



vriṣhtikone

Issue 2, 2024

Evangelical Perspectives on Mission and Ethics



**“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other,
just as in Christ God forgave you.”**
Ephesians 4: 32 (NIV)

Drishtikone means perspective or viewpoint in Hindi. The magazine seeks to provide a space in which Christians can share their perspectives and points of view on wholistic mission in India.

Our Vision is that **Drishtikone** will motivate change in readers. The experiences of development practitioners, theologians, grassroots workers and others demonstrating God’s love in a practical way, will influence and encourage Christians to join the struggle for peace and justice in this country.

Drishtikone seeks to present a Biblical perspective on social issues and provide readers with information and models of engagement in wholistic concerns. It is a forum for evangelical reflection and dialogue on development issues in India.

Drishtikone is published by EFICOR to mobilise Christian reflection and action. Financial contributions from readers are welcome to support EFICOR in its efforts to influence the mind towards action.

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Drishtikone is a magazine with many perspectives.

The views expressed are not necessarily those of EFICOR.

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Contents

Letters to the Editor



Dear Editor,

Thank you for sending Drishtikone magazine regularly. Thank you for sending 'Accountability to Communities' - Issue 1, 2024. I have relocated and changed my place of location. Kindly note and change my address in your mailing list.

Mrs. Themboi
P.O. Bolpur, Birbhum District,
West Bengal - 731204.

Dear Editor,

Praise God for the wonderful work of EFICOR and also for all those working towards the fulfilment of its aims and objectives. I have been receiving your magazine, which is very helpful.

Thank you.

R. Z. Prabhu Rayan
General Secretary,
India Fellowship for the Visually Handicapped,
Chennai, Tamil Nadu.

Dear Editor,

The recent Publication on 'Accountability to Communities' is very informative and an excellent issue. It covers the importance of maintaining standards at the personal individual, organizational and community aspects. The articles are great and action ideas are practical for us as individuals and for the Church as well.

Dr. Sudhi Nath
BCTA, Raj Niwas Marg, Delhi

2 **Editorial**

3 **Cover Story**

Working for the Common Good

Dr. Paickiam T. Samuel

8 **Response to the Cover Story**

Beyond Tolerance: Embracing Unity, Diversity, and Mutual Respect in Faith Communities

Mr. Sem Haokip

11 **FACTS**

13 **Biblical Perspective**

Accountability: A Biblical Perspective

Rev. Dr. Narendra John

15 **Voices From the Grassroots**

Restoring Peace Among Communities

Mr. Green Thomas

Contents



Editorial...

Forgiveness is not just a personal virtue; it is a societal necessity. In a world marred by conflict, the ability to forgive plays a crucial role in fostering peace and reconciliation. Without genuine willingness to forgive, the hope for lasting peace remains elusive. History has shown us that forgiveness is essential for overcoming deep-seated violence and achieving sustainable harmony.

Reconciliation restores broken relationships and rebuilds trust, requiring humility and grace. While challenging, extending mercy to those who have wronged us is vital. As Christians, we are called to practice forgiveness, reflecting the love and compassion we have received from God (Matthew 6:7-15). As forgiveness comes to be in practice, it opens the doors of peace and healing. The atonement of Christ lead us to God's forgiveness and to restore inter-personal relationships and communion. How do we strive to be at peace with others and be reconciled to one another? How should the Church play its significant role of reconciliation and building peace in situations of extreme violence and conflict among communities?

This publication seeks to address these pertinent questions and attempts to lay out various models and ways of building peace and reconciliation through the power of forgiveness. It delves into historical and contemporary conflicts, highlighting forgiveness as a pivotal factor in achieving peace. The cover story article highlights the concept of peace building, forgiveness and reconciliation through the lens of theological relationship. It deliberated on how conflict resolution through various rational strategies such as negotiations, mediation and assistance could yield positive outcomes.

Does forgiveness play a role in conflict resolution? What are the various pre-conditions of forgiveness? What prevents peace and justice to flourish in the world? Are we ready to embrace forgiveness as a solution to global conflicts? These questions would be further delved on in the various articles of this Publication.

18 **Faith in Action**
Called to Serve the Needy

19 **Seeds of Transformation**
Healing Touch

21 **Book Review**
The Book of Forgiving: The
Fourfold Path for Healing
Ourselves and Our World
Mrs. Joan Lalromawi

**Reconcile: Conflict
Transformation for Ordinary
Christians**
Ms. Mary Luanthianching

23 **Bible Study**
Journey towards
Reconciliation
Rev. Dino L. Touthang

24 **Ideas For Action**

Working for the Common Good: A Theology of Relationships

Rev. Dr. Paickiam T. Samuel

Relationships, whether personal, interpersonal or between communities has become a disconcerting issue today. Marriages often end in divorce, communities engage in bloody violence simply because there are differences among them. This causes a great amount of suffering. The concept of “working for the common good” has come into common usage in recent years. Instead of defining a situation in terms of *problems* of racialism, tribalism or communalism, an attempt is being made to focus on the *opportunities* for building a united and tolerant community.

There has also been a shift from conceiving such a united society in terms of a majority’s patronizing acceptance of its neighbouring minorities; “integration” is a self-defeating notion if it inhibits the survival and further development of diverse traditions; “tolerance” is an empty boast if it cannot extend, however taxingly, to others’ stubborn desire for insulation and even to their intolerance and fanaticism. Community is forged not from uniformity but from potentially enriching, albeit also potentially destructive, diversity.

The dreaming and the hard work involved in building better community relationships has two main thrusts. First, there are those with a smaller vision of community; they work for the betterment of their own tradition’s social, cultural and religious heritage. Second, there are those who have a wider, sometimes nebulous but sometimes prophetic vision of community: they work for co-operation between the various communities towards the realization of a new concept of community. If the former group can degenerate into self-seeking communalism,

the second can slip into impatient and impoverishing syncretism. Both groups can lose momentum for unity if they are impatient with each other and refuse to recognise that they have a mutually supportive function. The wider community cannot exist without the contribution of the various particular communities, large and small; and those particular communities will have nothing to contribute unless they can catch a glimpse of how others stand in need of them.



The analysis of societal tensions and hostilities should shift away from simplistic and divisive concepts like race or nation. Instead, we should focus on embracing the richness of diverse traditions with mutual respect, striving to create microcosms that reflect the cultural and racial diversity inherent in humanity. It must often then be in the fields of intellectual, technical, and physical partnership in the solution of practical questions that growth may occur towards some sense of spiritual communication participation and wider contribution.

Perhaps now is the opportune moment for a new initiative from the Ministry of Reconciliation aimed at contributing to the pressing needs of our societies. This initiative wouldn't seek to replace the efforts of existing secular or religious organizations; rather, it could serve to rejuvenate some of these agencies, particularly if it collaborates closely with them or operates within their frameworks. The integrity of the existing communities must be respected, but a determination to participate in building a new sense of community need not be incompatible with that. Today we wish to move beyond communalist relationships toward the collaboration of communities, working with each other but also,

in the case of faith communities, with a vivid sense of working together with and in obedience to God.

Competition or Co-operation

The tensions and hostilities of both past and recent times have frequently hindered the possibility of genuine *co-operation* among diverse faith communities worldwide. Each community carries with it the weight of past experiences, whether of genuine discrimination or perceived slights. While the underlying causes of friction may stem from political, economic, or social factors, the overlay of religious boundaries often amplifies these divisions. Consequently, it becomes all too easy to attribute differences solely to matters of faith. In light of this backdrop, it is truly noteworthy and heartening to encounter initiatives, no matter how modest, aimed at nurturing a renewed sense of solidarity among estranged faith.

Between active hostility and active cooperation, there often lies the insidious stage of competition. Whether it's the race to build ever grander churches, temples, and mosques within close proximity, the duplication of educational and health facilities to assert self-sufficiency for each community, or the zeal to have more followers of one's religion, energies are diverted from serving humanity and God toward satisfying personal or communal pride. Faith communities, engaging in competition, sometimes give the impression that they are parceling out God to the world. It may be truer to recognise that God extends His mercy and love to all humanity.

Rejecting competition as an expression of human pride, we must also scrutinise cooperation that amounts to little more than self-indulgent camaraderie. Enduring cooperation will not be wishful thinking, superficial acts of goodwill, or ecumenical euphoria; it will involve working together with each other and with God, obedient to God's purposes for human brotherhood and sustained by His reconciling power.

Faith communities may collaborate in various forms of work. They might serve as colleagues in State hospitals, Christian hospitals, Hindu hospitals, or Muslim hospitals. They could teach or study together in schools and colleges, work side by side in docks, building sites, or fields, or even coexist under the same roof within families that embrace mutual respect and harmony. While tensions may arise in such shared professional or domestic relationships, their difficulty doesn't automatically warrant discouragement or disapproval. Instead, new patterns

of mutual respect and partnership fostered in such contexts can make visionary contributions to society at large.

