Intersections ⟳

MCC theory & practice quarterly

Where is the peace?

Introduction

For the past two years I have had the privilege of serving as the editor of MCC's Peace Office Newsletter. I am proud to be a part of an organization that seeks to integrate learning, reflection on practice, and academic theory into its work, and that is a role that the Peace Office Newsletter has played within MCC for over four decades. During my editorship of the Newsletter, I saw the publication provide a forum for practitioners to step back and reflect on their work, for MCC partners from different parts of the world to share about issues they face, and for theologians and other academics to reflect critically on MCC's program. It was a publication with which I was proud to be associated—although I will admit to being somewhat perplexed by the title of Peace Office Newsletter, at times quipping to colleagues that there was no longer a Peace Office and that the publication was not really a newsletter. The pecularities of the name aside, I always found the Newsletter to be a publication well worth reading.

Seventy years ago, in 1942, the Peace Section of MCC was founded. Over the next seven decades, the Peace Section morphed in multiple directions: MCC Canada and MCC U.S. each dedicated staff time to peace education, restorative justice, and conciliation, while within the newly formed MCC Binational the Peace Section became the International Peace Office. In 2007 the Peace Office ceased to exist, with its previous functions folded into a new department tasked with promoting system-wide learning within all of the program sectors within which MCC works, e.g., food security, education, peacebuilding, and more. This department is now called the Planning, Learning, and Disaster Response Department (PLDR). PLDR carries forward some of the functions the Peace Office used to play —specifically, the promotion of quality planning, monitoring, and evaluation for peacebuilding projects and of peacebuilding best practices across MCC's international and domestic programs. Yet some of the roles previously played by the Peace Office—such as promoting inter-Mennonite and broader ecumenical reflections on peace theology—no longer have an obvious institutional home.

MCC has been restructuring for the past couple of years and the change in title and focus of this publication to some degree reflects those changes. In many ways these transitions are exciting: within my department,

for example, we are beginning to see how MCC's structural changes will facilitate greater mutual learning and interchange between MCC's peacebuilding (and other) programming in Canada and the United States, on the one hand, and MCC program around the world, on the other. Yet structural changes also bring anxiety. With one small aspect of the restructuring being the revamping of the Peace Office Newsletter into Intersections, a shift that reflects the earlier dissolution of the Binational Peace Office, some ask: "Where has peace gone within MCC?"

Asking "where is the peace" within MCC begs the question of what do we mean when we use the word peace? What are we referring to? A vision of shalom around which MCC's efforts might be rallied? A commitment to nonviolence? Support for strategic peacebuilding and conflict prevention programs? Forums for discussion about peace theology? There are varying and sometimes conflicting views about what we mean when we use the word peace within MCC, not to mention within broader Mennonite circles—and yet one routinely hears within some parts of MCC that "everything that MCC does is peace." So even as anxieties surface within parts of MCC about the institutional location of "peace" within the organization, another discourse within MCC insists that all of MCC's efforts are suffused with "peace." As someone tasked with promoting peacebuilding best practices, I admit to being perplexed at times by the claim that everything that MCC does is peace: if everything that MCC does across its diverse programs is "peace," how can one possibly identify best practices that are distinctive to the peacebuilding sector?

After many conversations about this perplexity, Alain Epp Weaver and I wrote a "think piece" about the ambiguities of how we use peace language within MCC. One potential outcome of this short essay, I hoped, would be to stimulate conversation about how to develop rigorous criteria by which to define MCC's peacebuilding and conflict transformation initiatives. We distributed the think piece widely within MCC and received many rich and fruitful responses. In turn we decided that sharing this conversation more publicly would be an ideal first issue of Intersections: MCC Theory and Practice Quarterly. So within this inaugural issue of Intersections you will see the full text of the essay that Alain and I wrote and circulated, along with responses from MCC staff, both past and present.

Carl Stauffer, who pioneered the Regional Peace Coordinator role with MCC in Southern Africa and is currently a restorative justice professor at the Center for Justice and Peacebuilding at Eastern Mennonite University, responds by sharing about tensions with the restorative justice field about the meaning of restorative justice. Should restorative justice be understood as a social service or as a social movement? How do we understand justice to intersect with peace? Stauffer also challenges MCC to think more critically about power analysis in its programming.

Paul Heidebrecht and Jennifer Wiebe of the MCC Ottawa office urge us to think not only about the distinctions between advocacy and peacebuilding but also about the connections. They argue that often peacebuilding and advocacy initiatives both work for long-term, non-linear, structural change and that therefore advocacy and peacebuilding have significant areas of overlap and their practitioners should learn from one another.

Judy Zimmerman Herr and Bob Herr, the final directors of the MCC International Peace Office, share about the history of the Peace Office and the decades-long conversation about peace within MCC. They note that

there are different understandings of peace work operative within MCC, including theological approaches and social-science-based peacebuilding practice perspectives that have often come into conflict with one another. While peacebuilding practice seems to have a clear place in the new MCC system, the space for promoting conversations around peace theology is less evident.

The question remains, where is the peace within MCC? We hope that the perspectives presented in this issue will be tools for continuing that important conversation.

