

# What Is JUSTPEACE?

Tom Porter

JUSTPEACE Center for Mediation and Conflict Transformation is in its second year of work in The United Methodist Church. Based in Evanston, IL, the center is governed by its own board of directors, with Bishop Susan Hassinger as President, Tom Porter as Executive Director, and Mark Mancao as Director of the Evanston office (see article by Mary Logan, page 3).

Our mission is to prepare and help United Methodists engage conflict constructively in ways that strive for justice, reconciliation, resource preservation, and restoration of community in the church and world. More specifically, we are committed to working and learning with the church and others to:

- ❖ Change attitudes toward conflict, seeing them as opportunities for growth, learning, and even God's revelation.

- ❖ Choose processes that are constructive and genuinely engage us, such as dialogue, mediation, peace-making and healing circles, appreciative inquiry, and communal discernment.
- ❖ Develop skills and spiritual practices, such as listening for understanding, speaking the truth in love, using the imagination, and being forgiving.
- ❖ Practice a ministry of reconciliation.

Congregations in the midst of change know conflict and the toll it takes on individuals and on the resources of the community. Recent studies show that 26% of churches are highly conflicted and that 1 out of every 50 churches is sued each year. We all bear the scars and pain of destructive conflict. We all know its cost to financial and human resources. The staff and board of JUSTPEACE are interested in opportunities to help and to learn from congregations in conflict, and to promote healing in the church. JUSTPEACE helps people and institutions in conflict through interventions, referrals, coaching, and training. We have a dream that churches can become reconciliation centers for their

communities, and we are working with other church agencies to make this dream a reality.

The United Methodist Church is gifted with conflict transformers. JUSTPEACE hosts an annual "Gathering," an opportunity for conflict transformers to meet, learn from each other, and support each other. The first Gathering in March 2001 brought 130 United Methodists and other conflict transformers together at Scarritt-Bennett Center in Nashville, TN.

The next Gathering will be March 18-20, 2002. Details are available at [www.justpeaceumc.org](http://www.justpeaceumc.org). For help with a conflict or to join our network, call 847-425-6526 or e-mail [justpeace@justpeaceumc.org](mailto:justpeace@justpeaceumc.org). People on the JUSTPEACE mailing list receive the newsletter, *Pathways to JUSTPEACE*, and announcements of training opportunities and other events relevant to conflict transformation work in the church.

*Thomas W. Porter, executive director of JUSTPEACE, is an attorney, a professional mediator, and former chancellor of the New England Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church.*



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This is a periodic newsletter to resource FaithQuest congregational leaders.

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## NEWS & NOTES FOR FAITH QUEST

# LEADERS

THEME :  
PEACE-  
MAKING  
(add to Tab K, "Journey," in your leader notebook)

## Churches as God's Peace in the World

When we examine the world's current reality in relation to God's vision for Creation, we quickly see a wide gap. The violence of terrorism overwhelms us. Many of us experience conflict and violence in smaller ways in daily life. Yet God calls us to an another way of living together. Images of shalom and visions of a peaceful kingdom permeate the Bible and the life of Jesus.

As your congregation examines God's call and vision for ministry in your community, how do you respond to this "dis-connect"? How do you respond to conflict and violence? The last issue of *News and Notes for FaithQuest Leaders* focused on building skills for conflict management within the congregation; this issue pushes beyond the church walls to face the conflict in God's world all around us.

We invite you to consider a ministry of peacemaking. Bishop Ott describes his vision for a Peace Center Church. Tom Porter describes the new United Methodist Center for Mediation

and Conflict Transformation. This new ministry, JustPeace, shows God's surprising creativity. It developed through the General Council on Finance and Administration, our United Methodist agency for pensions, insurance, and administrative matters—not where I'd expect a peacemaker ministry! Mary Logan tells the story.

Also in this issue, JoAnn Eslinger, GBOD staff, provides devotional reflection on Amos 5.