Both past history and modernity compel our communities to encounter each other in diverse circumstances worldwide. We collaborate in international and national development, reside in the same localities, and sometimes within the same families. Our past confrontations in hostility and failures to uphold doctrines of religious freedom underscore the urgency of seeking new ways of co-existence, driven by our growing interdependence.

Our past confrontations in hostility and failures to uphold doctrines of religious freedom underscore the urgency of seeking new ways of co-existence, driven by our growing interdependence.

Some of us also seek a theological and perhaps devotional framework for mutual recognition and awareness. There's immense potential in our efforts to weave together social and spiritual ties that bind us on a common

basis. Despite differing political expectations, motivations, and theological doctrines among our respective traditions, our encounters renew our commitment to God and fellow beings.

Our Hopes in the Ministry of Reconciliation

Reconciliation is not about glossing over differences; it is about embracing them openly and self-reflectively alongside those from diverse backgrounds. Rather than being satisfied with a lowest common denominator, we faced up to sometimes poignant points of tension. Yet, we also aspire to find common ground, not in impatient syncretism, but in openness to God's further guidance.

We aspire to transcend caricatures of each other's social and theological stances, recognising that our perceptions often lag behind the evolution of our beliefs. Our aim is to foster a deeper mutual understanding and appreciation. While acknowledging that shared language and symbols can carry divergent meanings within our communities, we seek to discern the significance of these disparities. Through this shared exploration, we strive for a clearer understanding of the genuine issues that underpin our efforts toward reconciliation.

In confronting these challenges, we embrace individual accountability. We commit to testing any claims that arise within ourselves before extending them to others. We believe that our personal experiences may not only rejuvenate our own faith but also enrich the fabric of our communities.

We realise the secular world's call for religious communities to eschew fostering hatred and division, understanding that

only by heeding this call can we engage others in meaningful discussions about life's ultimate questions. Reconciliation, for us, transcends personal enrichment; it is a gift we offer to the world and to God.

Towards a Theology of Relationship

Through open dialogue characterized by frankness and mutual respect, we have explored several major theological themes. Written papers and spoken contributions from members of religious traditions have begun to show us a wider vision of world community, of our understanding of revelation, and our roles as religious men and women within various nation states. We maintain that theological and spiritual renewal can pave the way for social renewal.

(a) *World Community:*

We are called upon to a wider vision or community, inter-racial, inter-cultural and international. This must often be tested and realised at the local level where religious pluralism provides a microcosm of the world's diversity. The quality of openness and co-operation in such local situations should make a vital contribution to the extension of inter-religious harmony and international justice.

We acknowledge the importance of communities dedicating themselves to the welfare of a particular situation or nation. There are times when religious communities must assess and critique local political or socio-economic frameworks that promote narrow nationalism, obstructing the establishment of global community, justice, and human dignity. It is imperative for faith communities to actively engage in rectifying societal injustices, even if it means challenging their own vested interests.



We express our deep concern regarding numerous situations posing threats to world peace and fostering tensions among religious communities. Specifically, we recognise the profound human tragedy unfolding in the Middle East and the manifold injustices endured by the Palestinian people, for which the global community bears a collective responsibility. We earnestly hope that this crisis will be solved in the spirit of forgiveness, compassion and justice.

(b) *Revelation:* In our attempt to be obedient to Truth, our respective religious communities are wrestling with their understanding of revelation. We are aware of the suspicion and doubt of many modern men and rapidly decreasing impact of traditional language and symbolism. Within our religious tradition, there is scope for reconsidering many of our theological and legal constructions; in this, we should ensure continuity with the past, notably with our authoritative sources.

In delving deeper into the historical experiences of revelation and reflecting

on the guidance of God in our personal journeys, some among us have recognised the need for greater receptivity to the boundless grace of God. We also acknowledge the importance of embracing a sense of estrangement from our fellow beings, including those within our own tradition, as we endeavour - perhaps even on their behalf - to cultivate a more discerning self-awareness.

(c) *Religion and Society:* Theologizing is inherently shaped by the political and socio-economic environment in which it occurs. We intentionally refrain from advocating for either a secular or religious state as the ideal backdrop for advancing towards world community and obedience to Divine revelation.

Our engagement in society stems from our obligation to God. Some of us perceive ourselves as being co-workers with God in shaping history and in transforming society. We recognize the

evolving dynamics of religion within society and grapple with questions such as: To what extent have our traditions failed our fellow men? How far do they hold new promise? Together, we strive for introspective re-evaluation of our roles and our mutual relationships.

(d) *Our Devotional Practice*: Our theological and our socio-economic concern need the spiritual basis and eschatological dimension of worship and prayer. Worship and prayer demand of us more than definitions, for they are the experiences of witnessing God and confronting the world. If our belief in the mercy and the justice of God impels us to work in the affairs of the world, how can faith communities relate their spiritual life to people's demands for justice, brotherhood and human dignity?

In the first place there is a constant requirement and hunger for each community separately to find spiritual nourishment in revitalized prayer and worship. The neglect of worship and prayer by many of our co-religionists is a challenge to us.

Where we meet together, we are not only listening to each other but we are listening to God. On occasion, therefore, individuals or groups may also express their mutual understanding and trust in opening themselves to each other's devotional idiom, notably of dua, of supplication and meditation. Despite being aware of our unique spiritual perspectives and keen to avoid misinterpretation, we endeavour to engage in a profound intermingling of recognition and responsiveness to the divine.

Suggested Practical Steps

We can endorse a variety of situations in which faith communities co-exist, communicate, deliberate and work together. The reconciliation processes often carry significant political or social implications which demand conscious engagement. While no local context is entirely immune to serving as an inspiring model for others worldwide, it equally carries the potential to discourage or embarrass them. Hence, we can propose a catalogue of practical steps, some of which may be opportune in some situations, but not in others. As we engage with global concerns and foster a sense of international community, our commitment lies in remaining vigilant to the myriad possible paths forward.

(a) *In our national and local communities*: Faith communities can and do co-operate with all their neighbours, as well as with each other, actively and prayerfully in nation-building, in

ensuring human and religious rights, in struggling for justice and peace. They may work as colleagues in teams engaged in rural development, in literacy campaigns, or in medical clinics. They could collectively address the challenges faced by alienated youth by adopting a more empathetic approach to their protests and by offering counselling services or recreational activities. Purposeful and mindful cooperation between communities, as well as with external stakeholders, in these scenarios might occasionally spark tensions, but ultimately, it could foster mutual understanding and reconciliation.

(b) *Within our own religious communities*: To foster the removal of prejudices and cultivate a deeper mutual appreciation, we must prioritize eschewing polemics and instead focus on developing inclusive textbooks, comprehensive teacher-training

programmes, and seminary programmes through collaborative efforts. It's encouraging to witness a growing willingness among religious communities to direct their material and practical assistance towards the broader community, irrespective of religious affiliations, to address pressing needs effectively. By

refraining from competitive endeavours in constructing places of worship and promoting closer social and spiritual interactions among local congregations of diverse traditions, we can enhance solidarity and understanding.

(c) *In further inter-religious dialogue*: We can commit to keep in touch with the results of local and international dialogues, and to work together in order to establish theological, missiological and societal principles for our dialogue. Dialogue encompasses more than just gatherings like this one; it also includes social collaboration, intellectual cross-pollination, and, for some, participating vicariously in each other's devotional lives.

The task ahead of us is both challenging and fulfilling, as embrace our shared humanity and collective responsibility to foster healing within our nation and the world. Just as there is diversity in God's creation, there is diversity in God's revelation. In essence, working for the common good involves aligning our perspectives with God's vision in a world where suffering often stems from divisive ideologies.

In this theological context, four pivotal words emerge: accepting, respect, commitment, and involving oneself for the well-being of others. It is not easy but they constitute the essential foundations of healthy relationships, forgiveness, peace and reconciliation.

“As we engage with global concerns and foster a sense of international community, our commitment lies in remaining vigilant to the myriad possible paths forward.”

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Beyond Tolerance: Embracing Unity, Diversity, and Mutual Respect in Faith Communities

Mr. Sem Haokip

In the cover story article titled “Working for the Common Good: A Theology of Relationships,” Rev. Dr. Packiam T. Samuel explores the deep complexities of relationships within personal, communal, and interfaith contexts and advocates for a shift towards mutual cooperation and respect. The central thesis of the article is that true community is built not on uniformity but on embracing diversity in a way that enriches and sustains all who are involved. Rev. Dr. Packiam critiques the shallow notions of “integration” and “tolerance” which often fail to address deeper issues of mutual respect and understanding. Instead, he calls for a broader, more inclusive vision of community that acknowledges and values the contributions of all traditions.

He discusses the two main approaches to community building; one that focuses on the preservation of individual cultural and religious heritages, and another that aims for a broader, co-operative inter-community relationship. He warns against the extremes of both self-serving isolationism and oversimplified unification, emphasising the need for a balanced approach where communities recognise their interdependence and mutual responsibilities.