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Peace, peace: making distinctions

"Everything we do at MCC is peace."

This oft-heard phrase within MCC circles both excites and frustrates. Excites, because it reflects the passion many MCC workers, supporters, and partners have for peacebuilding work. Frustrates, because claiming that everything that MCC does is "peace" threatens to make the concept so broad that it loses any concrete meaning.

As a ubiquitous word within MCC, peace is used to describe dozens of different things, with its meaning shifting according to the speaker and the context. What does the phrase "everything we do at MCC is peace" mean? Is it a prescriptive call to throw out relief and development and focus only on peacebuilding? Or is it rather a descriptive claim about the nature of MCC's work?

There is of course something to be said for having a big tent and for letting a thousand flowers bloom in the name of peace. We would argue, however, that we in MCC would do well to be more specific and rigorous about how we use the word peace, taking care to distinguish and define the different realities the word is used to designate. We risk watering down the potency and richness of distinct kinds of work when try to fit them all under one umbrella concept. Being more rigorous about defining the different types of work that get lumped together under the banner of peace does not mean narrowing the breadth of MCC's diverse involvements. Rather, it will strengthen those diverse involvements by recognizing, for example, that programs as diverse as a strategic conflict prevention intervention in South Sudan, an ecumenical conference about nonviolent Christology, providing resources for pastors on military enlistment and conscientious objection, and facilitating a victim-offender dialogue require different skills and point to different outcomes. Failing to recognize these differences, we suggest, fosters confusion.

Examples of the problem
Some brief examples of confusion, ambiguity and vagueness fostered by the tendency to define everything that MCC does as peace are in order. One example of such confusion revolves around our understanding of advocacy. In many MCC documents advocacy is categorized as peacebuilding work. This categorization reflects how all projects connected to issues of systemic injustice become associated with "peace" within MCC. This expansive definition of peacebuilding to include all forms of advocacy is problematic, we would contend, because it obscures

how MCC's advocacy efforts cut across various program sectors, as MCC offices in Ottawa, Washington, D.C., and New York call upon governments to institute more just policies in health, education, and food security sectors. As such, advocacy represents an operational mode.

Affixing the label "peace" onto different projects can also promote fuzzy thinking about the intended outcome of an MCC-supported initiative. Take, for instance, the example of a "peace playground" constructed at a school serving two religious groups. Because the playground is built as a place where children from both religious groups can play together, the MCC Representatives identify the project as a "peace" project. Underlying this decision is the apparent assumption that any project that brings together peoples across any lines of difference is automatically a form of peacebuilding. The problem with such an automatic identification is that it threatens to preempt rigorous thinking about the project's desired outcomes. A more thorough planning process would require that a conflict analysis be carried out to determine what types of interreligious conflicts, if any, exist in the community and what the likelihood of such conflicts becoming violent might be. If there is little tension or conflict in the community and the likelihood of violent conflict is minimal, it still might make sense for MCC to support the construction of a playground—but then the outcomes would be educational in nature, such as improvement in students' school performance, emotional health, communication skills, or even decreased absenteeism or fewer classroom disruptions. If, however, the conflict analysis indicates a history of violence or the likelihood of violent conflict across religious lines in the community, then MCC and its partners would still need to discern the nature of the desired outcomes. On the one hand, MCC and its partners could articulate educational outcomes for the project, while using conflict sensitivity tools (such as Do No Harm analysis) to ensure that the project is being carried out with awareness of and responsiveness to the conflict dynamics: in this instance the project should be viewed as an educational project being designed and implemented with conflict sensitivity tools. On the other hand, the outcomes could be defined in terms of a reduction in violence or increased positive, cooperative actions among youth from different groups: in this case the project would best be thought of as a peacebuilding initiative.

A final example of how bringing all MCC program under the umbrella of peace promotes vague thinking about outcomes can be found in the tendency to slot all of MCC's one-year young adult programs under the peacebuilding rubric. The confusion in this instance stems from the failure to distinguish between how MCC carries out its work (by connecting peoples) and the what of that work (i.e. the particular program sector of the MCC worker's assignment). All MCC Service Workers (be they in one-year assignments or longer) should be committed to connecting peoples: that's part of the how of all MCC work, as named by MCC's operating principles. But connecting peoples happens in assignments across program sectors—from the health sector (e.g. a SALTer assisting in an HIV/AIDS clinic) to the education sector (e.g. a YAMENer assigned to teach English at a high school) to the peacebuilding sector (e.g. a three-year Service Worker seconded to an organization working at conflict prevention) and more. As with the above example, it is critical to determine the desired outcomes of a given MCC project in order to determine the program sector into which it fits.

> **Affixing the label "peace" onto different projects can also promote fuzzy thinking about the intended outcome of an MCC-supported initiative.**

Making distinctions

How can we be more specific in the language that we use to describe and honor the differences in programs currently all gathered together under the umbrella of peace? To move in this direction, it is important to name the different aspects of MCC's program that are currently brought under the "peace" umbrella. We would contend that it is imperative to differentiate how peace language is used:

- to name an overarching organizational vision
- to identify particular program sectors
- to specify particular values shaping how MCC carries out its work (i.e., MCC's operating principles)
- to point to particular modes of MCC work.

