



Peace Advocate News

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.
Matthew 5:9

Peace begins when you make your peace with Jesus, accept Him as Savior and follow Him as Lord.

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Persecution

In too many places in the world, people live with harassment, oppression, discrimination intimidation, suffering, tyranny, torment, bullying, and even torture. These are all forms of violence and can also be forms of persecution, but the term 'persecution' is one we need to use carefully.

While the term 'persecution' is used for the abusive treatment of any people because of their religion, politics, or race¹, people often apply the term only when the abuse is directed at themselves. Many Christians assume abuse because of belief in Jesus is the only time the term persecution can be used. They connect the term to the horrific experience of their ancestors in the faith at the hands of non-Christians. It brings up images of people being thrown to the lions by the Romans, the disciples crucified as Jesus was, or missionaries facing abuse at the hands of unbelievers they are 'trying to save'.

Part of the reality of our world is that people of other faiths, political views, or race have similar experiences in their past – times when their ancestors were treated with horrific violence for their beliefs. The difficult thing for many people to grasp is that it is easy to accept the suggestion that, when your group is persecuted for their faith, it is more serious and more deserving of attention than violence people face for other reasons. There is the tendency to ignore the reality that people of other faiths may also face persecution for their beliefs which is just as horrendous and just as wrong. . .

It is not unusual for people to think abuses are worse when they happen to people 'like themselves'. Many American Christians apply the term persecution only when 'Christians' are the victims of such treatment – even in places where Christians are only one of several groups being targeted. This not only misrepresents the situation and the needs of the people involved, it is also hurtful to non-Christians being persecuted alongside their Christian neighbors. Ignoring this fact can contribute to the problem because it means assumptions being made about why the persecution is happening are at least incomplete if not completely wrong. In the current climate in the world, it is easy for Christians in the relative safety of America to forget that the Muslim extremist groups, so much in the news, are attacking; yes persecuting, other Muslim groups at least as often and with as much inexcusable violence as they attack Christians. . . The situation in Nigeria is one example.

In a recent Christian Churches Together (CCT) forum (March 2-3 in Newark, N.J.), Jay Wittmeyer, *executive director of Global Mission & Service for the Church of the Brethren*, highlighted this concern:

In speaking about the situation in Nigeria, I shared about the abduction of girls from Chibok and Boko Haram's attempt to establish a strict Islamic Caliphate, driving out Christians from the north and destroying thousands of churches. I also shared that an equal number of Muslims have been killed in the violence.

"Persecution" is such a divisive term, that it is difficult to work at interfaith dialogue and peace when we alienate others by using the term.²

Jay Wittmeyer was invited to join more than 40 CCT leaders who met to discuss the ongoing persecution of Christians around the globe. They met to pray for the persecuted and discuss ways Christian groups can help those who are suffering. Jay Wittmeyer's remarks came when he was asked to speak on behalf of the Church of the Brethren regarding the impact of Boko Haram on the Christian community in Nigeria.

The CCT forum noted that persecuted people often feel forgotten because many of the situations where persecution is taking place are not in the news and are rarely reported on. Archbishop Vicken Aykazian of the Armenian Orthodox Church highlighted the situation in the Middle East, for example.

The forum also put forth another important reminder. Christians are not only victims of persecution. Christians are in fact also the persecutors in some places. Christians sometimes persecute non-Christians and sometimes persecute other Christians. The Pentecostals and Catholics fighting among themselves in Mexico is one example.

The reality that Christians are at times the persecutors is far from new. For Anabaptists and Anabaptist/Pietists (Brethren), the term persecution brings to mind images of people burned at the stake, drowned, beheaded, and subjected to all manner of abuses for their beliefs by other Christians. Much of the history of the treatment of indigenous peoples and people of other faiths by Christians in the name of 'saving them' is also not pretty. The term persecution should be applied to such atrocities committed by Christians too.

The Christian community has a great responsibility. They must start by renouncing the use of persecution by anyone against anyone. They must seek to understand what causes persecution, and work for an end to it in all its forms.