I agree with the view that he brought out about the importance of faith communities working together not just among themselves but also with secular entities, aiming for societal reconciliation and mutual understanding. This is a crucial point to note as we need to move beyond traditional identifiers such as race and nationality, instead encouraging an embrace of cultural and racial diversity through practical and collaborative efforts. Genuine cooperation must transcend mere formalities and involve deep,

meaningful engagement with the divine and with each other.

In the realm of interfaith relations, Rev. Dr. Packiam notes the potential pitfalls of competition and surface cooperation. He advocates for a model of collaboration rooted in humility and genuine commitment to serving humanity and God. This involves working together in various social contexts, from hospitals to educational institutions, fostering mutual respect and partnership. We need to go for a deeper engagement with the theological concept of revelation, encouraging communities to reflect on their own traditions and to remain open to the diverse manifestations of divine grace.

Rev. Dr. Paickam’s article presents the following broad ideas which is summarised with relevant Bible verses for clarity:

- **Unity amidst Diversity:** Rev. Dr. Packiam discusses the challenges communities face today, where differences often lead to division and conflict, such

as in marriages or among various ethnic or religious groups. He advocates for working towards the common good as a unifying principle, which echoes the Biblical call for unity in diversity. Ephesians 4:3 states, "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace," emphasizing the importance of striving together despite differences.

This concept of ‘Unity amidst diversity’ emphasises the harmonious coexistence and collaboration of different people or groups despite their varied backgrounds, beliefs, or practices. For example, after the Pentecost, the Christian community from diverse backgrounds came together in Jerusalem. And despite their differences in nationality, socio-economic status, and

...we need to move beyond traditional identifiers such as race and nationality, instead encouraging an embrace of cultural and racial diversity through practical and collaborative efforts.

cultural practices, they were united in their faith in Jesus Christ. Acts 2:44-45 describes how they shared their possessions and cared for one another, demonstrating unity amidst diversity. In 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, Paul compares the church to a body composed of different parts, each with its unique function. Despite their diversity in gifts and roles, Paul stresses the interconnectedness and mutual dependence of believers, promoting unity in diversity. By embracing diversity while nurturing unity, communities can draw strength from their differences and work together towards common goals of peace, justice, and mutual flourishing.



• **Cooperation over Competition:** Rev. Dr. Packiam critiques competitive attitudes among faith communities, highlighting how rivalry over followers or resources can detract from serving humanity. This resonates with Jesus's teachings on humility and service in Mark 10:43-45, "Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all." Hence, Cooperation and not competition is essential for sincere service and unity.

This concept of 'Cooperation over competition' underscores the idea of prioritising collaboration and mutual support rather than striving for superiority or advantage over others. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul uses the analogy of the body to illustrate how different spiritual gifts contribute to the unity and function of the church. Instead of competing for recognition or status, believers are encouraged to recognise and appreciate the diverse gifts given by the Holy Spirit for the common good. In Mark 10:43-45, Jesus teaches his disciples about the nature of leadership and service, emphasising that true greatness comes from serving others rather than seeking power or dominance. This teaching promotes a cooperative spirit where individuals use their talents and resources to benefit others rather than outdo them. By embracing cooperation, communities can leverage their collective strengths to address challenges, promote social justice, and build a more compassionate and peaceful and thriving society.

• **Embracing Diversity with Respect:** Rev. Dr. Packiam argues for embracing diversity with mutual respect and understanding, rejecting both communalism and syncretism. This mirrors in Paul's message in Romans 12:16, "Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited," which encourages humility and respect in relationships, thus fostering genuine unity.

The concept of 'Embracing diversity with respect' emphasises the recognition, appreciation, and acceptance of diverse backgrounds, cultures, beliefs, and practices within communities. This principle is foundational in fostering inclusive environments where individuals and groups feel valued and respected. In Acts 10:34-35, Peter realises that God shows no favouritism but accepts people from every nation who fear him and do what is right. This encounter challenges Peter's previous understanding of cultural and religious boundaries, leading him to embrace the diversity of God's creation. In John 4:4-42, Jesus' interaction with the Samaritan woman at the well indicates his willingness to engage with and value individuals from different ethnic and religious backgrounds. Despite cultural and historical animosities between Jews and Samaritans, Jesus treats the Samaritan woman with respect and offers her the message of salvation. By drawing on Biblical principles of love, acceptance, and hospitality,

“The concept of 'Embracing diversity with respect' emphasises the recognition, appreciation, and acceptance of diverse backgrounds, cultures, beliefs, and practices within communities.”

communities can create environments where diversity is celebrated, and differences are seen as strengths that enrich the fabric of society.

- **The Role of Faith Communities:** Rev. Dr. Packiam challenges faith communities to move beyond internal divisions and engage in meaningful collaboration for societal well-being. It aligns with Micah 6:8, “And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” Faith communities are called to pursue justice and mercy collectively, contributing positively to society.

The role of faith communities in embracing diversity, promoting cooperation over competition, and fostering unity amidst differences is crucial both historically and in contemporary society. Faith communities, drawing inspiration from their respective religious teachings, play pivotal roles in shaping attitudes, behaviours, and practices that contribute to inclusive and harmonious societies. The early Christian community in Acts 2:42-47 exemplifies a model of unity and mutual support across diverse backgrounds where they shared resources, cared for one another, and welcomed new members, transcending cultural and social barriers to live out their faith in practical ways. In Matthew 22:37-39, Jesus' commands us to love God and love our neighbour as oneself. It emphasises the importance of inclusivity and compassion. This teaching encourages faith communities to extend hospitality, care, and respect to all individuals, regardless of their differences. By embodying the core values of love, compassion, and justice derived from their religious teachings, faith communities contribute to creating inclusive communities where all individuals are valued and respected. Their collective efforts serve as a testament to the transformative power of faith in promoting harmony and cooperation amidst diversity.

- **Reconciliation and Spiritual Renewal:** Rev. Dr. Packiam proposes a theology of relationship that includes reconciliation as integral to spiritual renewal and societal transformation. This reflects Jesus's teachings on reconciliation in Matthew 5:23-24: “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.” Reconciliation precedes worship and spiritual growth.

The concept of ‘reconciliation and spiritual renewal’ explores the transformative power of forgiveness, healing, and restoration in both individual lives and community dynamics. This theme is central to many religious teachings

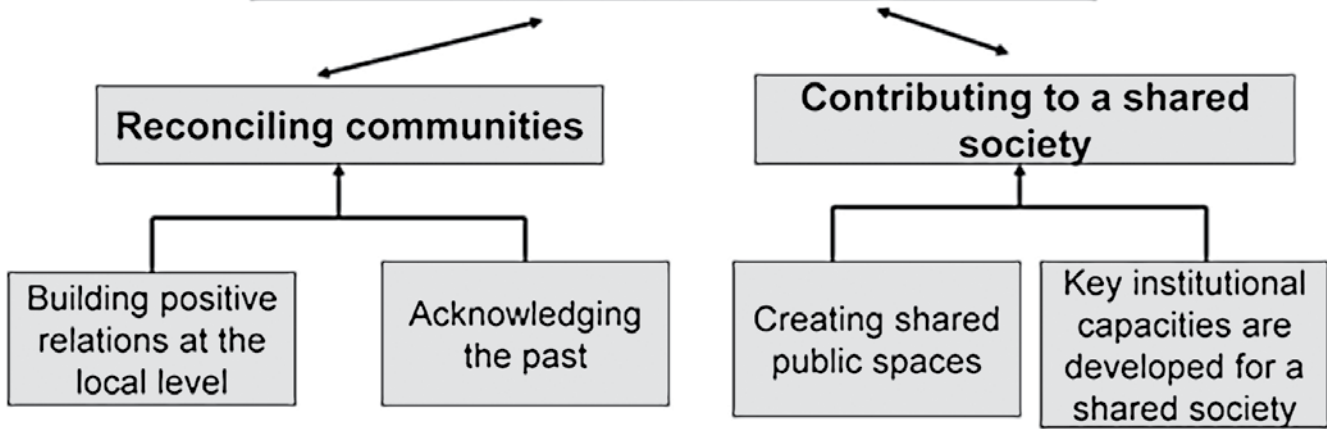
and practices, influencing how faith communities approach conflict resolution, healing from past wounds, and fostering spiritual growth. The parable of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15:11-32, tells the theme of reconciliation and spiritual renewal through the story of a father who welcomes his wayward son with open arms, emphasizing God's unconditional love, forgiveness, and the joy of reconciliation after repentance. Similarly, in 2 Corinthians 5:18-20, the Apostle Paul writes about the ministry of reconciliation entrusted to believers, emphasizing that God reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation. This passage underscores the role of Christians in promoting reconciliation and peace among individuals and communities. In essence, the concept of reconciliation and spiritual renewal emphasizes the importance of forgiveness, healing, and transformative change in addressing conflicts and fostering harmonious relationships.

