



What we mean by a culture of peacebuilding

"We are not Quakers because we have embraced the idea of pacifism or simple living... We are Quakers because we have encountered something within that convinces us that we can be and should be at peace, live simply, be loving toward all or live any other witness that may arise from this experience."

- Robert Griswold, 2005, quoted in *Faith and Practice*, Canadian Yearly Meeting, p. 108

We believe that peace is always possible. Neither peace nor violence is inevitable or natural. Relationships, social, and political structures can influence humans toward peace or toward violence. Modern science backs up this belief. However, for Friends it arises from an experience at the roots of Quaker faith that is beyond words.

We can experience and answer to that of God in all creation. At any moment each of us may heed this inward Light and be guided away from violence. The following description of a culture of peacebuilding expresses what we mean by *peace*, grounded in Friends' peace testimony. Whatever CFSC can do to foster the conditions that influence people toward peace and away from violence is part of peacebuilding. This is clearly a vast definition, and is holistic rather than technical. Peacebuilding is work that Friends historically, and still today, feel led to. It is an expression of all of CFSC's values: peace, integrity, equality, simplicity, and respect for all creation.



Canadian Friends, through a process of discernment, have expressed continued unity about the need for, and the value of, peacebuilding. There is no such unity in support of peacekeeping (i.e., seeking to prevent violent conflict through *armed* protective intervention). The CFSC book *The Four Elements of Peacebuilding* lays out examples of alternative techniques which Friends are more likely to support.

CFSC follows a theory of three levels through which the culture of peacebuilding is enacted:

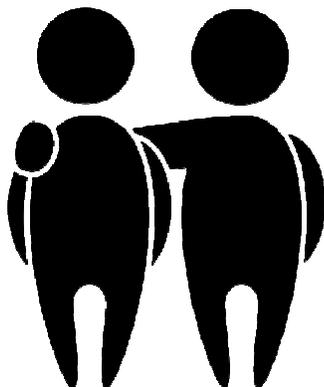
- **inner peace** - attitudes, beliefs, and habits conducive to peace;
- **interpersonal peace** - peace in day-to-day interactions with others; and
- **structural peace** - political and social structures conducive to peace in the wider community (whether locally or internationally).

Each of the levels is simultaneously influenced by and influencing the others. For instance, more peaceful structures will encourage more peaceful interactions between people. More interpersonal peace will help individuals achieve more inner peace. Structural peace will be promoted when people understand and value inner and interpersonal peace and use it to recognize, and seek to distance our society from, militarism.

Our definition of peacebuilding applies equally to any country in the world, whatever its present relationship to violent conflict. Because situations around us play such a major role in the decisions we make, peaceful situations and conditions must be continually built.

CFSC considers the following interconnected elements central to a culture of peacebuilding:

- **Justice** - Governing structures must be seen by citizens as legitimate and just. This entails a respectable system of norms, regulations, standards, laws, and procedures to deal with conflicts consistently, without bias, marginalization, discrimination, or advantage based on personal or group characteristics or power. This includes protection of dissent and fostering of respect for the full human rights, dignity, and participation of all. Social institutions must not be founded on principles of punishment, exploitation, unsustainable use of resources, or "might-makes right". As we live in a global and interdependent community, justice clearly includes right relationships with others (other individuals, communities, nations, and species). Problems cannot simply be exported elsewhere in the web of relationships if we expect to have lasting peace. For us, justice is social, economic, and ecological.



- **Social opportunities** - culturally appropriate, safe, dignified, and ethical services and entry points into a life which holds meaning to the individual and the community. For example: education and child services, health services, housing, employment opportunities, proper sanitation, arts opportunities, nutritious food and safe water, chances for fun and games, sufficient sleep, places and time enough to

connect with the natural world of which we are a part, opportunities for spiritual expression.

- **Active support for change in the direction of positive peace** - cultures are not static; new ideas and directions are always emerging. Tension is inherent in change, as some will inevitably seek to hold on to existing structures and ways of doing things. All elements of society need loving and supportive care, including listening to their needs and offering adequate chances for respectful public debate and priority setting. Space must be created to encourage positive changes on a continual basis.
- **Skills** - people need a great many skills in order to live peacefully. Leaders, teachers, and other role models are important in helping critical masses of people gain these. They include the abilities to:
 - **model healthy relationships with ourselves:**
 - i. deal with negative emotions and trauma so as to **remain emotionally present** and aware,
 - ii. **forgive** and let things go when appropriate, **but not avoid, repress, or deny,**
 - iii. **be aware of our limits** and be loving to ourselves,
 - iv. **live simply** - identifying needs and distinguishing these from greed and other forms of excess,
 - **model healthy relationships with others:**
 - i. empathize and engage in **compassion-based** responses,
 - ii. **admit faults and mistakes** such as anything that has caused harm, and seek to **respond appropriately,**
 - iii. **respect** others, including those with whom we are in conflict, appreciating **diversity** among all people, animals, and the natural world,
 - iv. **pause, be patient, and listen actively,**
 - v. **handle discomfort,** apparent chaos, and ambiguity **without becoming overly fearful** or distressed,
 - **analyze problems - recognize and name:**
 - i. **power-over/othering/exclusion** in all of its forms (in language, in economics, in news media, in celebrations, in popular entertainment, in games, in curriculums, in government policies, etc.),
 - ii. **biases and prejudices** (personal and others'),
 - iii. **subtexts** and the multiple layers and types of motivations,
 - iv. **signs that violence** is building internally or in others and ways to respond,
 - **imagine and enact change:**
 - i. **envision** positive and creative **alternatives** to current realities,
 - ii. **organize** in communities seeking change,
 - iii. understand the **range of nonviolent techniques** available and apply the ones that best meet the needs of the moment.



Photo CC-BY Caitlin Regan

This list (and it is far from exhaustive!) clearly shows that there are many conditions which may be lacking, and therefore lead individuals or societies away from peace. We are practical in our approach. Conditions will never be perfect, but now is always a good time to take peacebuilding action.

We recognize that, as a small organization with limited resources, CFSC must focus its efforts within the vast field we call peacebuilding. We believe that, whatever the level of engagement and change it produces in participants - from inner and interpersonal to structural - helping people gain some of the skills listed above will uphold our core program goal: *to contribute to creating a culture of peacebuilding to identify, engage constructively with, and transform conflict*. When CFSC engages in international work, it is to similarly enable skills development in local communities and based on local priorities, creating increased inner, interpersonal, and/or structural peace.

Peacebuilding is a spiritual challenge and comes from an understanding that God is peace. CFSC's work today continues Friends' centuries of efforts and witness for a culture of peacebuilding, in keeping with the peace testimony.

Find out more at <http://quakerservice.ca/our-work/peace>