



Reconciling Relationships: a Place for Hope Seminar

Tuesday 3rd October 2017
Edinburgh

Introduction

On Tuesday 3rd October 2017 forty-seven delegates met in the airy space of the Mews in central Edinburgh to share reflections, visions and hopes for 'Reconciling Relationships'. Place for Hope reaches its tenth anniversary in 2019, and talk, initially, of a 2019 conference to mirror the founding conference of Place for Hope at Aviemore in 2009, built the foundation for this seminar.

We were delighted with the interest in our event from the core constituency of Place for Hope, namely faith-based organisations seeking support in the art of conflict transformation, along with support from partners in interfaith, civic and secular agencies.

From the beginning of our planning process we recognised the synergy in such a seminar at a time when there is so much concern about the fragmentation of church and society. In addition, we were keen to celebrate the core value of partnership working which Place for Hope engenders, and were delighted to see so many of our partner agencies around the tables at the Mews.



Reconciling Relationships: a Place for Hope Seminar

The Purpose of our Seminar was agreed as:

- I. networking between mediation, peace-building and faith-based conflict transformation groups
- II. deepening our understanding of reconciliation
- III. drawing together wisdom for programme towards a peace-building conference in 2019

Our day began with coffee, tea and an opportunity to meet well known friends, and introduce ourselves to new faces. Resources from Place for Hope were on hand, and staff welcomed all with refreshments. James Aitken, Vice-Chair of the Board of Trustees of Place for Hope offered us words of welcome and placed our day in the context of recent bombings and situations of violence and conflict in our world: ours is an opportunity to share an approach to relationships based on transformation and reconciliation, rather than violence bred from fear.

In introduction, we spent some time meeting with one another sharing responses to the prompts: "share a hope that you have for the day"; and "share one thing about which you are passionate."



We were delighted then to welcome David Brubaker joining us via video conferencing from his office at the Eastern Mennonite University in Harrisonburg, Virginia. David directs the MBA Program there and serves as Associate Professor of Organizational Studies in the Center for Justice and Peacebuilding. Author of "Promise and Peril: Understanding and Managing Change and Conflict in Congregations" (published by The Alban Institute), David has been a good friend of Place for Hope since attending the Aviemore Conference as a speaker and workshop leader. Since then, David has become one of the Place for Hope Patrons, and led a week-long seminar for Place for Hope with the Iona Community on Iona in 2014: "Peace in our Churches; Hope in our Communities."

David led us through some powerful reflections on 'Reconciling Relationships: Perspectives on Change and Conflict in our Congregations and our Societies.' Exploring the notion of congregations as 'systems', we looked at the nature of a healthy system, and in particular focused on healthy leadership. The societal forces which impact on the life of congregations particularly in the US include:

- Decline of Christendom and “rise of the nones”
- Loss of trust in institutions
- Growing cultural and religious diversity (and rise of Trump)
- Increase in polarization
- Changing family structure
- Cellphone (mobile) saturation
- Accelerating individualism

We took time around our tables to share responses to the following questions:

1. What two or three changes in your congregation’s or community’s multiple environments (social, political, economic, technological) have had the greatest effect on your congregation or community in the last five to 10 years?
2. What specific changes were introduced to your congregation or community as it adapted to these changes in its environment?
3. Did conflict occur within the congregation or community due to these changes? If so, how did the conflict(s) impact your congregation or community?

Responses, along with David’s further reflections are captured in the [video conferencing recording](#).



Over lunch, participants took the opportunity to continue conversations begun earlier in the day. We then moved in to a time of conversation with four panel members, from left, in photo, Ruth Harvey (Director of Place for Hope), Graham Boyack (Director of Scottish Mediation Network), Maureen Sier (Director of Interfaith Scotland) Stewart Weaver (Church of Scotland Minister and Place for Hope Trustee).

Themes that emerged during this panel conversation included (see full notes below):

- conflict transformation in interfaith and international contexts
- ensuring that 'the voice' in the room is the voice of authentic experience
- the art of 'slow conversation'
- the power of listening, and the need to take necessary time for change and transition
- following the Easter story as a guide for the transformation of conflict

Time was then taken to reflect on the core purpose and audience/participant list for a 2019 conference, themes for keynote and workshop input, the place of worship/reflection, and possible venues and funding streams.

Our hope is that, through this seminar, energy and vision can be galvanised across the churches, the faith networks, secular and civic mediation partners and others, to ensure that reconciliation and the transformation of conflict become a way of life, and change our culture for the better.



