

Ruth Harvey

Wrestling for peace

Member Ruth Harvey is the Director of Place for Hope ...

A mark of summer 2019 where I live has been baking heat followed by dramatic thunderstorms. The splendour of creation is glorious. Yet we know that this heat of summer masks an anxiety about the almost unstoppable change in our climate. 'Deep adaptation' is being called for across the globe, as we search for new ways to care for one another and to hold our political and religious leaders to account as they guide our future.

It's not just climate change that raises anxiety. Whether it's change on the political, the social, the environmental front, or indeed within our church or faith communities, we know that change, and the transitions that accompany it, can induce anxiety.

In the work of faith-based reconciliation, we hold out a hope that, by working robustly through transition and change, we can reach a place of peace and unity – the shalom/salaam of the Gospel. This is not an easy peace, but a peace wrought out of struggle, turning, listening and 'deep adaptation'.

Place for Hope supports 35 trained and accredited mediators who travel in pairs throughout Scotland and the north of England, mediating towards peace, hosting very difficult conversations, and building reconciliation in churches and faith communities.

Our teams accompany groups in conflict over theological differences, buildings closure, bullying, communication issues, management concerns, bad behaviour, transition and change: the ordinary things of life. We often find that nested beneath a presenting issue can be years, sometimes decades, of difficult behaviour, buried for the sake of 'peace'. While churches are organisations, they also operate like families, with accepted practices being handed down over generations. Norms become habits, and habits embed and present as culture, as 'just the way it is here'. Our vision is to nurture a counter-culture of mediation, reconciliation and the transformation of relationships, so that every place of worship will be a place for

hope. We don't bring a magic wand or a drafted script. We bring robust companionship, dedicated Practitioners unafraid to go to the hard places, unphased by the rage, guilt, despair, depression that often accompanies such conflict.

There are parallels to the journey of reconciliation in scripture. The despair and lament of Good Friday followed by the not knowing of Holy Saturday, then turning when the time is right to the hope of Easter Sunday is a holy pattern of conflict transformation.

This autumn we meet for the 'Gathering in Glasgow on Conflict and Faith'. We are delighted to be joined by partner organisations committed to faith-based conflict transformation, celebrating both the diversity that distinguishes us and the synergy that we share. Workshops, worship, keynote input and time for networking will be hallmarks of the Gathering. Please help us make this a turning point for our communities and for our churches. Join us – and please also pass on news of the event to those who may be interested.

Visit www.placeforhope.org.uk to sign up for the Gathering in Glasgow (31st October– 4th November), or to join our Peacemakers Network. ●

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