- Christians must stand with brothers and sisters facing persecution for their faith – with their prayers, and their voices to bring such suffering out into the open.
- Christians must also acknowledge that people of other faiths face persecution for their beliefs. Persecution is no less wrong when the victims are non-Christians.
- Christians must acknowledge they have been the persecutors more than once throughout history and continue to be right now in some places. They must confess this sin and make amends where possible.

The March CCT forum also put forth a reminder that governments and international leaders have a role to play in ending religious persecution. The forum highlighted Article 18 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights and the need for governments and United Nations agencies to strongly enforce it. Article 18 states:

"Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship, and observance."³

God created all people. People are always trying to get God to take sides whenever there is a conflict by claiming to be in the right or claiming to be acting 'for God.' How must God, who teaches us to love, feel when his people claim to commit atrocities against other people in His name? In the message of Jesus, no one group has a corner on God's love or sympathy. God does not want any of his people to persecute or be persecuted. God does not feel the pain of any people over that of another people. We are called to love everyone (Mark 12:28-31, Matthew 5:1-11, Galatians 3:28) and serve everyone (Matthew 25:34-45). Only then are we truly children of God. Only then can we help end persecution in the world!

¹Webster's New College Dictionary. 4th edition. 1999.

²Wittmeyer, Jay. "Christian Churches Together Holds Forum On 'The Persecuted Church'". *Newsline*. March 17, 2017.

³Wittmeyer. *Newsline*. March 17, 2017.

Related Reading: Buck, Katja. "Carrying the cross without fear: How the Coptic Church in Egypt deals with the constant threat." *Newsline*. April 14, 2017. from a World Council of Churches release. This is a report of the persecution faced by the Coptic Church in Egypt and how they respond to their situation. They have brought back an understanding of persecution held by some of our ancestors in the faith. It is a challenging response in this day and age.

As of March 13, 2017, 121 retired U.S. generals & admirals signed a letter to Mr. Trump urging him not to make deep cuts in diplomacy & development aid, "describing their elevation alongside military prowess as 'critical to keeping America safe'.

Chicago Tribune, The Washington Post, The New York Times, etc.



Practical Peacemaking Tips Standing In Someone Else's Shoes

One of the hardest things to do is to stand in someone else's shoes! We see the world from a specific perspective based on our own life experience. It is very difficult to see things any other way. It is even difficult to comprehend that *there may be any other way to see things*. So much of how we look at the world is based on our assumptions some of which we may not even be aware of. When we stand in our own shoes, we are within our comfort zone and the world looks the way we *expect* it to. Trying to stand in someone else's shoes can turn the world upside-down for us. It pushes us outside our comfort zone; and complicates things by challenges our since of our place in the world.

- One of our instinctive assumptions is that the way we see things is the only way. That makes it the 'right' way and therefore, anyone who does not see things the same way we do must be 'wrong'.
- When one of our assumptions is challenged, we tend to become defensive – even when we are not fully aware that is what is happening, and even if there is really no threat to us at all.

- Becoming defensive is part of our instinct for self-preservation. However, it takes extra effort to think clearly and keep an open mind once our survival instincts kick in. That can be a big problem!

Anyone who has lived with other people – be it a spouse, siblings, friends, etc. has experienced what happens when a situation arises that brings these instincts into play, though you probably do not realize that is what happened the last time you had a disagreement!

One tricky part is that once your defensive instincts kick in, your reactions to the situation may help trigger the same defensive reaction in the other person.

- When you are in 'defensive mode' anyone disagreeing with you is likely to appear to be threatening – 'out to get you' in some way.
- If you assume the other person is a threat, you are likely not to trust them. Then communication is likely to shut down.

When both parties are in this defensive mode, you are in a cycle that is very hard to escape. Convincing the other party that *their perception of you* as a threat is not true is just as hard as convincing yourself that *your perception of them* as a threat is not true. Both things must be accomplished to end the cycle!