*Betsey Heavner (bheavner@gbod.org) is Director of FaithQuest, United Methodist General Board of Discipleship, Nashville, TN.*

## Peace Centers: A Bishop's Vision

Bishop Donald Ott

Conflicts, though inevitable, can be a gift from God. The congregation can be a place where conflicts are transformed into positive relationships.

I have a deepening conviction that some United Methodist congregations are intended to be places of conflict transformation/peace restoration. My vision is that at least 1% of all United Methodist churches worldwide will self-consciously prepare to be, and declare themselves to be, such a place in their communities.

Two objects have entered my life during the last decade—the peace pole and anointing oil. Throughout my episcopal

area, peace poles have been placed outside church buildings and homes of believers. They



declare a welcome to all and an intention to be fellowship zones of peace in the name of

Jesus, the "prince of peace." Anointing oil has had increased use at bedsides and healing services. People have sought new beginnings with God's blessing. Pastors have anointed, as a sign of God's action in making all things new.

The pole and oil are the signs of the desire for relationships that are whole and holy—with God, self, and others, especially with persons encountered daily in homes, neighborhoods, and towns of every size and kind.

My vision is that people engaged in relational conflict, or suffering the aftermath of conflict, will call or visit their local United Methodist

*Continued on page 2*

## Looking ahead ...

The theme of the January 2002 news letter will be Practical Techniques for FaithQuest Churches. How are new insights from FaithQuest affecting your congregation? Send us your new meeting and planning techniques so that we can share them with other congregations.



### National Small-Group Ministries Conference

July 24-27, 2002  
Loew's Vanderbilt Plaza Hotel, Nashville, TN  
[www.2or3.org](http://www.2or3.org)

Register a group from your church! There will be a special gathering of FaithQuest congregations, plus plenaries and workshops to build faith-forming groups in your church!

## The Bookshelf

These books are reviewed for your own meditation and reflection.

**More Light, Less Heat**  
*How Dialogue Can Transform Christian Conflicts into Growth*  
Joseph Phelps (Jossey-Bass, 2000)

"Dialogue is active peacemaking at its most basic level," writes the author. A good study book for congregational groups, *More Light, Less Heat* combines theory with practical examples, procedures, and stories from congregations. Participants will learn skills for dialogue at church, in families, and in the community. A helpful chart (Table 2.1) distinguishes debate from dialogue. Phelps offers clear, concrete models to help persons better articulate their beliefs while understanding the beliefs of others. The appendix includes lists of related resources. Available from Cokesbury, [www.cokesbury.com](http://www.cokesbury.com), 800-672-1789. Used copies available online: [www.half.com](http://www.half.com), [www.alibris.com](http://www.alibris.com), and [www.abebooks.com](http://www.abebooks.com).



**Conflict in the Church Video**  
(Mennonite Central Committee)

This two-part video offers alternate ways of viewing and dealing with conflict in congregations. Part I, Division or Diversity (10 minutes), shows how conflict can be used to strengthen a body of believers through examples from scripture, church history, and contemporary situations. It offers constructive congregational conflict management skills. Part II, Living with Conflict (30 minutes), features three hypothetical congregations wrestling with process and power issues as they address a typical conflict in their midst. Available from ECUFILM, 800-251-4091, [www.ecufilm.com](http://www.ecufilm.com).



*Are you forming New FaithQuest study groups? Call toll-free 877/889-2780, Ext. 7674 to order FaithQuest study materials.*

church, because it has gained the reputation of being a place where peace of mind and heart is restored. The signboard of such congregations will read: "Neighborhood Peace Center—a place of new beginnings." My hope is that persons will contact the Peace Center Church rather than hiring a lawyer, shouting at a neighbor, hitting a child, reaching for a weapon, or sinking into depression.

Some communities have "Dispute Settlement Centers" that provide services such as mediation, training, and education. They often handle referrals from the legal system. Church leaders can, do, and should utilize them as appropriate referrals. However, my vision is the product of God's call

to us to bring justice and peace together. That faith-focused vision means a far different foundational and operating methodology than the non-faith-based organization.