To conclude, Rev. Dr. Packiam T. Samuel's article advocates for a theology of relationships grounded in Biblical principles of unity, cooperation, respect for diversity, and reconciliation. By aligning individual actions with these principles, faith communities can contribute effectively to societal harmony and justice, fulfilling their call to serve God and humanity. He advocates for practical steps to enhance inter-religious cooperation and dialogue, stressing the need for faith communities to work together in addressing common challenges and to foster a spirit of mutual respect and understanding. He envisions a world where the diverse expressions of faith contribute to a common good, aligned with a divine vision that transcends divisive ideologies and fosters reconciliation and peace.

(Mr. Sem Haokip is the Proprietor of Sawm Inn Edn. & Agritech Pvt. Ltd. Kangpokpi District, Manipur. He can be reached at semhaokip@gmail.com)

FACTS

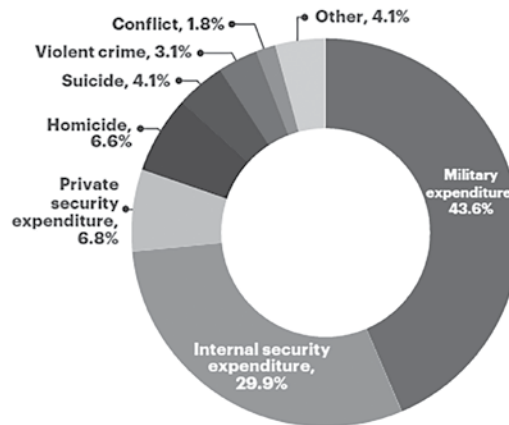
To reinforce progress towards a peaceful and stable society and to promote reconciliation



<https://peaceplatform.seupb.eu/en/story-of-peace/key-themes/reconciliation/>

Composition of the global economic impact of violence, 2022

Military and internal security expenditure accounts for over 73 per cent of the global economic impact of violence.



Source: EIP

In 2023, 6 out of 9 global regions experienced a decline in peacefulness, with only Asia-Pacific, North America and the Middle East and North Africa showing improvement. Among the 12 countries in the region, 6 experienced deteriorations in peacefulness, with Ukraine and Russia facing the most significant declines, ranking as the 1st and 5th largest deteriorations, respectively. Russia maintains its position as the least peaceful country in the region and ranks among the least peaceful nations globally in the 2023 Global Peace Index, securing the 158th overall rank. Russia's peacefulness deteriorated by nearly 5%, reaching its lowest levels since 2008.



The Global Peace Index ranks 163 independent states and territories (collectively accounting for 99.7% of the world's population) according to their levels of peacefulness.

Iceland	1.107	Switzerland	1.357
New Zealand	1.269	Canada	1.389
Ireland	1.288	Hungary	1.411
Denmark	1.296	Finland	1.439
Austria	1.300	Croatia	1.440
Portugal	1.301	Germany	1.462
Slovenia	1.316	Norway	1.465
Czech Republic	1.318	Malaysia	1.471
Singapore	1.326	Bhutan	1.481
Japan	1.336	Slovakia	1.499

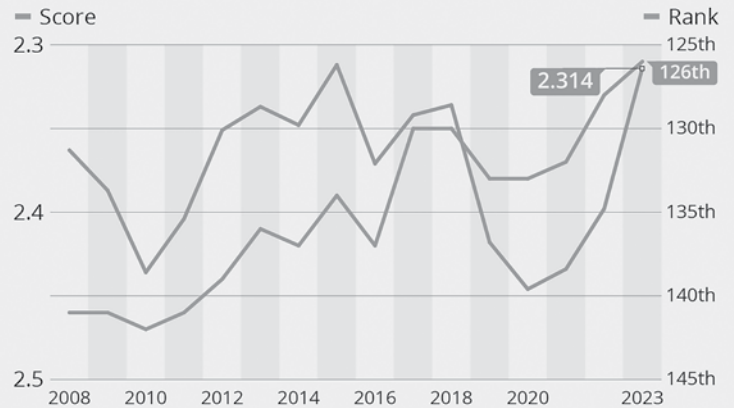
Source: IEP

Over the years, India's score on the Global Peace Index has fluctuated. In its latest release by the Global Peace Index, Institute for Economics and Peace, India ranked 126th.

India's score on the Global Peace Index had bettered drastically, improving in the regions of "violent crime, neighbouring countries relations and political instability", according to the report. However, India was still only the 21st most peaceful country in Asia out of 26 surveyed, coming in right at the bottom of the "medium" category. The economic cost of violence in India at \$600 billion PPP dollars or 6 percent of GDP.

India's Way to a More Peaceful Nation?

Score and rank of India on the Global Peace Index (5= least peaceful)



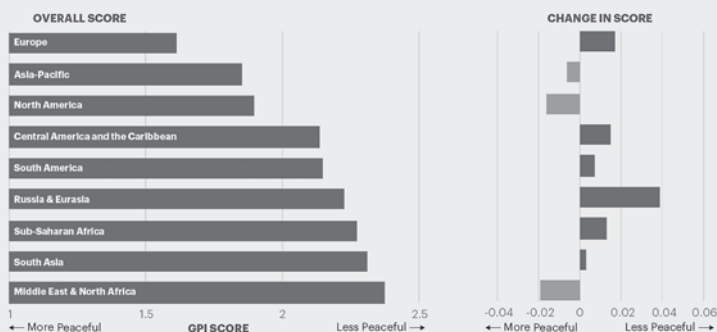
Source: Global Peace Index/Institute for Economics and Peace



<https://www.statista.com/chart/30298/global-peace-index-india/>

The Asia-Pacific region showed a slight improvement in peacefulness, with a 0.32% increase in its Global Peace Index (GPI) score in 2023. Myanmar experienced the largest deterioration in its peace score due to rising political tensions and changes in perceptions of criminality, violent crime, and deaths from internal conflict.

Regional GPI results, 2023



Source: IEP

South Asia

Regional Rank	Country	Overall Score	Score change	Overall Rank
1	Bhutan	1.506	-0.015	15
2	Sri Lanka	1.986	0.022	72
3	Nepal	2.003	-0.057	76
4	Bangladesh	2.128	0.05	101
5	India	2.605	0.088	141
6	Pakistan	3.072	-0.022	153
7	Afghanistan	3.574	-0.002	163
REGIONAL AVERAGE		2.411	0.009	

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- <https://www.statista.com/chart/30298/global-peace-index-india/>
- <https://peaceplatform.seupb.eu/en/story-of-peace/key-themes/reconciliation/>

Biblical Perspective on Forgiveness, Peace and Reconciliation

Rev. Dr. Narendra John

I am delighted that the EFICOR magazine is entitled DRISHTIKONE, which literally means “perspective” in Hindi. In this article, I will share my perspective on the Biblical understanding of forgiveness, peace, and reconciliation. Since the scope of the subject is so vast, I will limit my reflections to those aspects that have been the most formative in my own understanding and pursuit of the subject. I will highlight Biblical reflections, which I have gleaned from select Biblical Dictionaries, and then reflect on them from my personal experience. I trust that these thoughts will be edifying to all who read it.

Forgiveness

According to the Holman Concise Bible Dictionary, “Forgiveness is the gracious act of God by which believers are put into a right relationship to God and transferred from spiritual death to spiritual life through the sacrifice of Jesus. It is also the ongoing gift of God without which our lives as Christians would be ‘out of joint’ and full of guilt. In terms of a human dimension, forgiveness is that act and attitude toward those who have wronged us that restores relationships and fellowship.”¹

Passages such as Psalm 51 powerfully communicate our own need for forgiveness because of our sin, while other verses such as Luke 23:34 highlight how God’s Son, Jesus, forgave his enemies, while he was being tortured, and thereby showing the great cost God bore on our behalf in order to make forgiveness possible. Romans 5:18 which declares, “but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us,” shows us how the offer of forgiveness comes to human beings because of what God in Christ has done for us. Romans 10:9, on the other hand, highlights the need for us to respond to God through confession and belief. God forgives us, and we ought to receive it, but the story of forgiveness does not end with this vertical dimension. There is an important horizontal aspect that we need to reflect upon and practice as well. The Holman Concise Bible Dictionary is once again helpful: “A firm condition for the receiving of God’s forgiveness is the willingness to forgive others (Matt. 6:12, 15; 18:12-35; Luke 11:4).”² How I wish we as

Christians would consistently practice these teachings, especially our need to forgive one another when we are wronged! Christian leadership, in particular, would look very different if we practiced forgiveness. Sadly, what we see many times is just the opposite. May the Lord help us forgive, rather than hold grudges against our brothers and sisters in Christ.

