



## Peacemaking: Inside and Out

WSU Center for Peace and Conflict Studies

Acceptance Speech by **Kim Redigan** at **2016 Peacemaker Awards Ceremony**

October 7, 2016

I am deeply honored and humbled to be here today at Wayne State University's Center for Peace and Conflict Studies to receive this award and say a few words about peacemaking.

The Center is an inspiration for many of us who understand that the work of peace is not something abstract or sentimental or passive. Rather, it is often excruciatingly difficult work that engages head, heart, and hands. I applaud the Center for taking on the tough and often thankless work of peacemaking in a world that does not yet understand the things that make for peace and for graduating scholar-activists.

I come to this work as a mother, teacher, and peace educator who dreams of the day when money wasted by the Pentagon is spent on the pursuit of peace . . . when resources that are squandered on war are redirected to the work of rebuilding our communities. It is a sin and a scandal that we spend prodigious amounts of money on weapons while denying babies water. That we tolerate armaments being shipped around the world while families around the block are having their taps shut off. That we live in a culture that fails to see the ugly and dangerous triplets – so named by Dr. King - of materialism, racism, and militarization that threaten to cut the thin thread of democracy from which our nation dangles during this dangerous period of demagoguery and dog whistle politics.

Given the bread and circuses that keep us distracted and disengaged, it is perhaps no surprise that we are witnessing this strange phenomenon of clowns popping up around the country. As I reflect on this bizarre and frightening election cycle with all its fear-based hatemongering, I've come to believe that we are living in a revelatory moment, a moment when the big top is being ripped off and everything form of violence is being unmasked. A moment when we are witnessing the bloody fingernail scratches on history's wall of an old order that is passing away – a violent order based on oppression and domination and violence. A vicious order that is not going gently into the good night but one that is destined to collapse from the weight of its own untruth.

The good news for those of us who work for peace is that there is more to the story.

We are living in a moment that is both terrible and beautiful – a deep moment. Black Lives Matter and Standing Rock are harbingers of something good coming into being. Things may

seem bleak, but there is no cause for despair. I am in no way an optimist, but I am a woman of hope – two totally different things – and I believe with Dr. King that the “moral arc of the universe does indeed bend toward justice.” This hope that comes from a much deeper well than easy optimism is at the heart of my work; it is what keeps me going.

I was asked to talk about my personal journey to the work of peacemaking today. In short, I would simply say that throughout most my life I have been graced, and sometimes cursed, with a proclivity for looking deeply.

As a young girl growing up downriver in a working-class home, I spent hours in my room reading about the civil rights movement, agonizing over the Vietnam War, and writing poetry about the violence and suffering in the world. I was spiritual and sensitive by nature but unable to square the white, wimpy Jesus I was introduced to in church with the reality of young men in my neighborhood coming home from Southeast Asia in caskets and little girls being bombed before Sunday School in Birmingham, Alabama.

I always had an intolerance for bullying, a fire in my bones for justice, and a desire for peace, but I never knew how to realize those instincts. When I read about two priests, Daniel and Philip Berrigan, who set draft files on fire in defense of human life, I understood religion for the first time, but, as a pre-teen too young to get involved in the peace or civil rights movement, I felt isolated, powerless, and depressed. Eventually, I embraced unhealthy ways of dealing with these feelings that led to a lot of self-imposed pain and an ugly cynicism – a cowardly mask for a compassionate heart that was too scared to show itself.

But, things fall apart and so do people. Which means, if we're lucky, we get to start over. And I was one of the lucky ones.

I feel frightened and nervous sharing on such a personal level today, but, in truth, my journey as a peacemaker has been a matter of the heart, something that is still hard for me to acknowledge publicly.

I think for many of us it is so much easier to lean into the familiar terrain of the intellect where our vulnerability can be kept at bay, but, at the end of the day, when we look deeply at our world, it's our broken hearts that compel us to give ourselves over to the work.

That is not to say, that we do not analyze and research and write and organize and employ logic, but in my own experience, the real work of peace began when I allowed my heart to throw in completely - without reservation - and when I looked deeply enough to see the beauty beneath the brokenness in myself and in the world.

Some of my greatest teachers in this area have been my fellow Michigan-Meta Peace Team members. Whether we are in Lansing standing before preachers who wave their bibles and spew harsh words at Gay Pride gatherings or challenging young Israeli soldiers at checkpoints in the West Bank, it is all about leading with the heart and challenging injustice while always acknowledging the dignity of the human person – all persons, no matter how noxious the ideology or how offensive the behavior.

It is impossible to look deeply – really deeply - at the brokenness of those who hate or at the profound fear that undergirds oppression without experiencing compassion for people whose

spirits have become stunted by their own internal pain – people who have not seen the potential in themselves that is evident to others who see the vulnerability that lies beneath the violence.

While we who serve on peace teams are given extensive training in the strategies of active nonviolence and carry with us a suitcase full of valuable skills that call forth creativity and, at times, courage, the most important aspect of our work in the field is our deep-seated belief in the innate goodness of people – realized or not – and the possibility for transformation.

While this may sound idealistic and naïve, the stories of empowerment that we share in our trainings and our experiences in the field offer empirical evidence and testify to the truth of people’s ability to change. This means that our work for peace must always refuse to write off anyone.

How much easier it is to divide the world between saints and villains, but it’s not that simple. I think it’s more accurate and helpful to say that healed people heal people and hurt people hurt people. I have come to believe with increasing conviction that the most important and lasting work of the peacemaker is to help others heal, especially those whose woundedness has become toxic and dangerous.

