

Building just and lasting peace

Values and principles

Proposing an alternative to 'might is right'

On the 26th March sixty people were brought together by Tearfund at Lambeth Palace to explore what a 'Christ-centered' approach to building just and sustained peace might look like. The conference was in response to the increasing number of violent conflicts worldwide and a growing narrative that we live in an era where 'might is right' and that security comes through military and economic might. The conference asked if we, as Christians, were content with this increasingly dominant narrative and if not, whether we could suggest a better alternative.

Groups were asked to discuss the values and principles that should shape how we build just and lasting peace. They were tasked to consider the questions from three perspectives. Firstly as a member of their local community focused on their local environment. Secondly as a citizen of the United Kingdom, considering how

we should build peace for ourselves and with those countries or regimes that are perceived as threats or that perceive us as threats to them. Finally as global citizens asking how we build peace for people within all nations across the globe.

We offer the list of ideas below as a starting point for discussion. The list is undoubtedly flawed, imperfect and incomplete. So what do you think? How should we build just and lasting peace locally, nationally and globally? What values or principles do you think should shape the way in which we interact with others in the world, especially those with whom we disagree? What is a 'Christ-centered' approach to building just, sustainable peace?

Our 'strawman' list follows:

Foundational values

Human dignity

Focus on the dignity of all, recognising each individual as made in the image of God. This means that all people are equal in God's eyes, regardless of background, belief, or gender. Any words, actions or impulses that dehumanise the other or that introduce a sense of hierarchy of worth between groups must be resisted.

Love

Keep love at the centre of our thinking and action, embodying in practical ways the principle of loving others as ourselves. We must seek the security of the 'other, the putative enemy or stranger', as well as ourselves and build relationships and friendship across communities.

Hope

Be voices of positivity and hopefulness. We have not been given a spirit of fear and timidity and our thinking or actions should not be dictated by our fears.

Abundance

Be generous and hospitable, trusting that Jehovah Jireh, the God who not only provides but does so 'pressed, down,

shaken together to make room for more, running over, and poured into our laps' (Luke 6) will provide what is needed.

Resist the call to hoard and to protect what one has, excluding others in need through the fear that there may not be enough.

Mercy and justice

Speak up for justice and challenge structures, policies and practices that embed injustice or that apply justice partially. Rather than seeking revenge, show mercy and adopt a concept of 'healing justice' that refuses to ignore harm but also 'refuses to let harm have the last word', acknowledging that some wounds leave scars that will not go away.

Connectedness and inclusion

Recognising that, as the body of Christ, if one part hurts, all parts hurt, shift from individualism towards understanding our responsibility for one another, fostering a sense of global solidarity. Ensure that, as far as possible, the voices of those that are rarely heard are emphasised and meaningfully included.

Relational principles for community building

Reflection and self-awareness

Be aware of where our thinking and actions have been influenced or co-opted by worldly thinking and values leading to false assumptions and biases that influence our perceptions and responses. Be prepared to challenge and change our own hearts and attitudes and have the courage to imagine and pronounce a different way of being and relating.

Listen to understand

Be curious about people's individual stories, listen to deepen understanding rather than to challenge, persuade or debate.

Disagree well

Do not pursue false or superficial agreement. Accept that there will be issues where each will continue to differ,

and respect each other's positions. Focus on where there is agreement and on finding ways to live together well despite differences.

Be present

Be present when with others, giving them our full attention, demonstrating that they are valued and important to us.

Hospitality

Be welcoming, allowing people to enter our spaces as they are without conditions. As importantly, step out of our comfort zones and accept hospitality from others. Be prepared to go into their spaces as their guest.

Vulnerability

Be prepared to be vulnerable, practicing openness and authenticity.

National and global principles

Human-centric

Put people first. The focus of policies and actions to build just, sustainable peace should be individual human beings rather than states, institutions, businesses or structures. The needs of, and impact, on human beings, local, national and global, should drive policies.

Embrace complexity

Work with the messiness, complexity, tensions and diversity of the world and resist narratives that oversimplify situations or that categorise or group views, opinions or people into generic statements or stereotypes.

Address complicity

Encourage a rich understanding of our history that recognises both the positive contributions that our nation has made and the negative impact. Be willing to listen to the perspectives of others and allow their views and experiences to deepen our understanding. Acknowledge where our history has made, and continues to make us complicit in maintaining unjust systems and work to overturn them.

Accountability and education

Educate ourselves to increase awareness of global issues and the root causes of conflict, recognising where we may have contributed to those causes and dynamics.

Focus on prevention

Spend time and effort understanding the perspectives and interests of other nations and groups, identifying potential points of friction and working in advance to mitigate or resolve these to prevent violent conflict.

Seek mutual benefit

Be wary of pursuing short-term national interests if doing so conflicts with the interests of others. Instead look for ways of finding outcomes that provide mutual benefit.

Think systemically

Identify the root causes of conflict and create joined-up solutions that address the whole problem.

Values and principles to avoid

Group attribution

Do not attribute the actions of one person in an identity group to all people in that group, treating all with suspicion or fear or taking the actions of one as being typical of the entire group. Individuals are accountable for their own actions, the wider group is not.

Superiority

Show humility rather than arrogance or superiority. Recognise our own imperfections and faults and that we may not have exclusive expertise or knowledge. Be open to alternative perspectives and alternative knowledge and expertise. Be willing to learn from others, regardless of their status.

Rigid mindsets

Avoid dogmatism, absolutism and certainty. Encourage questioning and doubt as it leads to exploration, deeper understanding and growth as opposed to stagnation.

Self-interest

Don't be driven by our own self-interest. Articulate and champion our own needs and interests but look also at the needs and interests of others and find ways to satisfy the needs of others as well as ourselves.

You can comment on these suggestions or suggest your own by scanning the QR code below