It is complicated by the fact that we tend to *expect* people to react to things the same way they have in the past, especially when we are in defensive mode. Sometimes people do change, but we miss it because we see only what we *expect* to see. That can cause the other person to think changing does not help, and so push them back into old patterns; only now, they may resist change, or even open-mindedness because it appears useless.

To truly try to stand in someone else's shoes may *feel like* a very risky business. However, it is essential if differences are to be understood and resolved – and the first step is realizing that 'under stood' and 'resolved' does not mean everyone will suddenly agree with me! To stand in someone else's shoes:

- is a tool for seeking understanding
- it is not a tool for *us to change others* to our way of thinking
- we must be open to the possibility that the world may look very different through someone else's eyes.
- We must accept that 'Different' does not necessarily mean bad
- Acknowledging these things is the first step to understanding why people see things differently.
- We must also let go of the temptation to pass judgment. That role belongs to God (Luke 6:37).
- We must accept that some of our assumptions may be a problem – even short-sited or incorrect.
- We must also accept that some of our assumptions may be self-serving but not God serving. If our assumptions are hurtful to the people we share the house, the community, or the world with, *we need to reevaluate our assumptions first* (remember what Jesus said about logs and specks! Matthew 7:1-5).
- We must accept that standing in someone else's shoes is not a tool for proving who is right. Who is right or wrong may not be a factor at all. Someone's perspective can be different from our own without being wrong.

Standing in someone else's shoes is one way of truly *hearing* another person and trying to understand them. Think back on your own experience. Sometimes knowing you have been heard, even when you are not agreed with, can make all the difference. When you take the time and effort to really hear and try to understand another person it shows you value them and care about them as a person worthy of respect like you want to be yourself. Isn't that what it means to love your neighbor as yourself? (Matthew 22:37-40)



Remember Nigeria!

Update

Our Nigeria brothers and sisters continue to live in hope despite the ongoing nightmare of violence and now also famine. There have been several attacks in June causing more refugees and more deaths. Thousands remain displaced; burned out villages dot the country side; farm fields lie fallow. . . The resulting disruption in agriculture is a major factor contributing to famine. UNICEF reports in 2017 244,000 children will suffer from severe malnutrition in Nigeria's Borno state alone.

Good Friday (April 14) marked three years since the Chibok school girl's abduction. Of the 276 girls taken in 2014, a few escaped almost immediately, and within the first two weeks 57 had escaped¹. In 2016, one girl escaped, one was killed by her captors, one was rescued by the Nigerian military, and the Nigerian government (with help from the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Swiss government) negotiated the release of 21 girls in October. Good news came in May when 82 more girls were released through more negotiations! Still, just over 100 Chibok girls remain in Boko Haram hands. The girls released in October and May are not yet home. They are now held in a 're-integration facility' by their government. The plight of these girls, and their families, seems over-whelming, yet they are only a few among thousands. Amnesty International has records of 41 cases of mass abductions in the last three years. At least 2,000 additional women and children are still being held by Boko Haram.

The people of EYN (Church of the Brethren in Nigeria) live daily with the threat of violence. They also celebrate the power of Jesus in their midst. They are working to rebuild and are reaching out to those in need including Muslim neighbors who also suffer at the hands of Boko Haram. Keep EYN and all of Nigeria in your prayers.

¹ Some of these 57 are now in school in the U.S. Two of them just graduated from high school this month! (Newsline June 17, 2017)