In my own life, I have learned about forgiveness most from the Scriptures. This may sound like a truism, but it is true of my life. To be sure, there were important role models in my family, church, and society that taught me about these Christian virtues, which I will write about as well. But they functioned as secondary reinforcements. In the first instance, though, it was God’s Word that penetrated deep into my being and taught me the need to receive God’s forgiveness in my life and practice forgiveness with others. I cannot gainsay the important role Scripture has played in my understanding of forgiveness. Two specific passages will illustrate this point.

I was raised in a home with five siblings. Every morning and evening, my parents would read the Bible and pray with us. I distinctly remember one evening during Passion Week when we were reading Isaiah 53 and I had an epiphany. I was around four or five at this time, and I cannot fully describe what happened, but I began to cry uncontrollably for a long time. Everyone in the family was surprised. As I recall this incident now, I am certain it was the Lord convicting me of my sin and assuring me of his forgiveness.

Ephesians 4:26 is another passage that has been etched into my life. This verse declares: “Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger.” My wife was the one who taught me to forgive. She practiced the truth of this verse in Ephesians. She would never want to go to sleep angry. She would apologize before the sun went down. With Jesus as her role model, my wife modelled forgiveness for me, and through her practice, I learned about the need to seek forgiveness and liberally practice it.

I am still learning to practice forgiveness. With the help of the Holy Spirit, I seek to emulate this divine characteristic. It is a

¹ Holman Bible Publishers, *Holman Concise Bible Dictionary* (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2010), 242.

² Holman Bible Publishers, *Holman Concise Bible Dictionary*, 243.

journey, a continuous process, but the Lord helps us inculcate these godly virtues as we read His Word and with his help, apply it to our daily lives.

Peace and Reconciliation

“Peace is associated with receptiveness to God’s salvation (Matt. 10:13), freedom from distress and fear (John 14:27; 16:33), security (1 Thess. 5:9-10), mercy (Gal. 6:16; 1 Tim. 1:2), joy (Rom. 14:17; 15:13), grace (Phil. 1:2; Rev. 1:4), love (2 Cor. 13:11; Jude 2), life (Rom. 8:6), and righteousness (Rom. 14:17; Heb. 12:11; Jas. 3:18). Such peace is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22) that forms part of the ‘whole armor of God’ (Eph. 6:11, 13), enabling the Christian to withstand the attacks of the forces of evil.”³

Reconciliation is “a term indicating the changed relationship for the better between persons or groups who formerly were at enmity with each other. The NT encourages reconciliation between estranged parties (Matt. 5:24; Luke 12:58) and spouses (1 Cor. 7:11). But the noun and its corresponding verb most often refer to the new relationship between God and humanity effected by Christ’s redemptive work (Rom. 5:10-11; 11:15; 2 Cor. 5:17-20; Eph. 2:16; Col. 1:20, 22).”⁴

I recall an instance in ministry that brings home the truth of these two biblical concepts. I saw God’s peace and reconciliation transform a church, and I would like to highlight that account here. There was once an issue that caused great conflict between a Church and an educational institution. This was an issue that simmered for over three decades and the root cause of the conflict was money. Many parents who sent their children to the educational institution felt the fees were exorbitantly high; members of the Church shared this sentiment, because their children, too, went to this school. In one Parent-Teacher meeting, the issue of fees was raised, but it could not be resolved amicably. Therefore, it overflowed into angry demonstrations all year against the school.

To break this intense deadlock, some senior members from both groups – the educational institution and the Church – decided to meet to try and find a solution. Both groups realised that they had caused much hurt to the other because of harsh words spoken to each other and because many spread misinformation against the other. At one point, some even wanted to take this matter to the courts. However, during this meeting, they realised that going to court will cause more harm than good. Eventually, both groups came up with concrete resolutions that they could agree upon. The financial issues were mostly resolved as well, barring a few misgivings on the part of some. The pastor of the church then visited these families, to pray with them and to clarify doubts. Overall, after the meeting between both groups, there was a wonderful spirit of reconciliation and peace. This was certainly

God’s doing, and it continues to serve as a powerful reminder of breakthroughs that only God can bring about.

Role Models

I remember one Christian leader, whose practice of forgiveness deeply impacted me. Like any prominent leader in Christian ministry, this man had his fair share of critics and adversaries. He, however, interacted graciously with them. In fact, he even welcomed their input on important decisions related to the organisation. What stood out the most was his willingness to see past any personal hurt they caused him. He always gave them the benefit of doubt and thought highly of them. He even entrusted them with various leadership roles, according to their giftings. As someone who has been in Christian ministry for over fifty years, I know how hard it is to practice forgiveness, but what this Christian leader did still stands out as an example worthy of emulation.

Another noteworthy role model of forgiveness is a Pastor I know. He made it a practice to visit all homes during his pastoral visits. He would even visit homes where he was unwelcome. At least he would attempt to visit them. Some would open the door and welcome him to pray with them, while others refused to even open the door. This did not deter him from praying with them and encouraging his congregants to faithfully follow the Lord. His determination to practice forgiveness eventually softened hearts; some even apologised to him and gladly invited him to their homes. This pastor’s practice of forgiveness has been deeply formative in my own life and ministry.

Conclusion

Forgiveness is the key to peace and reconciliation. It is Jesus Christ’s death on the cross that makes forgiveness possible, provided we ask God for it. Once we receive God’s forgiveness, we are released from the penalty of sin, and what ensues is peace within and without, because of God’s forgiveness. We are reconciled to God and we therefore become, or more accurately, we ought to become, reconcilers. In every situation of conflict, our role is to understand how to reconcile warring factions. With God’s help, we should seek to bring them to the table for discussion, so there can be a peaceful resolution. This is our calling as Christians.

(Rev. Dr. Narendra John served Free Methodist Church India for the last fifty years that included as Bishop for seventeen years. Presently he is Bishop Emeritus and continues to help the churches in their various ministries. He can be reached at njohnfmc@gmail.com)

Restoring Peace Among Communities

Mr. Green Thomas

When we are hurt by someone, we carry the wound and bitterness in our hearts. This bitterness grows each day and is passed on to our children, spreading to future generations, even though they were not part of the original incident. These wounds can be individual, familial, or affect a community. This bitterness can grow into a tree of enmity, increasing daily. A culture of mutual hating develops, leading to name-calling and ongoing conflict for generations. It is like a bomb ready to explode; a small spark can trigger a large conflict, making many innocent people victims of this bitterness.

It is crucial to identify and stop the growth of bitterness. The best way to stop it is through forgiveness. Forgiveness has many advantages, but bitterness can overshadow all of them.

EFICOR has been working with the Malto and Santhal communities in Sahibganj district of Jharkhand. Instead of living in peace, they perpetuate hatred due to wounds passed down from their forefathers. The Malto and Santhal communities live in the Sahibganj District of Jharkhand State in Eastern India.

Jharkhand became a separate state in November 2000. There are 33 million people (approx.) and 13 million of these are poor. The state is known for its rich mineral deposits, yet despite holding 40% of India's mineral wealth, economic development has not sufficiently trickled down to those in need. The poverty level in Jharkhand, as measured by the Tendulkar committee, is one of the highest among all large states, with high levels in both rural and urban areas. The state is inhabited by various people groups and has a large tribal population. There is uneven progress across social groups in Jharkhand, with tribes living under chronic poverty.

EFICOR (The Evangelical Fellowship of India Commission on Relief) has been working in Jharkhand state, particularly in Sahibganj and Pakur districts, among the Pahariya people (also known as Maltos), who are categorised as one of the 75 Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTG) by the Government. They are settled on hilltops in and around Rajmahal Hills in Jharkhand and live in difficult and rugged terrain with limited accessibility.

Their geographical isolation affects their access to services such as healthcare, education, service providers, and communication networks. They rely on agriculture and forests for their livelihood, practicing shifting cultivation, which leads to large-scale destruction of forest areas as forests are cleared every 3 to 5 years, leading to significant depletion.

Additionally, with a growing population and the rising need for more fuel for household consumption and income, their neighbours, the Santhals, encroach on their forest area. The forests in the hills require at least 40 years to regenerate to the same stage, meaning that deforestation occurs 8 to 13 times faster than natural regeneration. This deforestation not only poses environmental problems but also continues to be a source of conflict between the two tribes.

Agricultural production is low, and they are mainly dependent on rainwater which largely affects food availability. The vulnerability of the Maltos is compounded by the improper functioning of government institutions, as they are denied their entitlements due to corruption and misgovernance in the state.

It is crucial to identify and stop the growth of bitterness. The best way to stop it is through forgiveness. Forgiveness has many advantages, but bitterness can overshadow all of them.

in by the British, who are deemed to have usurped the land of the Maltos and pushed them into the hills. This continues to be a point of contention between the two tribes, especially for the Maltos, who continue to blame the Santhals for their poverty and pass on stories of how their lands have been taken away. The Santhals are relatively more educated and have better access to cultivable land and other services. There remains an asymmetrical power relationship between the two tribes, as the Maltos are often powerless in their relationship with the Santhals. Often, the Maltos have to submit to the Santhals as they cross Santhal villages to access markets.