Some brief definitions and explanations will serve to highlight the distinctions between these different aspects of MCC's program.

Vision: We suspect that when many people claim that "everything we do at MCC is peace" they are thinking about MCC's broad organizational vision. Part of MCC's vision and identity statement reads: "MCC envisions communities worldwide living in right relationship with God, one another, and creation." While the word "peace" is absent here, this sentence functions as a succinct definition of the biblical vision of shalom, a vision of a reconciled humanity drawn from Scripture. As Mennonites in the United States and Canada became less separatist and more engaged with their surrounding communities and undertook worldwide mission and relief and development work through agencies like MCC, Mennonite peace witness become more than the refusal of military service, expanding to encompass work on behalf of the reconciled humanity, a vision identified with the word peace, or shalom. Because all MCC work— be it in the education, health, food security, or peacebuilding sectors— arguably is carried out as part of this vision, one can claim that all of MCC's work is peace. The strength of this assertion is that it keeps the theological vision of communities reconciled with God, one another, and creation front and center in MCC's work. The potential dangers are that the richness of that theological vision becomes diluted by simply labeling it "peace" and that a sole focus on vision will prevent us from taking care to think critically about the outcomes of the different types of projects carried out under the umbrella of "peace."

Program Sectors: Currently several different types of program get the "peace" label affixed to them. Distinguishing among them will help us think more constructively and thoroughly about the program outcomes to which MCC hopes to contribute.

- Peacebuilding: Interventions which seek to improve relationships and address root causes of conflict in order to prevent, reduce or recover from violent conflict.

- Restorative justice: Work based on addressing the needs of victims, offenders and communities, with a focus on harm that has been done and, where possible, the restoration of broken relationships.

- Promoting theological conversations (inter-Mennonite and broader ecumenical) around peace theology: Support for and engagement with Anabaptist-Mennonite churches around the world as they contextualize the gospel call to love enemies and to respond nonviolently to evil.

> **We best celebrate the diversity of MCC work and honor the varied outcomes to which that work contributes by being more focused in what we mean within MCC by peacebuilding work, differentiating peacebuilding projects from other types of MCC program.**

Operating Principles: MCC's seven operating principles name the lenses through which MCC carries out its work and the ways of working that MCC hopes will shape its mission. These are:

- Accompanying the church and partners
- Acting sustainably
- Building just economic relationships
- Connecting peoples
- Dismantling oppression to realize participation
- Practicing nonviolence
- Seeking a just peace

These operating principles cut across program sectors, shaping not only MCC's peacebuilding work but also its work in other sectors like education and health. So, for example, MCC can and should use conflict sensitivity tools when planning, monitoring, and evaluating a food security initiative. Or, to take another example, MCC will often want to conduct a conflict analysis or a power analysis when developing a health project. Or, as a final example, food security projects will often have a connecting peoples component. Because the operating principles name key aspects of an overarching vision of humanity and the rest of creation reconciled with God, the temptation again is to categorize all work shaped by these operating principles as "peace." Our contention, however, is that succumbing to this temptation increases the risk that we will not be as deliberate as we should be in thinking through the practical ways that these operating principles should be shaping our diverse programs, be they in peacebuilding or in other sectors like humanitarian relief or education.

Mode: A mode names a particular type of program activity in which MCC program engages. Some modes include grant-giving, public engagement, distributing material resources, and organizing. Of the different modes of MCC's work, advocacy is the one most often conflated with "peace." However, as we have seen, advocacy as mode or as a form of MCC action stretches beyond the peacebuilding sector, as MCC's office at the United Nations and in Ottawa and Washington, D.C. organize advocacy initiatives related to other program sectors, such as health and humanitarian relief. Likewise, advocacy is a tool that is used by program beyond the walls of the Washington, Ottawa, and United Nations offices, with partners seeking local-level political change and advocating for corporate responsibility (e.g. mining justice or divestment efforts). Advocacy should be seen as a means for seeking both structural change and policy change.

Moving forward

The typology above of the different aspects of MCC's work that get lumped under the "peace" umbrella within MCC is not meant, we should stress, to denigrate any one particular type of program or approach. We have distinguished among vision, program sectors, operating principles, and modes not to suggest that MCC discontinue one type of program, but rather to foster internal clarity and better planning.

Making these distinctions also offers us the opportunity to think more clearly about what types of projects MCC supports within the peacebuilding sector. Within the peacebuilding sector we should work within these parameters and then take the time to focus on the related best practices. We recognize that even within the peacebuilding field there is debate about whether peacebuilding is the lens through which all kinds of development work is done or a specific set of sectoral knowledge within development organizations. Initial findings from the Alliance for Peacebuilding mapping project suggest that in practice peacebuilding is both a lens and a sector. However, our hope with this discussion paper is to encourage clarity about peacebuilding as a program sector and to distinguishing that from the other ways in which "peace" language is used within MCC. MCC is in a unique position in relation to the broader peacebuilding field. MCC was arguably "doing peace" before the peacebuilding field was a more technical academic discipline and field of study. However, as the field has continued to grow and change and mature and become more formalized, MCC has not always kept up with developments in the field. By using "peace" to cover "everything that MCC does," we would suggest that MCC has not always been as rigorous as it could and should be in using sector-specific best practices—including the best practices of the emerging peacebuilding field—to shape its work. Being clearer about the sector-specific best practices of this peacebuilding field, while also acknowledging and affirming that work in other program sectors such as food security, education, and health are carried out as part of a theological vision of the peaceable Kingdom, of humanity and the rest of creation reconciled with God, will, we hope, strengthen MCC's work across all program sectors, including the peacebuilding sector.

