attack at Finsbury Park, London. I said to myself "Britain is now a wounded country". If one adds in the Grenfell Tower horror, political instability and economic worries, it is no wonder that anxiety is widespread, as it certainly is. This is not a time of peace, of God's shalom, in our country. Yet, we must always remember that for people in Baghdad, Kabul, and similar places car bombs and far greater suffering are a daily occurrence. Our pain is part of the greater pain of the wider world today.

WHY THIS RISING VIOLENCE NOW?

The answers are complex: extremist political-theological narratives - especially those of Ayatollah Khomeini and Osama bin Laden - rising global inequality, great poverty from North Africa and Middle East to Afghanistan, the burning sense of injustice among millions in Global South, Shia-Sunni sectarian conflict, great power rivalries, seething resentment against powerful elites [felt in UK too] and deep reaction against Western interventionism. This latter is not only about Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya, but going back to late 19th/early 20th century onwards, as West manipulated and exploited Middle East countries and far beyond for economic gain and imperial power. Revenge is certainly part of terrorist agenda - revenge by hurting those wholly innocent.

THE CHALLENGE:

Pain, turbulence, revenge - all are in evidence today. We can easily be overwhelmed and feel helpless and powerless. **The challenge to all of us in the inter-faith and peace movements is not to succumb to despair and helplessness, but TO BECOME PART OF THE HEALING** - of our communities and of our world. We cannot undertake the great political actions, but by a myriad of small actions we can create a mosaic of peace and healing, we can help transform our world. What those actions are is up to you - but, in the strength of our various faiths, **WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE. That is the challenge of events like this. Thank you!**

Rev. Brian Cooper - Churches/Inter-Faith Secretary, Uniting for Peace. July 4 2017.

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The Annual Inter-Faith Occasion for World Peace has been held in Edinburgh every year since 2003, when it was launched by then World Disarmament Campaign Churches' Work [Uniting for Peace predecessor body] in the run-up to the Iraq War. Those present issued a statement against the war being undertaken. The Occasion is a well-established feature in Edinburgh's inter-faith and peace calendar, and an important part of UfP's work. This 2017 event included talks on 'Zoroastrianism: Early Insights for Harmony and Peace', 'Peace in the Celtic Spiritual Tradition' and 'Non-Violence in Islam', all set in a context of prayers and meditations from a range of faith traditions. Seventy people attended the event.

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