Minimal communication between the two tribes has deepened age-old hatred and entrenched perceptions of threat and distrust. Referring to the Santhals as "Kadakhher," which means "bitter," is

common, with stereotyping playing an important role in providing a sense of orientation as the Maltos attribute collective characteristics to members of the Santhal tribe. The Santhals, on the other hand, are oblivious to these labels and often see the Maltos as powerless. Apart from the historical injustice, in recent years, the Santhals continue to infringe on the forest areas of the Maltos, leading to large-scale destruction of forests. Despite these differences, both communities live in poverty, and with the large-scale destruction of forest land, livelihood continues to be scarce.



EFICOR has been working with both the communities in Jharkhand with a focussed approach to ensure that they live peacefully together.

By conducting thorough background checks and drawing information from all stakeholders through need assessments, EFICOR collects community feedback before implementing any interventions. The following outlines EFICOR's approaches to fostering peace and forgiveness among the communities:

Collaboration and Learning

EFICOR actively engages in inter-agency coordination (IAC) to access resources and expertise beyond its immediate scope, ensuring comprehensive community accountability. When designing projects or relief interventions, EFICOR considers the programmes of other organisations and authorities to address any gaps. A culture of learning and continual improvement is integral to EFICOR, involving constant interaction with service users to implement changes and adaptations based on community feedback. EFICOR also creates platforms for stakeholders to share their findings and foster a culture of peace among all community members.

Forming Local Peace committees

Communal harmony can be achieved by leveraging the local capacities within communities to rebuild fractured and estranged relationships. EFICOR, in collaboration with local community leaders, has formed Local Peace Committees among the Malto and Santhal communities in Sahibganj. These committees are seen as effective and necessary peacebuilding structures at the local level. Central to their success are three concepts: participation, sustainability, and utilising local knowledge and skills.

“In all conflicts, it is essential to recognise our own contributions and seek repentance. Seeking forgiveness is vital to preventing bitterness. In every situation, our efforts should always be directed towards peace, not conflict.”

By integrating these concepts into its approach, EFICOR has influenced and built peace between the two communities. Community members are actively involved, working together to rebuild relationships, and the committees become valuable instruments that use traditional and local skills to resolve conflicts. Evidence from cases in Sahibganj show that these Peace Committees have been instrumental in preventing communities from engaging in conflict.

Mediating conflicts through Peace Workshops and socio-cultural activities

EFICOR's work among the Malto and Santhal communities is grounded in the Biblical principle from Ephesians 4:32 (ESV) “Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.” Historically, prejudice and hatred between these communities have been prevalent. EFICOR played a crucial role in mediating conflicts by organising Peace Workshops, socio-cultural activities and sports, and encouraging community leaders to seek and offer forgiveness. These efforts have led to a reduction in conflicts and increased cooperation. Members of these communities now attend each other's weddings, worship services, and funerals, and exchange gifts instead of harboring hate.

Embracing Unity and Love: Maisa's Transformation

*In the village of Bishanpur, located in Sahibganj district, Jharkhand lived Mr. *Maisa, a prominent leader of the Santhali community. Known for his significant influence among the locals, Mr. Maisa held a critical stance toward the Malto people, fostering long-standing animosity between the Malto and Santhal communities. He used to openly express his resentment and encouraged other members of his community to harbour negative sentiments toward the Malto community.*

EFICOR organised a Transformative Peace Workshop in their village and Mr. Maisa also attended the Workshop. Driven by curiosity, he decided to participate, unaware of the profound impact this decision would have on his life. During the workshop,

Maisa experienced a crucial realisation: That every human being is created in the image of God. He began to understand that divisions based on ethnicity or community were superficial, and that all individuals are equal and deserving love and respect. Maisa expressed genuine remorse for his past behaviour, acknowledging that he had wrongfully criticised and harboured animosity toward the other community. In a moment of repentance, he recognised the importance of unity and respect among all people and saw the need for reconciliation and harmony between the Malto and Santhal communities.

Inspired by this realisation, Maisa decided to foster friendship and cooperation with the Malto community. He pledged to support and assist them, transcending the barriers that had previously separated the two communities. He also became an advocate for love, compassion, and mutual assistance, teaching both communities about their importance.

Maisa's efforts to bridge the two communities began to bear fruit. He actively promoted unity and encouraged others to embrace a spirit of togetherness. His words and actions resonated with the people, gradually transforming the village's atmosphere and fostering an environment of understanding and acceptance. Maisa's transformation not only impacted his own life but also created a ripple effect throughout the community. The seeds of love, forgiveness, and cooperation that he sowed began to blossom, leading to a more harmonious relationship between the Malto and Santhal communities. His leadership and dedication to peacebuilding continue to inspire others, as he wholeheartedly commits himself to the betterment of his community and the pursuit of peaceful coexistence.

This real-life story of transformation highlight EFICOR's crucial role in guiding communities towards building peace.

*Name Changed

In all conflicts, it is essential to recognise our own contributions and seek repentance. Seeking forgiveness is vital to preventing bitterness. In every situation, our efforts should always be directed towards peace, not conflict. If we have contributed to a conflict, we must ask for forgiveness and strive to forgive others, as God forgives us. Adopting a non-violent approach is an effective way of addressing conflicts and building peace in society.

(Mr. Green Thomas works with the EFICOR as Master Trainer in the Training Department. He can be reached at greenstomas@eficor.org)

Called to Serve the Needy

The Khajuri Prarthana Bhawan (Church) was initiated by Pastor Sukh Lal Panna in 1994 at Khajuri village in Garhwa district, Jharkhand. The vision and mission of the church is to serve the needy through integral mission work. A thorough understanding and conviction of wholistic mission, grounded in Scripture, motivates the church to put its belief into practice through many avenues of work among the communities. With just 40 members initially, the Church gradually expanded and they now have 100 members.

the initiative of the community, ensuring that even the poor households get electricity and LPG connection, setting up medical camps, etc.

Due to all these good works, there is much cooperation and good relation developed between the church and community. People are now able to have access to safe drinking water. They are now able to make use of the road and it is easy to reach the marketplace and other neighbouring villages and towns. They now have sufficient electricity in the village.



The pastor came in contact with EFICOR in 2011 and he was invited to attend a workshop on Integral Mission. He was motivated not just to work for the poor but also to work alongside the community for their development. With this motivation, the church started working with the community and was able to see a lot of changes in the lives of the people. He had earlier thought that Christian ministry was all about caring for the church members and only about development of the church but this workshop had changed his perspectives.

The church did various kinds of work with the community such as setting up tuition centre for the children and forming self-help groups for the women. They also do awareness on environment and creation care, as a result of which the community became environmentally conscious and mindful of not cutting trees or burning the forests. Government Welfare schemes such as BPL ration cards were made for most of the poor households. Various development work happened due to the initiative of the church such as - road construction with

Literacy levels improved and the community also became more aware of the importance of education. Most of the children are now enrolled in government or private schools. The poor in the community became aware of their rights and were able to access various Government welfare schemes which enabled them to have equitable access to livelihood.

However, there are also challenges faced by the church as there are not much employment opportunities in the village besides agricultural activities. Despite all these, the church has been able to successfully work along with the community for their own development. The efforts of the Khajuri Prarthana Bhawan have therefore significantly impacted the lives of the community in and around Khajuri village.

(Pastor Sukh Lal Panna is the Pastor of Khajuri Prarthana Bhawan, Jharkhand. He can be reached at sukhalalpanna6264@gmail.com)

Healing Touch

Swayam Shikshan Prayog, a Non-governmental organisation based in Tamil Nadu, has mobilised the women's groups to ensure basic health facilities to tsunami-affected communities.

When the tsunami hit South Indian coastal regions like Tamil Nadu in 2004, the contribution of a civil society organisation named Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP), based in Mumbai, was commendable. The organisation has been mobilising disaster stricken communities to rebuild their lives in a sustainable and participatory manner in many states for more than 15 years. The organisation had conducted a participatory mapping process in tsunami-affected villages by involving earthquake survivors from Maharashtra and Gujarat. It found a critical gap in post-disaster activities: inadequate health service delivery and access to safe drinking water and sanitation. Tsunami severely damaged health and drinking water supply infrastructures. The survey also found that women suffered most from this gap as they traditionally prioritised their husbands' and children's health neglecting their own.

Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP) used its experiences of working with the women groups during and post-earthquakes in Maharashtra (1993) and Gujarat (2001). This resulted in the formation of local health governance groups (HGGs) called Arogya Sakhis for Health Awareness and Action (ASHAA) in 2005. These are women-led groups that address their basic health needs post-disaster. The focus on addressing the health gap aims at building more resilient communities. Awareness of health, sanitation and basic services has reduced the critical vulnerability of these affected populations to future disasters. Moreover, these groups address the gap by addressing two critical but complementary processes:

Creating grassroots demand for better health services, sanitation and working with government service providers to improve quality access to health and basic services and accountability of service providers to communities.