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Restorative justice—social movement or social service?

I applaud the intentionality of this thought-piece undertaken here by Krista Johnson and Alain Epp Weaver in order to define peacebuilding as understood within Mennonite Central Committee. Having served with MCC for 16 years, I do believe that these sorts of delineations of the work of MCC can only help to increase the impact, efficiency, focus and the critical evaluation of MCC and its work. I have been tasked to comment on the place of restorative justice in this discussion, highlighting the issues and challenges at play in identifying outcomes specific to restorative justice.

As MCC considers the location of restorative justice in its programming, whether domestically or internationally, it is pivotal to understand the inherent tensions that are currently besetting the restorative justice field. The increasing pressure to embark on a process of universal, professional accreditation for restorative justice practice highlights this 'rift' most clearly. This fissure surfaces around the discussion on what would be the standard criteria by which we would evaluate our work. For many, a well-solidified set of general values and principles by which all restorative justice practitioners agree to abide by would be enough. For instance, in South Africa, the restorative justice community articulated four critical elements of restorative justice practice as a way of defining the scope of their work, namely, encounter, amends, reintegration, and inclusion (Skelton and Batley, 2006). This position is primarily concerned that restorative justice practice remain contextual, adaptive and innovative in order to accomplish its goal which is nothing short of a complete shift in systemic thinking about the nature of justice and its application.

In response to this view, many leading voices in the restorative justice field are calling for a detailed delineation of technical training and skills competencies that would be required of all accredited restorative justice practitioners. This kind of professionalized protocol would allow for concise measurement and provide the benchmark for documenting success in restorative justice practice in order to accomplish its goal of internally changing the priorities of the criminal justice system in the direction of a more restorative response to crime. Of course, the 'values/principles' proponents accuse the 'skills/competency' advocates of reductionist thinking, carving out the moral soul of restorative justice and replacing it with a set of technicalities, while the 'skills/competency' proponents accuse the 'values/principles' advocates of allowing the practice of restorative justice to be carelessly diluted with highly marginal and even harmful practices going unnoticed and unchecked. Behind each of these respective camps are important clashing worldviews that need to be articulated.

In reality, this form of debate presents an unnecessary polemic in both theory and practice. Firstly, we know that sustained social movements must be strategic, organized, and constrained in order to effect durable social change (Pearlman, 2011). Secondly, we know that social movements in their essence consist of, and are bolstered by, complex levels of practice. The function of strong, localized practice is to provide the direction, guidance, and restraint for social movements to progress with the necessary equanimity. In other words, social movements and social practice have a symbiotic relationship.

The implications of this challenge—to hold together the paradox of restorative justice as a social movement and a social service—are multiple for MCC and its role in nurturing justice and peace. Let me suggest the following extrapolations of how to integrate the theory and practice of restorative justice:

Vision: To my mind, a motivating vision for restorative justice is best represented by the idea of intergenerational justice. One of the key reasons why our contemporary justice system is failing us is its preoccupation with the past (who is to blame?) and the present (how to administer pain/punishment?). Current forms of justice have failed us precisely to the extent that they are unable to cast a vision or provide the appropriate future-view that would motivate those who have committed wrongdoing to step into the risky, liminal space of transformational change. John Rawls in his seminal work on justice coined the term intergenerational justice to describe the linkages between the public decisions around social justice, equity and the notion of concern for the "common good." While the concept of intergenerational justice has primarily been applied to issues of economics and environmental sustainability, I contend that restorative justice provides an ethical and moral framework for justice that not only effectively interrupts a life of criminal misbehavior in the present, but also lays an ethical-moral foundation for social justice that can be transmitted to the next generation through various forms and rituals of mimesis that satisfy justice needs in the future.

Practice: I would propose at least four practice arenas in which restorative justice effectively accomplishes this vision for trans-generational justice:

- by nurturing safe spaces for trauma healing to occur
- by offering a non-violent alternative to state-sanctioned retributive violence and therefore breaking the cyclical nature of generational revenge

Learn more

Flora, Cornelia, and Flora, Jan. *Rural Communities: Legacies and Change, 2nd Ed. Boulder, CO:* Westview Press, 2008.

Gladwell, Malcom. *The Tipping Point.* New York: ABACUS Publishers, 2000.

Pearlman, Wendy. *Violence, Nonviolence and the Palestinian National Movement.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

Rawls, John. *A Theory of Justice.* Cambridge; Harvard University Press, 1971.