Reconciling Relationships Programme

- 11:00 Coffee/tea/refreshments available
- 11:30 Opening worship and welcome
Introductions and purpose
- 12:00 'Reconciling Relationships: perspectives from the USA'
Live Video/Zoom input from [David Brubaker](#), Centre for Justice and Peacebuilding, Eastern Mennonite University, Virginia, and Place for Hope Patron.
- 13:00 Lunch and time for networking
- 13:30 Panel conversation
'Reconciling Relationships: key issues, essential tools, markers for the future'
- Maureen Sier, Director of Interfaith Scotland
 - Stewart Weaver, Church of Scotland Minister/Place for Hope Trustee
 - Graham Boyack, Scottish Mediation Network
 - Ruth Harvey, Place for Hope Director
- 14:30 Coffee/tea/refreshments
'Focussed Conversation' on plans for the 2019 conference
- 15:15 Feedback and next steps
- 15:25 Thanks and sending prayer
- 15:30 Close



Opening Words: James Aitken, Place for Hope Trustee

For everything its season, and for every activity under heaven its time:
a time to be born and a time to die;
a time to plant and a time to uproot;
a time to kill and a time to heal;
a time to break down and a time to build up;
a time to weep and a time to laugh;
a time for mourning and a time for dancing;
a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them;
a time to embrace and a time to abstain from embracing;
a time to seek and a time to lose;
a time to keep and a time to discard;
a time to tear and a time to mend;
a time for silence and a time for speech;
a time to love and a time to hate;
a time for war and a time for peace.
God has made everything to suit its time.
Whatever God does lasts for ever; there is no adding to it, no taking away.

(Ecclesiastes 3: 1 - 8, 11, 14)



There is a time for conflict - after all is there not a time for everything? In 2009 the Church of Scotland took a step - at that time 8 years ago at a conference in Aviemore - to find a better way to make conflict-time a positive experience for individuals, congregations and others. Today, Place for Hope calls what we do, conflict transformation.

The Aviemore Conference came up with three ideas for the future, which the Church of Scotland followed through with; and which to a great extent have been achieved - Place for Hope is the embodiment of this commitment, achievement and success.

At Aviemore the first idea was:

to establish a network of people throughout Scotland committed to the work of peacemaking and reconciliation. So, Place for Hope provides the churches of Scotland with a team of trained mediators available to help congregations deal more effectively with disputes.

The second idea at Aviemore was:

to found a place recognized as a Centre where resources in mediation and reconciliation can be accessed. So, Place for Hope is an ecumenical partnership allowing the Church as a whole to claim its own ground as a peacemaker and healer in a broken world.

The third idea was:

to initiate a church-wide realisation of the importance of building communities of peace and reconciliation. So, Place for Hope reaches beyond addressing the church's internal conflicts and helps congregations become peacemakers in the communities they serve.

That all began a long time ago - 8 years - and in 2 years' time we plan to celebrate a decade since Aviemore with another conference that will set objectives for the next 10 years in the world of mediation, reconciliation and transformation.

What should these objectives be? Should they be more of the same? Has the Church changed in the past 10 years? Has Scotland changed in the past 10 years? Has Britain? Has the world?

We want to talk to you about what questions need answers at this time. Today, we are asking for help to ask the right questions; to help us all see more clearly the land ahead; to help us all understand what is happening at this time, and what might happen in the time to come.

There are people here today who will help to stimulate our thinking, and I'd like to welcome them in particular: David in America, and Maureen, Stewart, Graham and Ruth who are in this room. But once again I want to thank you for coming here today, and for taking part in this seminar to address times of conflict.



Place for Hope Seminar, input from Stewart Weaver

1. Introduction

- Thanks for chance to think/speak about 3-way union in Portobello and assistance from P4H
- Approach: Ruth suggested inviting someone from congregations to speak → no joy
→ therefore quotes from that process and comments from recent e-mails.

2. Quotes during union process

2.1 'That was the first honest thing I've heard'

Context: Parish Grouping team; had talked about other issues; but, after about 7 months, the deeper conversations about fears/hurts.

Thus: try to look at remainder of this talk through the lens of time: SW had a chance to look into unions via study leave; we had time to prepare, time to get to know each other, time to be honest and vulnerable. Recent e-mail supported importance of time.

2.2 'Let's just get on with it'

SW heard this a number of times, often from people who were practical

Assumptions: others respond as practically as they do?

Moving from head → heart takes time.

Time to give people the chance to process what's going on?

2.3 'We'll never try that again.'

Context: tried something different/unusual → didn't work.

Immediate reaction rather than examining: who/why/where/what/how.

Time to decompress?

2.4 'Presbytery has already decided.'

Many people convinced that the decision was already made even when it was pointed out that Sessions would vote on Basis of Union

Did people actually want the decision taken from them → easier?

