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MAURO INSTITUTE FOR PEACE & JUSTICE AT ST. PAUL'S COLLEGE

Special Issue: Fostering Hope in a Divided World

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Fostering Hope in our Divided World

Stanley Amaladas PhD

"Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all the darkness."
Bishop Desmond Tutu

Our first Special Issue comprises of select Conference Proceedings from *Our Whole Society Conference* held in Winnipeg (June 15-17th 2025) and other invited articles. The Canadian Museum for Human Rights was a hub for civic reflection and moral dialogue. The Arthur V. Mauro Institute for Peace and Justice at St. Paul's College was honoured to collaborate with the Canadian Interfaith Conversation in co-sponsoring the conference.

With the theme '*Fostering Hope in a Divided World*,' the conference brought together scholars, activists, public servants, and faith leaders in a search for transformative solutions to today's urgent social challenges. Our collaboration was intentional in that the theme for this Conference is directly aligned with Dr. Arthur V. Mauro's vision for Winnipeg, namely, to be cultural center of hope.

Hope is complex. It is more than an emotion, mixed with the expectation that peace, justice, and human dignity might be possible. It is more than a passive attitude. Hope is deeply enmeshed in social, cultural, political, and economic contexts. As a collective and active force, hope is a refusal to give up on imagining the possibility of a better world. Hope can, in other words, be a catalyst for real transformational change. In this Special Issue our authors share their stories and struggles with this phenomenon called hope.

Conference Proceedings:

Dr. Payam Akhavan, a Keynote speaker, shared his storied life journey of the risk of confronting both our shared humanity and the diversity of our community living in harmony amid the onslaught of an age of rage - a rage that moves us in the direction of despair.

Panelists, Dr, Sami Halewa, sj, Joanne Seiff, and Tanya Brothers address Hope through their storied lenses of the politics of belonging and what it means to belong.

Invited Submissions:

Dr. Robert Chrismas: Drawing on Jean Paul Lederach's hopeful idea of moral imagination, Dr. Chrismas contends that hope can rise from the sea of inhumanity, if we develop empathy and the strength to carry it out.

Dr. Whitney McIntyre Miller reviews the emerging literature on Peace Leadership in considering the importance of promoting individual peace toward building and sustaining collective peace. She positions her review as a guide to foster hope in creating collective and sustainable peace in our world.

Dr. Ahmed Mohammed-Salee, Kaleem Hussain, and Lisa Hilt, explore the idea of post-normal peace, that in-between period where old orthodoxies are dying, new ones have not yet emerged, and nothing appears to make sense. Utilizing the concept and method of a polylogue they attempt to exemplify the use of multiple logics, perspectives, voices, and existences for the sake of bringing people together to foster hope in a divided world.

Can We Begin Anew?

This Special Issue on the topic of Hope is indeed timely and necessary. In our divided world, we need to remain hopeful. But what is hope without action? It is wishful thinking. It is a mere act of optimism. For the late Pope Francis, however, hope is a verb. Here is what he had to say:

> ... to live hope requires a “mysticism with open eyes”, as the great theologian Johann-Baptist Metz called it: knowing how to discern, everywhere, evidence of hope, the breaking through of the possible into the impossible, of grace where it would seem that sin has eroded all trust.

Pope Francis grounded his discernment by telling his story:

> Some time ago I had the opportunity to dialogue with two exceptional witnesses of hope, two fathers: one Israeli, Rami; one Palestinian, Bassam. Both lost daughters in the conflict that has bloodied the Holy Land for too many decades now. But nonetheless, in the name of their pain, the suffering they felt at the death of their two little daughters – Smadar and Abir – they have become friends, indeed brothers: they live forgiveness and reconciliation as a concrete, prophetic and authentic gesture. Meeting them gave me so much, so much hope. Their friendship and brotherhood taught me it is possible that hatred, concretely, may not have the last word. The reconciliation they experience as individuals, a prophecy of a larger and broader reconciliation, is an

> invincible sign of hope. And hope opens us to unimaginable horizons.

For the sake of humanity, may friendship guide us along this hopeful journey for peace. May friendship enable us to not let hatred be the last word. Why not let hope open us to unimaginable horizons?

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Hope and Human Rights: Empathy in the Age of Rage

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Abstract

Dr. Payam Akhavan, a Keynote speaker, shared his storied life journey of the risk confronting both our shared humanity and the diversity of our community living in harmony amid the onslaught of an age of rage - a rage that moves us in the direction of despair. However, he does not give in to despair. He concludes his story with an inspiring and hopeful verse from a Persian poet Hafiz: "*Even After All this time, The Sun never says to the Earth, "You Owe Me." Look What Happens With a Love like That. It lights the whole sky."*

Honourable Lieutenant-Governor, distinguished guests, chers collègues, chers amis: bonjour et merci de m'avoir invité. C'est un grand honneur de partager avec vous aujourd'hui quelques réflexions sur la promotion de l'espoir dans un monde divisé. It is a great honour to share some reflections on fostering hope in a divided world.

I am especially pleased to address you at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights. It is a remarkable monument to our faith in human dignity; a faith that is at the core of our Canadian identity. We, who call ourselves Canadian, are both Indigenous and immigrants, Anglophone and Francophone, from every conceivable colour and creed in the world. We share a multicultural heritage, a conception of belonging founded on human dignity, that transcends the divisive ideologies that have wreaked such havoc throughout history. Yet today, that vision of a diverse community living in harmony, that vision of a shared humanity, is facing the onslaught of an age of rage. Whether it is antagonism in our local communities, or the rise of hateful populism in national politics, or the horrors of war and atrocities on the global stage, there is a prevalent sense of despair that humankind is

moving in the wrong direction. In an earlier time, we might have taken the theme of hope and human rights for granted, a feel-good progressive platitude. But now, this gathering assumes a much greater importance, as we gaze into a turbulent horizon, pondering an uncertain future.