Skelton, A. and Batley, M. *Charting Progress, Mapping the Future: Restorative Justice in South Africa.* Pretoria: Restorative Justice Centre and Institute for Security Studies, 2006. See also: *"A Charter for Practitioners of Restorative Justice,"* 2003. http://www.sfu.ca/cfrj/fulltext/charter/pdf.

- by providing the platform for building community through the transmission of ethical political contracts and social capital reciprocities, including bonding, bridging, and linking capital (Flora & Flora, 2008)
- and finally by presenting a values-based framework through which to critique and shape durable transitional justice and upon which to reconstruct of post-war societies.

Agency: In order truly to effect the social change we so often speak about we need to ask critical questions around agency. For instance, how does MCC define power? Who has power? Where does the locus of power for change lie? How can we exercise our power appropriately to bring about social transformation? Social movement theory and history itself informs us that lasting social change occurs when there are people working from the inside and from the outside of the structures and systems that propagate injustice. Put another way, social change occurs when internal and external agents of change who are connected through regular communication, collaboration, and strategic, unified action mobilize a critical mass of people who will enact the necessary 'tipping point' for transformation (Gladwell, 2000).

Modes of Operation: What does this "integrated restorative justice framework" mean for how MCC does its work and where it places its human resources? Firstly, it calls for MCC to continue to place personnel in local, contextual practice settings where traditional restorative justice practices are undertaken (e.g. Victim-Offender Conferencing, Family Group Conferences, Circles of Support and Accountability, etc.). Secondly, it calls MCC to increasingly consider new ways to influence and transform the structures and systems that continue to perpetuate injustice (e.g. courts, schools, military) by prioritizing both personnel and material resources for the purposes of advocacy, lobbying, policy analysis, and legislative formation and design. MCC has over the past several decades maintained that genuine peace cannot be attained without justice. Thus, restorative justice remains foundational to the exercise of peacebuilding in that it paves the way for the establishment of a justice without violence.

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Advocacy and peacebuilding: making distinctions and connections

In recent years, advocacy has been increasingly recognized by MCC's partners and constituents as a significant—rather than optional or controversial—dimension of our work. As the thought-provoking piece by Alain Epp Weaver and Krista Johnson in this issue of Intersections notes, however, more often than not advocacy is assumed to be a dimension of MCC's peacebuilding work rather than a tool or form of action that is utilized across all of our program sectors.

While many systems or structures give shape to our lives, MCC's three advocacy offices in Ottawa and Washington, D.C., and at the United Nations in New York City focus on political or governmental structures. Our advocacy offices work for constructive changes in government policies, recognizing they are not ends in and of themselves, but a means to

The primary tension lies at the heart of whether one believes that restorative justice is a social movement or an emerging social service (practice) field.

contribute to specific outcomes identified by MCC program partners, and to achieving the long-term impact ultimately being sought at the grassroots level.

Although it is important to highlight distinctions between the fields of peacebuilding and advocacy, the main purpose of this article is to highlight some important points of connection. Quite apart from the contribution that the pursuit of advocacy can make to helping achieve project outcomes, there are opportunities for mutual learning between MCC's peace programming and advocacy work. These connections emerged for us in the process of enhancing our approach to planning, monitoring, and evaluating the advocacy work of the Ottawa Office. The paragraphs that follow will briefly outline several common challenges encountered in the evaluation of both advocacy and peacebuilding activities, drawing on insights from Steven Teles and Mark Schmitt's "The Elusive Craft of Evaluating Advocacy" and John Paul Lederach, Reina Neufeldt, and Hal Culberton's "Reflective Peacebuilding: A Planning, Monitoring, and Learning Toolkit."

In it for the long haul
First, given that peacebuilders and advocates seek to address the root causes of issues and, as such, work for long-term change, evaluation in the short-term is difficult in both peacebuilding and advocacy. While noting that peacebuilders are often forced to work in crisis settings, Lederach and his colleagues insist that "deeper change goals require a long-term approach to deal with historical structural issues and injustices not easily addressed or transformed in the crisis timeframe." Thus, peacebuilding practitioners "must find creative strategies to be effective in the moment of crisis, and, at the same time, consider changes across decades" (1-2).

Given that political systems are typically characterized by stasis, advocates must also navigate regularly shifting terrain while working with a view to the long-term. Failure to achieve change is often the overwhelming norm rather than the exception, and outcomes can take decades—if not generations—to come to fruition. As such, the evaluation of advocacy should be based on the longest time horizon possible. After all, not only do policies change slowly, but the political process does not end after a new priority or law is implemented—hard-earned changes need to be protected through ongoing efforts. What really matters, as Teles and Schmitt put it, is whether "a policy sinks deeply into society and political routines" (42).

Progress in fits and starts
A second point of connection is that progress in building peace and advocacy for policy change is often nonlinear or non-incremental. In the words of Lederach et al, conflict "can easily and unpredictably spiral into unexpected renewed violence, destroying months, even years of peacebuilding work" (2). Similarly, the political agenda, as Teles and Schmitt note, is typically determined by "random and chaotic routes" (40)—it is often not clear at any given point in time just where things are at in the process of policy change.