Time to take responsibility?

2.5 'We know things need to change and we can't keep going this way, but...'

Context: many knew the need to change was great but simply couldn't see a way forward.

Time to see/create new possibilities?

3. Recent Comments

3.1 Listening

Great appreciation to Hugh, Russell and Nigel for listening. Almost a sense of affirmation in the listening.

Time to listen?

3.2 Outsider

▪ Importance of someone who was neutral

▪ Thus, focus on process > result

▪ Thus, provide perspective: difficult for everyone; 'a bump in the road'

- Time to gain experience?

3.3 Accompany

- P4H accompanied > solved: not tell us what to do.
- Journeyed with us
- Time to build relationships?

3.4 Warmth

- A strong sense of warmth, understanding and encouragement from P4H
- Helped to 'soften' things
- Time to understand

4. Summary and Question

4.1 Summary: Importance of Time

See what's coming

Listen

Feel

Prepare

Understand

4.2 Metaphors

- Journey/road
- Corporate: 'takeover', 'merger'
- 'Warmth': nurture? Hands held together.

4.3 Question

- Metaphors underlying union/conflict/process.
- Which rest under our assumptions? And which should we pursue?



Theologies of Reconciliation, by Ruth Harvey

I was asked recently to reflect on the theology of reconciliation that is particular to Place for Hope. While it would be disingenuous to say that we in Place for Hope have evolved our own specific theology of reconciliation, I'd like to offer a reflection from the spiritual root that gave birth to Place for Hope: the Christian story of life, death and new life, as focussed for that faith community in the particularity of the Easter story. This story is couched in three movements, or 'times.'

1. Time for Lamentation

Beginning with Good Friday, the day on which Jesus is tortured and crucified, we are reminded that there is a Time of Lamentation. In the confusion and pain of the crucifixion, there is a time to acknowledge trauma, hurt, wounded-ness, fear, pain, grief. Our story is rooted in having the courage to walk towards sorrow both as grief-stricken participant, and empathic observer. A root element in our faith is that awful trauma happens, that God may seem absent (but is not), and that people get hurt, and even die. We are invited to move towards pain, through fear, into bewilderment, hurt and grief. This is part of our faith story. In times of conflict and danger, a human instinct says to avoid danger and potential pain.

Sometimes this is not possible – and we have a model and a precedent in the Good Friday story of lamentation.



2. Time for not knowing

Moving towards Easter Saturday, we know there is a time for not knowing: a time of limbo, of heightened fear and uncertainty, of pondering, reflecting, wondering – time for reflection, for coming together, for dwelling in our grief, for learning with one another, for building resilience, for looking for support, for not rushing towards the answers, for the courage to wait. 'The Stature of Waiting' by Vanstone and 'Grain in Winter' by Donald Eadie offer resource and reflection for Saturday people.

For the disciples this time of not knowing lasted for 3 days – for others this time of not knowing, in the midst of grief and pain may last for a very long time; if we are caught up in a lengthy or protracted dispute, or in a grief that seems interminable, this time may seem never ending. Waiting in this time of not knowing, also means being able to discern when to stop waiting. Because waiting doesn't mean stalling, but means active, discerned, waiting – the courage to know when to act.

3. Time, and a Place for Hope

Finally, we are Easter people. Unlike the disciples, we do indeed live in the knowledge of the resurrection, and this reveals to us that there is a time, and a Place for Hope. Not a wishful thinking hope that if we bury our heads in the sand, the worlds, and our problems will go away. But a cosmic hope that through the pain and the waiting there is a possibility of totally human and utterly cosmic transformation – both mysterious and deeply ordinary at the same time.

As the mystery of birth is both miraculous and commonplace, so the mystery of death is both miraculous and commonplace – and the choice we have is to move towards pain, and possible death (metaphorical or real) with courage, with patience and with hope.

By exploring the rich faith traditions into which we are born and within which we can grow, we discover wisdom for the journey towards reconciliation, and so open the door to a clutch of theologies of reconciliation.

Key Points from Panel Discussion, by Maureen Sier Interfaith Scotland

In addressing conflict of a religious nature Interfaith Scotland has noted that the following points may be useful;

- The key role of religious leaders to use their respective 'pulpits' and voices to preach peace and reconciliation and to ensure that they do not support conflict of any kind in their preaching
- The transformative nature of using religious scripture as a 'text' for dialogic study has proven very useful in conflict situations
- The power of story-telling has also been extremely helpful in conflict situations – allowing people to see the human being behind the label
- Creating a safe space for dialogue is critical in any situation of tension and this means more than just the physical space but the emotional/spiritual 'space' that is created
- It is important for those in a 'privileged' position to recognise that the playing field is not always even and work needs to be done to allow everyone to feel an equal at the table of dialogue



Notes from Contribution to Panel Session by Graham Boyack

My reflections on reconciling relationships and mediations are based on two aspects, my work for Scottish Mediation and my work as a volunteer at the Edinburgh Sheriff Court Mediation Project.