**The preparation to be a Peace Center will be considerable.** Conviction of the need and claiming it as "our" mission is essential. Skilled, trained, committed, gifted leadership is central.

We use the word *peace* to describe our best intentions for life within our families, congregations, communities, the nation, and the world. Nevertheless, unease prevails. Nearly always, people turn for help to society's systems and methods rather than

to the church to resolve conflict. There is another, better way than litigation and retribution.

Our God, faith, scriptures, tradition, and United Methodist congregations give us another way—a way that leads to reconciliation and life restored. I hope that at least 1% of our congregations will become a sign of this other way—God's way—by preparing, then living as a Neighborhood Peace Center.



Bishop Donald A. Ott is a board member for JustPeace and first shared this vision in March 2001. He is coordinator of the council of Bishops' Initiative on Children and Poverty. He has served as Episcopal leader in the Michigan area.

## Websites for Peacemakers

[www.justpeaceumc.org](http://www.justpeaceumc.org)

The United Methodist Center for Mediation and Conflict Transformation has an active bulletin board for discussion, links, and helps. (See article by Tom Porter, page 5.)

[www.ipj-ppj.org](http://www.ipj-ppj.org)

The Institute for Peace and Justice offers resources for parents, schools, and faith communities. Among the educational materials are family devotional materials, action steps for families, and a "Pledge of Nonviolence" for individuals, families, and church groups. A good place to start as you explore living into Bishop Ott's vision (see page 1).

<http://interfaithvoices.org>

Based in St. Louis, Interfaith Voices for Peace and Justice is a communications network for faith-based peace and justice activists. Register and access a directory of more than 800 faith-based organizations. The homepage features quotes from a dozen world religions that illustrate that people of all faiths have a common call to seek peace and justice.

[www.spicenter.org/teachingtolerance](http://www.spicenter.org/teachingtolerance)

Teaching Tolerance is a national education project dedicated to helping teachers foster equity, respect, and understanding. They offer free and low-cost resources, including posters, videos, guides, lesson plans, and more. Sponsored by the Southern Poverty Law Center, a nonprofit group that monitors the presence of hate groups in the U.S. and actively uses legal means to fight violence and hate in the U.S.



[www.umbcs.org/gbcs007.htm](http://www.umbcs.org/gbcs007.htm)

The United Methodist General Board of Church and Society website includes the Peace with Justice Newsletter, featuring information about Peace with Justice Sunday and links for congregational leaders.

<http://lmppeacecenter.org>

The Lombard Mennonite Peace Center offers skill training for faith-based mediation. Their newest one-day workshop is "God's Own Peace: Systems Theory and Spirituality." The website includes a schedule of training events and recommended resource books.

## How JustPeace Began

Mary K. Logan

I spend most of each day addressing conflict. The phone continuously rings with persons calling for help with conflicts in the church: simple disputes over the care of a cemetery, a sermon, closing of a church, music, sale of property; complex disputes, such as sexual misconduct, embezzlement, arson, internal power struggles in a church, a difficult pastoral appointment, accidents involving serious injury or death, discontinuance of a probationary member, adulterous relationships. The list goes on, with common themes of money, power, control, and fear of losing control.



Some church conflicts are very destructive, in large part because we are not well equipped to address them constructively. Two experiences of conflict in the church tear at my soul: (1) when individuals feel estranged from God because of the human failures in the institution of church; and (2) when conflict rips apart a good community. Serious conflicts do both. What happens when these conflicts are ignored (avoided) is that persons who are hurt experience escalating pain and frustration, which eventually leads to isolation, confrontation, and litigation.



### 5 Events Opened My Eyes

Between 1996 and 1998, I began to see a new possibility for helping people in the church learn how to resolve conflicts in more constructive ways.

1. A highly publicized situation in which a large, prominent local church was ripped apart when its powerful pastor was accused of serious misconduct with many women. Thousands of hours of church time and immense sums of money were spent in this battle within the church, with insurance carriers, and in lawsuits. The case eventually settled as a result of a series of mediations.