Sources & Resources: For more information on the situation in Nigeria go to Church of the Brethren Newsline at brethren.org; for more on Brethren efforts to help and **TO HELP YOURSELF** go to www.brethren.org/nigeriacrisis. Newsline, 6-17-17 includes updates on the African food crises & on relief efforts. Newsline, 5-8-17 confirmed release of the 82 Chibok girls. Newsline, 6-3-17 names the released girls Brethren congregations in America have been praying for. Newsline Good Friday 4-14-17 is a special issue on Nigeria & on the Coptic Church in Egypt also dealing with violence. Included is **information on how to urge the U.S. government to be more proactive in addressing the famine** in Nigeria, South Sudan, Somalia, & Yemen. Newsline, 4-14-17 cited a March 18 article written by Dionne Searcey & Ashley Gilbertson of the New York Times, titled "Beneath Mask of Normal Life, Young Lives Scarred by Boko Haram," stories of several children & teens abducted by Boko Haram. See www.nytimes.com/2017/03/18/world/africa/boko-haram-nigeria-child-soldiers.html. Included are links to other New York Times articles on Nigeria.

The BBC also a good source. See www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-39846326 about the 82 girls. The Church of the Brethren Office of Public Witness recommends a Sojourners article **about Boko Haram by Charles Kwuelum** (a Nigerian now working in Washington, D.C., who grew up in a neighborhood of young men who joined Boko Haram) Go to <https://sojo.net/magazine/march-2017/my-neighbor-boko-haram>.

Glimmers of Hope

Speech and actions that are abusive and hateful have become all too common in our society. Public discourse has become very polarizing. Abusing, even attempting to destroy opponents because they disagree with you has become acceptable. Particularly for some, declaring that any information with which you disagree is 'fake' or 'false' has become a preferred means of putting down opponents and attempting to write off issues you prefer not to address. This climate has emboldened people who promote fear and hatred.

There are people of faith who are heeding the call to speak out against this climate and such speech and actions. One place where faithful people have taken action is in Amber Pennsylvania. Following several incidents including Ku Klux Klan literature being left in people's driveways and offensive graffiti painted in public places, the Amber Church of the Brethren congregation opened their doors to a gathering of more than 300 people from the community who came for a candle-light vigil sponsored by the Wissahickon Faith Community Association. They came in an interfaith show of solidarity to declare "there is no place for hate in our community." Racism, prejudice and judging our neighbors are not acceptable here. Among the community leaders and people who spoke was Pastor Enten Eller (current president of the Wissahickon Faith Community Association) who told the crowd, "We stand together against actions that would divide us." "We are here to be a light in the darkness." The gathering was united in their commitment to move forward together, united for the good of all. For the full story of this gathering go to Newsline for June 3, 2017 and to the "Ambler Gazette" at

www.montgomerynews.com/amblergazette/news/photos-vigil-against-hate-draws-hundreds-in-ambler/article_428c567f-f9db-5186-8bd0-1d2fd80399a4.html.



Making a Difference for PEACE!

What can one person do to make peace every day? Second grader Christian Bucks learned of an idea he thought his school could use; it has worked in his school; and he has been sharing the idea ever since.

Christian learned that an international school in Dusseldorf, Germany has a 'Buddy Bench' on their playground. "The idea: If a kid feels lonely, or has no one to play with, or is being bullied, he or she takes a seat on the bench, a signal to other kids to come over and talk or offer to play." Christian had seen kids with no one to play with at his school so he brought the idea to his teacher and principle, and they installed a Buddy Bench on their playground at Central York School District's Roundtown Elementary School (in

York, PA). Christian reports it has been a hit. It has fostered new friendships and helped prevent bullying.

Christian's simple act of sharing this idea attracted media attention, including a spot on the NBC Nightly News. As a result, the Buddy Bench idea has spread. There are now at least 2,000 Buddy Benches on school playgrounds. They are in all 50 states and at least 13 more countries including Italy, Russia, Spain, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Japan, Norway, Thailand, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia.

One simple idea from a school in Germany is helping make peace in the world one school at a time with a little help from a second grader!

Christian Bucks is now in 5th grade and just likes how the idea has spread. His story comes from the following article: Mike Argento of USA Today Network. "Boy's Buddy Bench Idea Caught On: Playground Concept Helps Kids Create Friendships All Around the World". The article appeared in the *News Journal*. Mansfield, OH Sunday June 11, 2017. Page 1D.