Work at the court involves a range of different disputes from builders to landlord and tenants to sofas. Many are not suitable for court – many are about relationships and communications. So many times I have heard “I wish I had known” and often it is the first time they have heard the other side. For me apart from gaining mediation experience the process provides an opportunity for people to resolve and move on. In doing so it helps provide a bit of glue for society.

If disputes aren't resolved and in some ways particularly low level ones, is the message that somehow society doesn't care? And if so why should the people involved care about society?



Across Scotland the tools available to resolve such disputes include, volunteer mediators, online info and helplines. However, access is not universally available and not always free.

In my Scottish Mediation work a lot of calls via our helpline are about neighbour disputes. When I became Director one of the first to congratulate me was a police officer from Grampian who said he often used mediation and was aware of how successful it could be. The types of issues include, noise from wooden floors, poor sound insulation, clashes of lifestyles and people working night shifts. The tools for resolving these disputes include, some local authorities (not all offer mediation), community mediators or money to pay for mediation.

So why mention it?

For me it's about the human presence that can help resolution and that often for the people involved life can be hell. Often those in need don't have access to resources whether it be expertise, human resource or money and cannot get these things through persona networks.

So, in next 3-5 years there is a need to ensure mediation is not seen as a Cinderella activity, it's a process with a skills set to support. It has to be one of the long term objectives of an engaged society.

There are clear challenges too. They include: developing new schemes around mediation in court and the pressures on local authority funding. Taken together these say to me we need to develop new models for delivery. Perhaps these models can help

other areas such as the community empowerment agenda, planning, community asset transfer all supporting local decision making?

There is a need to develop community assets, people with the skills of mediation this is something which can be assisted by both the faith and non-faith communities. The skills are similar to those involved in peacebuilding. There is a tie in with politics too. Especially in the work being undertaken by collaborative Scotland and their call for respectful dialogue.

Maybe there are parallels with the slow food movement.

Do we need slow conversation in a social media world?

Thanks and Closing Prayer: James Aitken

Thank you for coming. I hope you have found today valuable. We hope to see you again in the future.

The way that the Christian scriptures encourage people to cope with the time that is to come in the future - the future that is always uncertain, always ready to trip us up - is through the power of promise. Promises help us to cope in the present time with the future time that is to come.

The way that the Christian scriptures encourage people to cope with the time that has passed - the past that is often filled with conflict, and weighed down by baggage - is through the power of forgiveness. Forgiveness has a mathematical exactness to it. Forgiveness is the product of justice and mercy; justice multiplied by mercy equals forgiveness.

Place for Hope's prayer is that we will all go from this place with a promise on our lips to meet again and to continue the work of reconciling relationships. Go, also, to be multipliers of justice and mercy so that the time that is to come is not the same as the time that is passed, and times of conflict can be times of opportunities.

Let Speeches Fall Silent

COLUMCILLE (DOMHNACH TRIONOIDE) 11.11.11



1. Let speech - es fall si - lent and plat - i - tudes cease
 2. Let teach - ers of ha - tred, sus - pi - cion, and fear,
 3. For - give us the times we ne - glect - ed to act;



from hawk - ers of vi - o - lence they brand as "peace."
 and those who would kill for the views they hold dear,
 for - give our ex - cus - es for cour - age we lacked.



Let peo - ple who suf - fer find plac - es to speak,
 be turned from their ways and dis - armed of their wrath
 God, teach us the wis - dom that leads us to grace:



and hold - ers of pow - er give way to the weak.
 to walk on a new, more com - pas - sion - ate path.
 your im - age is found in our en - e - my's face.

Text: Adam M. L. Tice, 2016; ©2016 GIA Publications, Inc.
 Tune: Gaelic traditional

This song was originally written post the Columbine shooting in 2015.

Adam Tice, the author re-released this song post the Las Vegas shooting of October 2017 with permission for use.