Thus, peacebuilders and advocates cannot be guided (or constrained) by the assumption that the path toward achieving a desired change depends upon establishing and then meeting interim goals or benchmarks. There may be long periods when it seems like nothing is happening, and thus there is little to measure, much less evaluate. And yet ongoing effort is

crucial in order to be ready for the moment when the situation changes unexpectedly. Indeed, significant changes in the political sphere often resemble a paradigm shift more than evolutionary adaptation.

Who gets the credit?
In addition to working with a long and uncertain timescale, peacebuilders and advocates often have difficulty isolating the impact of specific interventions within the complex political and cultural contexts in which they operate. As Lederach et al suggest, "Sustainable peace requires a convergence of activities, and actors, in different spheres and at different levels, from local to global. It can be difficult, if not impossible, to attribute particular changes to particular processes or projects" (2).

Likewise, the burden for failure or credit for success in achieving policy change must always be spread across multiple actors and many factors beyond the control of individual advocates. Given that advocacy typically relies on collaboration within networks, partnerships, and coalitions, it is difficult to assess the influence an individual organization or initiative has had on any given policy change. In addition, Teles and Schmitt note that advocates must be prepared to "adapt to the shifting moves of the opposition" or a "strategic adversary" (40-41), interaction that introduces yet another layer of complexity to navigating the political terrain.

Sometimes less is more (and all we can hope for)
A fourth point of connection is that both peacebuilding and advocacy interventions often focus on resisting harmful changes rather than instigating positive ones. As Lederach et al. point out, "Many peacebuilding projects include the prevention of destructive or violent conflict as a goal." "How," they wonder, do we "measure a crisis that never erupted?" (2)

This is no less true in the world of advocacy, where minimizing the potential damage—rather than maximizing the benefit—of a proposed policy change is a common scenario. Indeed, for MCC, there is often more to critique than to support in government initiatives. In such circumstances, the effectiveness of an intervention is not measured by how much a situation was improved from a known starting point, but by how much less a situation was degraded in relation to an unknown end point.

So what really matters is…
In our view, these shared challenges should not lead us to downplay attempts to monitor and evaluate peacebuilding or advocacy initiatives. The lesson that Teles and Schmitt have drawn is that organizations should move beyond attempting to evaluate individual advocacy initiatives and begin to "focus on evaluating advocates." In the long-run, they suggest, "the proper focus for evaluation is—long-term adaptability, strategic capacity, and ultimately [the] influence of organizations themselves" (42).

One implication of this insight is that the MCC advocacy offices should focus more attention on building our capacity to, as Teles and Schmitt put it, "nimbly and creatively react" and to "read the shifting environment of politics for subtle signals of change," rather than preparing to proceed along a linear or predetermined course of action (41). Concretely, this would mean enhancing our tools and processes for policy analysis and strengthening our expertise in the practices of political and public engagement. And it would also mean doing more work on fewer issues, narrowing the focus of the advocacy offices in order to develop the in-

> Conflating "advocacy" with "peacebuilding" obscures the wide-ranging ways in which MCC works for systemic and structural change across all three of our organizational priorities: disaster relief; sustainable community development; and justice and peacebuilding.

depth perspective required to provide a meaningful contribution to policy debates as opportunities arise.

A second implication is that as advocates we need to rely more on the political and civil society actors we deal with on a day-to-day basis to gauge our contributions to policy debates instead of our own in-house perceptions. After all, at its core, advocacy—like peacebuilding—not only depends upon relationships of trust with MCC partners, but also with competing voices, power structures, and those perceived as enemies.

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Peace theology and peace practice

Peace has been at the heart of MCC work from the beginning, but what this means has been a point of both discussion and contention. In the mid-1990s, as professional peace institutes and peace training began to take shape, John Paul Lederach insisted that such training institutes should be housed in sociology departments of Mennonite colleges, and distinctly not in Mennonite seminaries or theology faculties. His point was that if peace work were to be restricted to theological and seminary frameworks, it would be too limited. It would not be able to submit itself to impact measurement, best practices, or adjustment in response to contexts, as social science disciplines demand.

So how does peace as a religious conviction fit into the rigor of testing and adjustment, as it must if it is to respond to the program realities of on-the-ground MCC work? This has been the debate in MCC peace conversations for much of the past 30 years. "Peace" in MCC has both theological and sociological paths, and these are sometimes seen as conflicting. This article aims to plot some of these paths, which will continue to challenge peace work in MCC for the foreseeable future.

MCC's beginnings were in response to human need—famine, refugees, war—and "peace" was basically seen as personal motivation. MCC's founding churches were among what became known as "Historic Peace Churches," which meant that their members refrained from going to war, but this conviction did not directly shape MCC's on-the-ground work. This began to change in 1942, with the founding of the Peace Section. Originally a separate body, but with staff housed in MCC offices, the Peace Section was formed as a cooperative venture of the various Anabaptist church bodies in the U.S. and Canada to advocate for recognition of conscientious objection. Through its efforts, the U.S. government allowed Mennonites and other peace churches to operate Civilian Public Service camps during World War II, in which conscientious objectors performed non-military, public service. This was the beginning of "peace work" in MCC—advocacy by MCC's constituent churches on their own behalf, to allow draft-age men from those churches to follow their consciences and abstain from war.