Yes, we rebuke and challenge and protest and rail against injustice with all the might we can muster, but, in the end, the fear and the soul sickness we are dealing with is so profound that without healing we are only postponing the inevitable violence – whether that violence takes the form of domestic abuse down the street or drone strikes halfway around the world.

The question is: Can we heal ourselves and others while at the same time dismantling the structures of injustice that make us sick in the first place?

Perhaps one of the most difficult aspects of peacemaking is the dance between the inner and outer work that must occur if we are to work with integrity and balance for the long haul. The two great temptations inherent to this work constitute the yin and yang of peacemaking.

The first is the temptation of staying so busy that we bypass the beauty that keeps us grounded, becoming the very violence that we abhor. The second is to become so self-reflective that we find ourselves retreating into a solipsistic and selfish individualism that mirrors the worst aspects of our culture and that bypasses the messy work of resistance that necessitates getting our hands in the dirt alongside others.

No matter the work we do for peace, we all need to be mindful of the need for balance.

One of the places that allows me to find this balance is in the classroom where my high school students help sharpen and clarify my commitment to nonviolence in a thousand different ways.

Yesterday after having read Dr. King’s “Creative Maladjustment,” I asked my senior theology students to name the things in this world to which they will never adjust. To explain the moral lines in the sand that they would draw for themselves and hope to never cross. The discussion was rich and honest.

When they asked me where I have drawn lines, I told them of the day when I found myself sitting on a friend’s front porch in the north end of Detroit where we were stuffing baggies with rolled up baby wipes – care packages for the elders in the neighborhood whose water had been shut off. At one point that summer afternoon, something deep and ferocious inside of me

screamed a defiant “No!” and I knew that shutting off water on families and then marking their sidewalks with a shaming streak of blue spray paint was an indignity that I could not . . . would not . . . allow.

This was not the first line in the sand for me, not by a long shot, but it was a vivid and clearly demarcated line that demanded my time and attention. It became clear to me that I could no longer talk about peace, work for peace, train for peace without working against the systemic violence of water shutoffs - violence predicated on a long history of racism and, now, the denial of democracy under emergency management with its attendant privatization schemes.

That day my heart compelled me to widen the scope of my work for peace and human rights and to throw in completely. I am a grateful and teachable neophyte in a sacred struggle that is led by indigenous water warrior women who have carried the water as well as the message for a very long time. I have much to learn from them.

My contributions to the water struggle have been small in comparison, but I have humbly tried to offer myself to the work in ways that I feel called. On a warm Friday morning in July 2014, my heart led me to the entrance of a local contractor, Homrich, where nine of us prayed and sang and, for eight hours, blocked the trucks contracted to shut off water that day before being arrested. This nonviolent action, a small piece of the water work going on that summer, was dedicated to the Rosa Parks of the Detroit water justice movement, Charity Hicks, whose final message to Detroit before her untimely death was to “Wage Love” in the struggle for justice.

After more than two years of being in and out of court, we await our trial, which is nothing compared to the tens of thousands in Detroit who continue to wait for water.

Inspired by the indigenous Women Water Walkers, some of us walked from Detroit to Flint the following summer as part of a week-long Water Justice Journey. A few years prior to this, a handful of us walked from Detroit to Lansing on behalf of peace, a joyful and bucolic walk compared to the resolute and grim journey to Flint where each step along the hot, hard pavement through post-industrial Detroit, Highland Park, Pontiac and Flint offered a meditation on the casualties of an economy that places profit before people.

As we walked we listened to the stories along the way of people left behind by a system that no longer needs their labor. Walking and listening may not bring about world peace and economic justice, but it is a small way of putting one’s feet where one’s heart is – and, who knows? Maybe these small, quiet actions matter more than we know.

I have been honored to represent Michigan Coalition for Human Rights as a member organization of the People’s Water Board Coalition. It has been life-giving and humbling to sit in the same room with long-time water warriors and seasoned activists who have for a very long time been advocating for a moratorium on shutoffs, the implementation of the 2005 Water Affordability Plan, and a rejection of privatization. They are my mentors, my teachers, my inspiration. They have helped me connect the dots of injustice which are so great in number that they seem to have all coalesced into one deadly mega-dot of injustice.

The good news is that we are living in a moment when our struggles are coalescing as well. A moment when the intersection of unbridled capitalism, racism, and militarism has become so breathtakingly brutal that it has torn the tops off the silos which had previously kept us separated in our activist communities.

The water issue has deepened my resolve to rail against a war economy that leaves in its wake children living without water. While elders bathe with bottled water, the war machine rages on. Something to which I will never adjust. Something I will continue to resist with all the love in my heart.

The issues of water and war are inextricably linked. Issues of poverty, planet, and peace are connected.

And so are all of we.

I want to end by lifting up the sacred interconnectedness of our work and our lives. I want to acknowledge my friends and fellow activists, and, especially, my beautiful family. I think others here would agree that our families are so often the real behind-the-scenes heroes – often holding down the house while we are out doing the work. My four children would be the first to tell you that their mother is far from a paragon of peace. I am no Gandhi. Just a foot soldier like everyone else who has a heart for peace and justice. There are no heroes or superstars in this work, only fellow foot soldiers.

Therefore, we learn together and celebrate our work together. The only advice I have to offer today is to look deeply. Seek the beauty beneath the brokenness. Don't run from healing. Draw lines, but draw them with humility.

And then throw in completely . . . without reservation and with all the love in your heart.

For more information visit the [MetaPeaceTeam website](#).