Reconciling Relationships: Attendees

1	Ailsa Macintosh	BBC Scotland Religion
2	Clare Davidson	Centre for Ministry Studies, Aberdeen University
3	Wendy Young	Christian Aid Scotland
4	David Williams	Church of Scotland 'Go For It' Project
5	Andrew Tomlinson	Church of Scotland Church and Society Council
6	Martin Scott	Church of Scotland Council of Assembly
7	Mirella Yandoli	Church of Scotland Interfaith Programme
8	Dan Carmichael	Church of Scotland Mission and Discipleship Council
9	Derek Browning	Church of Scotland Moderator
10	Marjory McPherson	Church of Scotland Presbytery of Edinburgh
11	Peter Colwell	Churches Together in Britain and Ireland
12	Hugh Foy	Conforti Institute
13	Craig Cameron	Corrymeela Community
14	Kerry Watson	Cyrenians
15	David Brubaker	Eastern Mennonite University
16	Iain Stewart	Edinburgh Interfaith Association
17	Iain Johnston	Faith in Community (Scotland)
18	Wendy Ball	Freelance Consultant
19	Vérène Nicolas	Independent Mediator/Trainer
20	Maureen Sier	Interfaith Scotland
21	John Chalmers	Place for Hope Patron
22	Russell McLarty	Place for Hope Practitioner
23	Roy Henderson	Place for Hope Practitioner
24	Val Ott	Place for Hope Practitioner
25	Elisabeth Spence	Place for Hope Practitioner
26	Ruth Harvey	Place for Hope Staff
27	Natalie Barrett	Place for Hope Staff
28	Neil Wykes	Place for Hope Staff
29	Abdul Rahim	Place for Hope Staff/Centre for Good Relations
30	Charlie Irvine	Place for Hope Supervisor
31	Hugh Donald	Place for Hope Supervisor
32	James Aitken	Place for Hope Trustee
33	Stewart Weaver	Place for Hope Trustee
34	Carol Ford	Place for Hope Trustee
35	Peter Cheer	Religious Society of Friends
36	Bishop Bill Nolan	Roman Catholic Church in Scotland
37	Major Steven Turner	Salvation Army

38	Anne Tomlinson	Scottish Episcopal Institute
39	Dave Bell	Scottish Government
40	Graham Boyack	Scottish Mediation Network
41	Kenneth Fleming	St Mary's Cathedral, Edinburgh
42	Alastair Forsyth	United Reformed Church Listening and Reconciliation Service
43	Ali Newell	University of Edinburgh Chaplaincy Centre
44	Jo Love	Wild Goose Resource Group/Iona Community

Reconciling Relationships: Apologies

1	Matthew Ross	Action of Churches Together in Scotland
2	Andrew Clarke	Baptist Union of Scotland, Peaceful Transformation Team
3	Jo Williams	Blackley Baptist Centre, Yorkshire
4	Colin Moulds	Bridge Builders Ministries
5	Ken Jeffrey	Centre for Ministry Studies/Aberdeen University
6	Sarah Hills	Centre for Reconciliation, Coventry
7	Stewart Goudie	Church of Scotland
8	Fay Ross	Church of Scotland
9	Alan Kimmitt	Church of Scotland
10	Jenni Chinembiri	Church of Scotland World Mission Council
11	David Plews	Church of Scotland, Ministries Council
12	Jayne Scott	Church of Scotland, Ministries Council
13	Daran Golby	Church of Scotland, Ministries Council
14	May-Kane Logan	Congregational Federation in Scotland
15	John Sturrock	Core Solutions
16	Pádraig O Tuama	Corrymeela Community
17	Philip Mendelsohn	Interfaith Glasgow
18	Pat Bennett/Michael Marten	Iona Community
19	Martin Pearson	Kinharvie Institute
20	Jill Baker	Methodist Church in Scotland
21	Richard Andrew	Methodist Church UK
22	Leah Robinson	New College, Edinburgh
23	Mary Alice Mansell	Northern Friends Peace Board
24	Brent Haywood	Place for Hope Practitioner
25	Brec Seaton	Place for Hope Practitioner
26	Iain McLarty	Place for Hope Practitioner
27	Iain Goring	Place for Hope Practitioner
28	Sally Russell	Place for Hope Practitioner
29	Raymond Jenkins	Place for Hope Practitioner
30	Nigel Watson	Place for Hope Practitioner
31	Cecelia Clegg	Place for Hope Supervisor
32	Nancy Adams	Place for Hope Trustee
33	Pamala McDougall	Religious Society of Friends in Scotland (Quakers)
34	Georgia May	Rose Castle Foundation
35	Owen May	Rose Castle Foundation
36	Geraldine Hill	Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund
37	Mark Davis	Shoreline Consultancy
38	Trishna Singh	Sikh Sanjog and Punjabi Junction
39	Justine Huxley	St. Ethelburga's
40	David Pickering	United Reformed Church
41	Jim Coleman	United Reformed Church Listening and Reconciliation Service

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