As the Peace Section became more established, its focus expanded from advocacy toward government, for recognition of conscience, to advocacy toward other churches: theological dialogue. The establishment of the World Council of Churches (WCC), following World War II, provided the opportunity for conversation between the Historic Peace Churches and this movement. The rubric here, as churches reflected on the devastation of

a war in Europe that pitted Christians against one another, was summed up in a motion to the first assembly of the WCC, by Church of the Brethren leader M. R. Ziegler (later to grace a popular MCC-produced poster): "Let Christians of the world agree not to kill each other."

Through the mid-twentieth- century, the Peace Section within MCC played a dual role: speaking for Mennonites in international and ecumenical conversations about peace theology, while at the same time seeking to educate members of MCC's own constituent churches, pulling them together for conversation about what it meant to be a peace church. With the founding of the Washington Office in 1968 and the Ottawa Office in 1975, MCC also pushed its churches to look outward, as it began to engage in advocacy that spoke to public policies beyond those that directly affected its own founding churches. By this time, MCC had begun to see itself as having some responsibility to share the voices and concerns of its partners around the world with lawmakers of its home governments.

When we became directors of MCC's International Peace Office (one of the institutional successors to the Peace Section) in 1991, these tracks—(1) advocacy, whether on behalf of MCC constituent members or on behalf of international program partners toward governments in U.S. and Canada, and (2) theological conversations about peace with the Historic Peace Churches and the ecumenical movement—were well established. However, a new area of focus was beginning to grow. MCC had pioneered the "Mennonite Conciliation Services" office in the 1980's, making peace practical through offering training in peacebuilding skills. "Conflict resolution," or "conciliation," was a new field at the time, and MCC helped support its growth and development. In the early 90's, John Paul Lederach served under the Peace Office as a resource for MCC's international programs in peacebuilding work. By the end of the decade, peace training institutes were established at several Mennonite universities or colleges in the U.S. and Canada, and MCC was supporting similar training around the world. This track worked at the "social science" dimension of MCC peace work.

Advocacy within MCC is now well-established, with offices in Washington and Ottawa, and a presence at the United Nations in New York. However, the inherent tension between the other two tracks (theological conversation and social-science-based peacebuilding practice) continues. Both are important, but they engage different contexts—and at times, challenge each other directly.

Between 2002 and 2004, the MCC Peace Office hosted a "Peace Theology Project" that sought specifically to engage constituent church members in conversation about the questions of security and order that had come to the fore as a result of the September 11, 2001, attacks. The project surfaced the tensions between these disciplines. Some in the theology and church history faculties of Mennonite institutions asked why MCC was talking about theology, and especially why we were talking about questions of "responsibility." At the same time, peacebuilding practitioners welcomed MCC continuing to engage questions of what kind of social structures lead to a reduction of violence and conflict. The conversations surfaced a gap between those involved in peace practically, located in the world of measurement, impact assessment, and contextual realities, and those engaged in theological reflection on peace, operating in a framework of theological and ethical norms.

For much of MCC's history, challenges to settled ways of thinking about Mennonite peace assumptions have come from engagement beyond safe ecclesial borders. Discussion with other traditions, and work in difficult and challenging locations, has been the source of new learning. In the last decade, a focus on "interfaith bridge-building," and especially MCC encounters in Islamic contexts, again pushed MCC and its constituent churches in new directions. How can MCC embrace this need for learning and best structure to encourage such learning? The following seem relevant from our current vantage point:

1. MCC must embrace its history of hosting inter-Mennonite and ecumenical theological dialogues on Christian peace witness. While institutions of higher learning in MCC's constituent churches take up some of this task, MCC continues, via its world-wide engagements, to provide significant learning opportunities and venues for dialogue. MCC should see this role as part of its on-going work to encourage an ethic or theology for Christian peacemaking.

2. MCC must also continue to embrace the social science world of peace practice, or "peacebuilding," and to give it the space it needs within MCC to reach for new understanding and practice. The world of social conflict, including war and civil unrest, seems to ever expand. MCC has the opportunity to take risks that may skirt the borders of traditional peace understandings, and should feel responsible to do this. If no risks are taken, little new contextual learning will come. This should be a growing focus within MCC's international programs, developing a collection of "best practices" for peacebuilding based on the experiences of MCC and its partners.

These two streams, peace theology and peace practice, have been held together somewhat uneasily. It may be better to allow them separate professional space, and clear structural homes within MCC. They should not be so distant from each other as to become foreign, but should each have the space to bring their best thinking to the larger community.

Within MCC programmatic systems, peacebuilding program work has a clear place and definition within MCC's planning documents. Less clear is the structural locus or support within MCC for the second stream we are here describing. Could this potentially be housed in a series of annual dialogues or conferences, perhaps harking back to the older "Peace Theology Colloquium" movement?