2. The first ever educational conference that the General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA) hosted for the annual conference chancellors. During communion worship service Tom Porter explored the theme of what it means to be a Christian lawyer. His sermon inspired many follow-up conversations between the two of us about how to prepare United Methodists to engage conflict in a different way and how we might bring mediation into the church.

3. In my own little church, the congregation was poised to split over a contemporary worship service. I couldn't believe the way everyone was behaving. We brought in an outside expert who helped us talk with one another about our feelings—and listen to one another! A year later, the church was able to stabilize and make healthy decisions.

4. A conflict between my then 11-year-old daughter and another girl in her school. With the blessing of the other girl's mother, we went to

their house for the girls to talk with one another. They talked about their feelings and apologized to one another, finding their own way to reconcile. Surely so can we in the church!

5. I received a phone call from a woman about my age who had been victimized by her youth pastor as a teenager. This old conflict led her to feel painfully alone and estranged from God and the church. Finally she received healing through counseling. This year, the Annual Conference Board of Ordained Ministry contributed to the counseling cost. The money wasn't much, but it was an authentic, positive step of compassion, regret, support, and Christian love taken by the church as an institution to help her resolve old wounds.



Throughout this time and woven into these events, Tom Porter and I continued to talk about finding a way to help the church deal with conflict more constructively. As our conversations became more serious, we began to envision a place where United Methodists could learn to engage conflict in a different way. Our only real stumbling block was money.

When GCFA learned it would be repaid the money it loaned to help settle the Pacific Homes litigation, GCFA's General Secretary, Sandra Lackore, suggested that some of this amount would be perfect as seed money for starting a conflict transformation center. What a wonderful legacy: creating something positive out of the worst conflict the church has faced in many years; using money borne out of conflict to help people learn how to deal with conflict differently! Through God's inspiration of Tom Porter, Sandra Lackore's genius with finances, the GCFA Board's willingness to use some of this money, the pain of too many real conflicts, and some midwifery skills, was the birth-ing of JustPeace.

JUSTPEACE could have been birthed at another time, such as 1972, when Jim Laue and John Adams of the General Board of Church and Society asked General Conference to create a conflict resolution center. But there is something to be said about the time being ripe for change. Many have worked in their own quiet ways to bring peace in the midst of strife since then. JUSTPEACE happened to be at the right place, at the right time! Its future is up to you and your church friends and neighbors throughout the connection.



Mary K. Logan is chief legal counsel for the United Methodist General Council on Finance & Administration.

## As the Water Flows and the Grass Is Green

Water. Justice rolling down like water. Why is water such a vivid symbol for justice? The Prophet Amos tells us that justice needs to flow like water and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. Many who have stood before the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial at the Southern Poverty Law Center have put out their hands to feel the water flow over the words of Amos. Flowing water seems to bring us comfort.

A mountain stream moves in its constancy and determination, never slowing to rest. It is always there, always emerging from that source so far beyond our sight. Its path takes it through smooth places, rough rapids, and falls, but it does not hesitate. It moves on and grows stronger with each stream that joins it.

### Justice and water

... give life;

... are free-flowing;

... are restoring;

... mean salvation;

... are purifying.

Justice is as necessary as water for our daily strength and survival. Many Scriptures link the images of justice and water:

- ❖ Isaiah 58:11 (NRSV): "And you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail."
- ❖ Isaiah 12:3-4 (NRSV): "With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. And you will say in that day: Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name; make known his deeds among the nations; proclaim that his name is exalted."
- ❖ Psalm 1:3 (NRSV): "They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper."

Many Native Americans use the phrase "As the water flows and the grass is green" in covenants. This is a way of expressing that all parties will uphold the agreement for-ever. Other literature and poetry refer to justice with images of water, flowing streams, and fields of green grass. Water is a necessity for human life and survival. Justice and peace are the dream of God, just as essential for life and survival. Justice flowing like water . . .

JoAnn Eslinger is Director of Congregational and Community Action Ministries at the United Methodist General Board of Discipleship.