Famine & Violence Watch

The World Council of Churches had a special day of prayer for South Sudan May 21st. The South Sudan Council of Churches met with the All Africa Conference of Churches May 14-17 in Nairobi, Kenya where they discussed overcoming hunger and sustaining justice and peace in the Horn of Africa. The meeting comes as horrific violence continues in the region; and a food crisis and famine, caused by both man-made and natural calamities, is bringing suffering and potentially death to thousands. The UN reports more than 20 million people in South Sudan, Somalia, Yemen, and northeastern Nigeria are facing famine. South Sudan and Somalia are the hardest hit by this food crisis, which is expected to be the worst in 70 years!



South Sudan has the worst human rights record in the world – people burned alive; women & girls raped; people brutalized & killed in front of relatives; soldiers taking children. Their government is largely responsible. In December of 2016, foreign aid workers and reporters were expelled from the country. This may have been to eliminate outside witnesses to genocide. In January 2017 more people fled to Uganda to escape violence in South Sudan then tried to reach Europe from Syria.

Worship Resources

Make Prayers for Peace Part of Your Worship Remember in prayer:

1. **South Sudan:** is facing a devastating famine. The country has the worst human rights record in the world. Jan. 2017 more people fled to Uganda to escape violence in South Sudan then tried to reach Europe from Syria. Even so, the World Council of Churches reports the South Sudan Council of Churches Easter message was "The resurrection reminds us that even in this world there is goodness and light with triumph."
2. **Nigeria:** the 82 Chibok school girls released in May; & the 21 released in October; their families & communities. The 106 Chibok girls & more than 2,000 other women & children still missing, EYN, all those affected by the violence & now famine.
3. **All people in this world who live with war.**
4. **People facing torture.**
5. **People affected by gun violence.**

6. **Bangladesh** – brutal attacks by Islamist militants on minority groups including non-Muslims and intellectuals are rising.
7. **Those facing execution** – & those willing to execute because they put revenge above redemption & forgiveness
8. **Those in prison** because of their beliefs.
9. All those whose lives are dominated by **fear**.
10. **People affected by gun negligence** – especially 525 child shooters in 2016. Many shooters are toddlers. . .
11. **Yemen & elsewhere;** where the U.S. is involved in often forgotten wars in which civilians are victims every day.
12. **People Displaced** because of war or political unrest including the **Syrian refugee crises**
13. People **working for peace** locally and in the world.
14. Those who **don't know God's peace** & have lost hope & joy.
15. **Veterans'** living with their part in war. 18 U.S. Iraq/ Afghanistan veterans commit suicide every day. (US Veterans Affairs statistics)
16. **Girls & Women** facing abuse and violence every day
17. **Child Soldiers**
18. **People facing Deportation** –women, children, & men are frequently pulled from their homes & work places, with little due process. Some children come home from school to find parents gone without warning. . .
19. **Community – Police issues,** that communities & police will work together respectfully for the common good.
20. **Those now waging war by remote control** – they push buttons from far away that hurt or killed men, women, children

**Goodness is stronger than evil; Love is stronger than hate;
Light is stronger than darkness; Life is stronger than death;
Victory is ours through God who loves us!**

Archbishop Desmond Tutu

Quote shared in the Brethren Church peace newsletter, June 14, 2017

Peacemaking Remembrance Dates!



June 20 World Refugee Day.

June 23 United Nations Public Service Day.

June 26 United Nations International Day in Support of Victims of Torture.

August 6, 1945 the U.S. dropped the first nuclear bomb ever used on Hiroshima, Japan. 140,000 men, women, & children were killed.

August 27, 1928 Kellogg-Briand Day. On this day the major nations of the world gathered in Paris, France, to sign the Kellogg-Briand Pact banning all war. The treaty remains on the books today.

September 21. This is the International Day of Peace and of Prayer for Peace. **Make plans to observe Peace Day!**



**Resource
List**



**See specific articles for
related resource information.**



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