One way of grounding theology defines it as "reflection on praxis." MCC represents for its constituent churches a locus of praxis: a point of intersection with the issues and contexts that shape the wider world. MCC also serves often as a practical link to fellow-Christians responding to contexts of struggle. Theological reflection as a central part of MCC's work, informed by MCC's practical peacebuilding engagements, is needed by the wider church. Maintaining ways to hold together these sometimes competing streams may be the factor that defines a faithful Christian peace conviction in our time.

Bob and Judy Zimmerman Herr, Area Directors for East Africa, worked as MCC Peace Office Directors from 1991 to 2006.

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Seven decades of MCC Peace Section

The MCC Peace Section was established in 1942. Over the ensuing seventy years, the Peace Section and its successors moved MCC from its initially narrow focus on ensuring opportunities for conscientious objection and alternative service to participation in war to vigorous engagement in advocacy efforts, initiating peacebuilding programs, and giving leadership to inter-Mennonite and broader ecumenical conversations around growing edges of peace theology.

While the MCC Binational Peace Office closed in 2007, bringing with it an end to 65 years of MCC having a department named either Peace Section or Peace Office, the mission of the Peace Section/Peace Office to promote innovative peacebuilding program continues. A comprehensive history of the MCC Peace Section and its successors has yet to be written. Below are some selected highlights which provide but a small sampling of the scope of the Peace Section's efforts.

1942: MCC Peace Section founded

1946-1949: Publication of the Peace Section Newsletter

1948: Inauguration of the Inter-Collegiate Peace Fellowship

1950: Peace Section Study Conference at Winona Lake, Indiana, November 9-12 brings together delegates from almost all Mennonite and Brethren groups in Canada and the U.S.; conference produces "Declaration of Christian Faith and Commitment"

1953: Peace Section gives leadership to drafting of "Peace is the Will of God," a testimony from the Historic Peace Churches and the International Fellowship of Reconciliation to the World Council of Churches

1955: First of the Puidoux theological conferences bringing together Christian leaders from eastern and western Europe to converse with Mennonite theologians regarding Christian pacifism and non-resistance

1957: Counseling begun for conscientious objectors in the armed forces

1958: Seminar on race relations in Chciago on the removal of "the racist barrier from the fellowship of Christ."

1959: Peace Section begins addressing protest actions, non-payment of war taxes, and non-registration for the draft

1972: As a friend of the court in Wisconsin v. Yoder case before the U.S. Supreme Court, the Peace Section argued for Amish religious freedom in education

1973: Special task force initiated to explore involvement of women in peace-related activities

1974: Two national peace committees (Canada and U.S.) recognized, together forming a binational/international Peace Section

1975: Conference held to explore biblical and theological aspects of war taxes and war tax resistance

1979: Statement on "Militarism and Development" adopted by MCC

1980: Collection of Mennonite statements on peace and social concerns published

1987: International Peace Section becomes MCC Binational Peace Office; MCC U.S. Peace Section later becomes MCC U.S. Peace and Justice Ministries, while MCC Canada Peace Section becomes MCCC Peace and Social Concerns

Learn more

Enns, Fernando, et al. Eds. *Seeking Cultures of Peace: A Peace Church Conversation.* Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2004.

Friesen, Duane K. and Gerald Schlabach. Eds. *At Peace and Unafraid: Public Order, Security, and the Wisdom of the Cross.* Scottdale: Herald Press, 2005.

Miller, Donald, et al. Eds. *Overcoming Violence in Asia: The Role of the Church in Seeking Cultures of Peace.* Telford, PA: Cascadia, 2011.

Miller, Donald, et al. Eds. *Seeking Peace in Africa: Stories from Africa Peacemakers.* Telford, PA: Cascadia, 2007.

1989: Peace Office begins focus on "International Conciliation," with assignment of John Paul Lederach as part-time consultant to MCC international program

1991: Publication by the Peace Office of Mennonite Peace Theology: A Panorama of Types, ed. J.R. Burkholder and Barbara Nelson Gingerich

1993 The statement, "A Commitment to Christ's Way of Peace," adopted by MCC as a common statement of peace convictions guiding MCC's work.

2001-2010: Peace Office provides leadership in planning series of four conferences in Switzerland, Kenya, Indonesia, and the Dominican Republic bringing together representatives of the Historic Peace Churches to reflect on their identities and mission in light of the World Council of Churches' declared Decade to Overcome Violence.

2004: Peace Office hosts At Peace and Unafraid conference on human security and peace theology, culmination of two-year Peace Theology Project

Intersections: a crossroads of theory and practice

Welcome to the first issue of Intersections! As editors of this new publication, we want Intersections to be a place in which practitioners join church leaders and academics from a wide variety of disciplines in thinking rigorously about challenges and new directions in humanitarian relief, community development, and peacebuilding. Upcoming issues will examine trends in migration and resettlement; disaster risk reduction strategies; and responses to sexual- and gender-based violence. We are grateful for your readership and urge you to contact us with any suggestions you might have about topics that Intersections should address.

Bruce Guenther and Alain Epp Weaver are Co-Directors of MCC's Planning, Learning, and Disaster Response department.

Mennonite Central Committee

Relief, development and peace in the name of Christ