The programme was initiated in 10 selected villages of Cuddalore district, Tamil Nadu. Initially, the ASHAA structure began with Health Guides (HGs) at the helm of affairs. Health guides are women who receive specialised training and are responsible for the education of ASHAA volunteers for two villages each.

HGs are trained by local physicians about important health subjects, including antenatal and postnatal care, family planning, and treatment for a host of ailments.

HGG leaders call village-wide meetings to convey the



importance of working collectively to improve community health and sanitation. This leads to the formation of ASHA groups at the village level comprising mostly of women volunteers. Women active in various village activities are picked up by their peers and the SSP during local meetings to be ASHAA. Although there are no set criteria or skill prescribed for being an ASHAA, a strong and genuine interest in improving community health are some qualities expected. SSP constantly works with these groups and helps them in the identification of health problems and on finding solutions to them. This process of partnership leads to the emergence of a clear vision for the ASHAA. This group of women undertakes village settlements mapping and household surveys to understand major health problems, related expenditures and access to health services. In the beginning they found that people spent \$100-120 per year on doctor fees, medicine and transportation to access health services. This was in addition to wage losses incurred. A strong preference to private clinics over government-managed Primary Health Centers (PHCs) was reported due to wrong perception of the quality of services being poor, corrupt and being ill-equipped to handle their health needs. This information was effectively used by leaders to organize women to address the health needs of their villages. Their key responsibilities included:

Promotion of Herbal Medicines and Community Health Fund

As part of their overall illness prevention strategy, HGGs distribute traditional homemade herbal medicines. They impart training on preparation of herbal medicines and also on developing herbal gardens for minor ailments. Additionally, to sustain the healing services and network of groups, HGGs have created a common health fund for the community with contributions from every member on a monthly basis. This

fund is used for various purposes such as supporting the health needs of the most vulnerable in the community.

Linkage to Private Service Providers

Beyond the well-established relationship between HGG and PHCs, the federation of HGGs have created a partnership with a nearby private hospital for discounted medication and minor surgeries. The federation also maintains a health database of all doctors, hospitals, pharmacies and medical laboratories for use in organising camps, health talks as well as to refer and accompany patients to their medical appointments.

Increased Awareness on Health and Sanitation

HGG has brought a higher degree of awareness on health, seasonal illness, sanitation and environmental health among women.

The initiative has been scaled up to the status of an institution. In March 2008, the Women's Federation for Disaster Management and Community Development (WFDMCD) was constituted with representation from AASHA groups. It is mandated to coordinate, strengthen and standardize the HGG activities across each district and to sustain and support these groups. Further, to lessen their reliance on SSP and outside funding, the Federation charges Rs. 10 to each member to meet administrative cost and also to support various initiatives of HGG. After successful implementation and overwhelming response, this initiative has been extended to 11 more villages in Cuddalore and 20 villages in Nagapattinam district. By promoting community access to government-run healthcare facilities and simultaneously collaborating with Primary Health centres to effectively deliver services to tsunami-hit communities, HGGs are on the one hand consumers of basic services and at the same time, they are positioning themselves as collaborators, working with government to improve its ability to reach the poorest of the poor. The impacts of this initiative are many. A few of them are listed below:

Stronger linkage with PHCs and increased accountability to communities

HGGs have enabled PHC staff to reach their target population. HGGs have also made the PHCs more accountable. For example, household visits of the village nurse have gone up ensuring timely treatment. Prior to the tsunami, community level health camps were organised occasionally. But now they are being done regularly and also at the demand of the community.



Increased use of PHCs and decreased reliance on private services: Prior to the formation of HGGs, public health facilities were hardly utilised because of poor perception about the services. Private facilities were preferred leading to high health expenditures. However, HGGs have made service delivery reliable and accountable. This has resulted in increased use of government facilities. HGG members claim that health expenditures have decreased by approximately 72 percent since their intervention. This drop in health expenditures can be attributed to the improved accessibility to government health services.

Community Trainers

SSP has facilitated women's groups to address community health in their village after tsunami. SSP trained community trainers who could become resource persons to provide training to other communities on community health, water and sanitation, government linkage and alternate livelihoods. There are nearly 160 women trainers functioning in 41 villages of Cuddalore and Nagapattinam districts.

Post-disaster, the health of surviving communities often suffers and sanitation standards fall, especially when residing in temporary shelters. In case of a future disaster, women are more equipped to make collective demands to relief organizations, government agencies, and service providers to provide a coordinated response to their communities such that resources and aid are used most efficiently and effectively. Increased awareness on the promotion of health, disease prevention, and sanitation will undoubtedly help to reduce the risk posed by disasters to the health of affected communities. Additionally, when women actively facilitate health services, such as health camps, and distribute PHC and herbal medicines, communities willingly come forward to access health care and treatment. Furthermore, stronger community links are critical for the mobilisation of people pre and post-disasters.

(Adapted from the book 'Turning the Tide: Good Practices in Community Based Disaster Risk Reduction', published by EFICOR and Sphere India, 2010, pp.103-106).

Books on our Desk

The Book of Forgiving: The Fourfold Path for Healing Ourselves and Our World

By Desmond Tutu and Mpho Tutu, HarperOne, 2014, 240 Pages

Mrs. Joan Lalromawi

In this ground breaking collaborative effort by a father-daughter duo, Nobel Peace Laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu and his daughter Reverend Mpho Tutu, unfold a profound exploration of forgiveness within the pages of this book. Before delving into the mechanics of forgiveness, the authors eloquently underscore the necessity of forgiveness. They assert that forgiveness is integral to healing not just individual hearts, but the world at large. It is a process which is essential for personal peace, transcending mere absolution for others. Within each of us lies the capacity to derive joy from suffering, to discover hope amidst despair, and to mend fractured relationships.

The authors highlight two fundamental truths: Every transgression can be forgiven, and every individual is deserving of forgiveness. Recognising our interconnectedness - whether through shared heritage, circumstances, or humanity - underscores the universality of both needing forgiveness and extending it. They contend that within our own brokenness, we inadvertently harm others, and forgiveness is the pathway to wholeness. Ultimately, the choice between forgiveness and retaliation shapes our strength and liberation. True peace, they assert, is the fruit of forgiveness.

Drawing from the experiences of post-apartheid South Africa, the authors delineate four essential steps towards forgiveness that one must traverse:

- 1) Telling one's story and witnessing the anguish. This is the step where the victim and offender honestly share their own stories of anguish without any self-justification.
- 2) Admitting the wrong and acknowledging the harm. In this step, both parties acknowledge the harm caused, offering their perspectives on the hurt inflicted.
- 3) Asking for forgiveness and granting forgiveness. This is about uttering the transformative words, "I forgive you" to the other person (s) and to really mean it.
- 4) Renewing or releasing the relationship. This is the last step of releasing resentments in the old relationship and charting

out new ways to restore or renew the relationship.

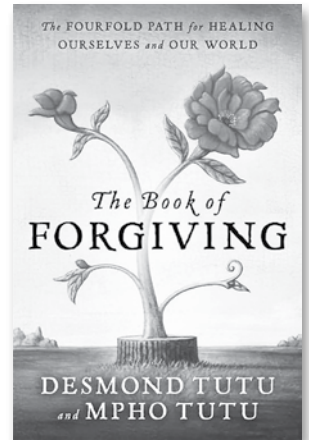
The essence of the book delves around this four-fold steps of forgiveness. The authors emphasise the importance of following these steps sequentially for effective healing. Each chapter is filled with reflections and personal stories, and practical exercises

corresponding to each step. The narrative style is gentle, thoughtful and persuasive, encouraging readers to engage in personal introspection. Poems and mindfulness exercises are provided at the end of every chapter to aid in this process. Through poignant narratives and insightful guidance, the authors empower readers to navigate forgiveness in a tangible and impactful way.

Even when we acknowledge our interconnectedness, forgiveness remains a challenging path to tread. Some days, it feels like we are taking two steps backward for every one forward. It is a journey. And like any journey, whether big or small, it starts with the willingness to take that initial, hesitant step. Without willingness, the authors caution that this journey becomes insurmountable. Prior to compassion lies the willingness to embrace empathy. Prior to transformation, one must believe in the potential for change and be open to being changed. Before forgiveness can flourish, there must be a readiness to entertain the notion of forgiving.

Although the book delves deep into the subject of forgiveness, it somehow falls short in providing a comprehensive framework for restitution or penalties within civil society, particularly concerning grave atrocities like genocide. Nonetheless, "The Book of Forgiving" remains an indispensable resource for anyone seeking the path of forgiveness. It serves as a valuable tool for both personal reflection and group exploration on the concept of forgiveness.

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Reconcile: Conflict Transformation for Ordinary Christians

By John Paul Lederach, Herald Press, 2014, 192 Pages

Ms. Mary Luanthianching

In his illuminating book titled 'Reconcile: Conflict Transformation for Ordinary Christians,' the author, John Paul Lederach, delves into the phenomena of conflict and the process of conflict transformation, drawing on his extensive experiences in international conciliation. He reminds readers of the Biblical call to peace-making and reconciliation, weaving stories of war-torn villages, the suffering of innocents, and the tireless efforts of the conciliation teams to usher in peace amidst prayers, machine guns, and threats. While addressing the damage and destruction caused by conflicts, Lederach highlights the potential of conflicts to open a holy path towards revelation and reconciliation. By recounting his personal experiences of facing danger and interacting with both victims and perpetrators of violence, he offers a window into his journey along this holy path, sharing the lessons learned along the way.

Drawing inspiration from the reconciliation journey of Jacob with his brother Esau, Lederach describes reconciliation as both a destination and a journey. He illustrates how this journey involves an encounter with the self, others (including our enemies), and God. Lederach then examines the essence of conflict transformation by exploring the life of Jesus, the ultimate model of reconciliation. Jesus' compassionate life underscores three essential reconciliation arts: loving our neighbour by noticing mutual humanity; loving ourselves through self-reflection and self-care; and loving God by embodying His love and accompanying others through committed friendship.

Emphasising the Christian call to reconciliation, Lederach highlights the importance of faith in the reconciliation ministry. Unlike realism, which sees tomorrow as the slave of today, Christians look towards the Bible, where champions of faith have changed their reality by living according to a vision of the future. He points out that conflict is a natural part of human relationships, present since the creation of mankind. Thus, while conflict itself is not a sin, sin may enter in the form of attitudes of superiority, oppression, and refusal to listen. Lederach cautions readers to be careful about who they see as the enemy, as it is easy to fall into the trap of self-deception and superiority. It is crucial to identify human sameness even with our enemies and search to find a trace of God in everyone. However, he warns that perceptions of enemies rooted in pain and suffering are unlikely to

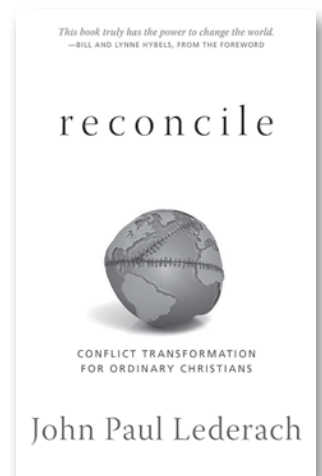
shift with rational discourse. Reconciliation must be found in being present and in respecting and acknowledging the suffering, fear, and bitterness of the lived experience of violence. We remember and change, not forgive and forget.

The author addresses the necessity of the coexistence of truth, mercy, justice, and peace, drawing on various Bible texts, from the sermons of Jesus to the letters of Paul. He elaborates on the principles and practical guidelines for handling conflict, emphasising our mission as Christians to align ourselves with God, who is working to reconcile all of creation to Himself. Overall, this book provides valuable first-hand information from an experienced mediator who encourages readers to embrace the challenge of moving towards, rather than away from, their enemies.

Lederach's approach to reconciliation may be criticised for being overly idealistic or abstract, as well as for lacking concrete guidance on how to handle the difficulties that arise in real-world conflicts. Additionally, the book's emphasis on individual transformation may overlook systemic injustices and power disparities that perpetuate injustice and conflict. Moreover, the book could benefit from including perspectives from under-represented or marginalised groups.

Even so, 'Reconcile' by John Paul Lederach provides important insights into the reality of conflict resolution and Christian faith. The book is a crucial resource for promoting reconciliation and healing, offering practical wisdom for mediators and community leaders worldwide, especially those interested in the intersection of faith and conflict transformation.

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Journey towards Reconciliation

Rev. Dino L. Touthang

We are living in a world where relationships are facing severe strains. Hurt feelings and conflicts surround us like smog, whether between individuals, families, communities, or nations. As a result, conflict resolution is a global concern. Conflicts can arise from various causes: Geo-political, socio-economic, racial, ethnic, religious, or interpersonal. Among all these, inter-personal conflicts affect and influence human lives more than any of the other conflicts because they occur at the very basic level - between spouses, families, workers and management, among colleagues, indeed in all spheres of human relationships. These are the conflicts that can easily spiral into painful situations if left unresolved.

Key aspects of Reconciliation

Reconciliation is the restoration of relationships after estrangement. It is the process of healing and coming together again after a breach in relationship, whether between individuals, communities, or nations.

1. Reconciliation is a Process.

Reconciliation is not a quick-fix solution. It involves both parties coming together to discuss the causes of conflict, to understand and accept differences, and to heal. (Read & Reflect - Matthew 5:23-24).

2. Reconciliation Requires Preventive and Curative Measures.

It is not enough to address the present situation of discord; reconciliation also involves preventing future discord. (Read & Reflect - Romans 12:18 – “*If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone*”).

3. Reconciliation at both Macro and Micro Levels

Reconciliation is needed on a large scale - between nations, communities, and people groups - but it must also happen on a personal level. (Read & Reflect - James 3:18 – “*Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness*”).

4. Mutual Loss and Gain

Reconciliation requires mutual compromise. It is a collaborative process. Both parties need to be willing to sacrifice and work together for reconciliation to happen. (Read & Reflect - Philippians 2:4 – “*Not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others*”)

5. Forgiveness Precedes Reconciliation

Forgiveness is the foundation of reconciliation. Without forgiveness, there can be no true healing. (Read & Reflect - Colossians 3:13 – “*Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you*”).

Justice and Forgiveness

Forgiveness is often complicated by our desire for justice. In conflicts, people tend to see justice from their own perspective. What seems just to one party, may seem unfair to the other. As Christians, we look to God as the ultimate standard of justice and forgiveness. It is only through His forgiveness that we can learn to forgive others.

Peace making: A Christian Responsibility

Peace making is not just the responsibility of those directly involved in conflict. We are all called to be mediators and peacemakers in the world around us. Too often, like Cain, we ask, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” (Genesis 4:9), avoiding responsibility and involvement in others’ problems. Jesus Himself is the ultimate example of a peacemaker. He reconciled humanity to God through His sacrifice, and as His followers, we are called to carry on His mission of reconciliation. John Stott, in his book *Issues Facing Christians Today*, writes that God is a peacemaker and Jesus Christ is a peacemaker. As God’s children and Christ’s disciples, we too must embrace the call to be peacemakers.

Questions for reflection:

1. How can you apply the process of reconciliation in your own relationships?
2. What steps can we take as a church community to foster reconciliation?
3. Reflecting on Jesus as the ultimate mediator, how can we become more proactive in peace making?
4. In what ways do you struggle with forgiving others? How does God’s forgiveness toward you influence your ability to forgive?

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IDEAS FOR ACTION

AS AN INDIVIDUAL

- Make a conscious effort to forgive those who have wronged you. If you struggle with forgiveness, seek guidance.
- Write a letter of forgiveness in your private journal to help release negative emotions.
- Seek reconciliation by reaching out to individuals and accepting differences.
- Engage in community services that promote mutual understanding.
- Volunteer and participate in conflict resolution workshops.
- Encourage open dialogue to address conflicts and misunderstandings respectfully.
- Listen actively and empathetically to others' perspectives.

AS A CHURCH

- Your Church could organise educational workshops and seminars on forgiveness, peace, and reconciliation.
- Establish support groups where individuals can share their experiences and struggle with forgiveness.
- Provide counselling services for those dealing with mental health issues or conflicts, and encourage them to practice daily acts of forgiveness.
- Your Church can form Peace and Reconciliation Committees dedicated to promoting peace within the Church and the wider community.
- Facilitate peace-building activities such as inter-faith dialogues, cultural exchange programmes, and community outreach.
- Your Church could dedicate Special Services to themes of forgiveness, peace, and reconciliation.
- Partner with other churches, religious organisations, and community groups to address broader social issues and promote peace.
- Host events that bring diverse community members together, fostering mutual understanding and respect.
- Create platforms (such as newsletters, social media, or church meetings) where members can share their stories of forgiveness and reconciliation.
- Use art, music, and drama to explore and express themes of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Drishtikone is Transitioning to an Electronic Format

Drishtikone has been in print since 1994, and we are deeply thankful to the Lord for His guidance over these years. We also extend our sincere gratitude to readers like you, whose continued support has been vital to sustaining the publication of our magazine.

Your feedback has shown that Drishtikone has been a blessing, shaping evangelical perspectives on social issues and inspiring action.

Beginning with the next issue, EFICOR will transition Drishtikone to an exclusively electronic format, which will be easily accessible for download on our website.

We encourage you to continue partnering with us in our mission to influence the nation.

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