I had the privilege of visiting the Museum not long after it opened its doors in 2014. The first time I had visited Winnipeg however was some thirty years earlier, in the winter of 1984. I was an itinerant teenager, en route to Nunavut, traveling from Toronto to visit a remote place called Baker Lake, or Qamani'tuaq in Inuktitut. It was a long and memorable flight across the vast Arctic tundra. Upon arriving, I realized that the freezing temperatures in Winnipeg had in fact been quite reasonable. I asked an Inuit resident of the hamlet how cold it was, and he responded that: "it doesn't matter." I can only imagine what he must have thought about an ignorant *kabloona* from the south asking such a stupid question.

The Inuit culture was like nothing I had experienced before. It wasn't difficult to sense the profound spirituality that was shaped by the immensity of the land, stretching as far as the eye could see, enveloped in the constant darkness of the winter night. The magical glow of the aurora borealis, in enchanting shades of green and purple, a cosmic curtain dancing mysteriously in the heavens above, was a surreal spectacle made all the more dream-like by the scattering of brilliant stars glittering from distant galaxies. That purposeful silence was full of meaning, a pervasive message that despite our delusional self-importance, we are but an insignificant speck in an infinite universe.

The beauty of the moment though came with the stark realization that at minus 50°C, the idea of freezing to death was not metaphorical. The biting wind summoned all to prostrate themselves before the brutal laws of nature that spared no one. It was difficult to understand how the Inuit had survived in this climate from time immemorial. Such resilience was unfathomable. The intuitive way in which they communicated too was striking, prolonged silence punctuated by very few but meaningful words. This ancient wisdom of harmony with the universe stood in sharp contrast to the constant noise of the big city, with empty chatter and endless entertainment, and a corrosive consumerism portrayed as the pursuit of happiness.

As much as I approached this new culture with reverence and curiosity, there was also a palpable grief amongst the people that I encountered. The youth my age talked of

substance abuse, self-harm and suicide. These were conversations that I could not fully appreciate at the time. I met a young woman wearing a traditional parka. Her adorable toddler was peering out with big brown eyes from the comfortable pouch on her mother's back where she was ensconced. There were no words exchanged for a while. Then suddenly, without any introduction, she shared the story of her sister who went south and never returned, her whereabouts still unknown. A long silence followed. Like most Canadians, I had yet to learn about the plight of murdered and missing Indigenous women, or the legacy of colonialism and the residential schools, or the inter-generational trauma behind self-harm and substance abuse.

There was an endearing authenticity among those I befriended, but also an immense need for healing. Immersed in a culture that was foreign to me, I had come upon a remarkable combination of spirituality and suffering, as I struggled with my own sorrow. Our experiences were so radically different, but we could somehow connect in profound ways across our vast cultural differences. We were learning the language of empathy, the mother tongue of human beings.

In 1983, the year before visiting Nunavut, my life had suddenly changed course because of events in Iran, the land of my birth. I had become a Canadian citizen in 1980, a year after the revolution that established the so-called Islamic Republic of Iran. When we first arrived in Toronto, I didn't quite understand the meaning of persecution and exile. I lived in a world of childhood innocence. My parents sheltered me from the dark clouds that were gathering, presaging the violent storm that would destroy so many lives.

At first, I was terribly home-sick, longing for the embrace of friends and family that filled my life with so much love and warmth. One of the best memories I had was the beautiful orchard where we would spend the weekends. It was a bucolic paradise, an escape from the unbearable stress of life in Tehran, with its incessant noise, pollution, and traffic. In the pre-social media dark ages, these social gatherings were instrumental in acquiring information and learning from others. When Bruce Lee's "Enter the Dragon" first appeared in the cinema, it was up to the older cousins to teach the latest Kung Fu techniques to the younger cousins who weren't allowed to watch the film. Our exhausted parents wanted nothing more than reposing beneath the cool shade of mulberry trees, with the soothing sounds of the limpid stream. Instead, they would be screaming at

us to stop experimenting on each other with leaping tiger kicks, warning us to no avail that somebody is going to get hurt.

Iran was now a world away. Fresh experiences supplanted distant memories. As one of two brown children in the fourth grade, accused by the schoolyard bullies of hostage-taking and suicide-bombing, my priority was to gain acceptance in my new home. This was not yet the multicultural society that we know today. My efforts to become a Canadian patriot were genuine though not without difficulties. There was the one time that I confused the theme from Hockey Night in Canada with the national anthem. In fact, much of what I initially learned was from television. Having watched American movies dubbed in Persian, I was surprised to see John Wayne speaking fluent English. Armed with the remote control, I discovered the emancipatory potential of endless entertainment, a life of constant distraction and amusement. My understanding of suffering was but a brief glimpse of hapless victims from distant lands on the evening news, as I flicked rapidly through channels, in search of an episode of Gilligan's Island.

As an immigrant adolescent, I had entered a new phase of my assimilation process. I couldn't quite decide whether to dress as a rock star or a disco icon. In either scenario, I committed fashion crimes that are best not discussed at such a distinguished gathering. And then, in my sixteenth year, this world of illusions was suddenly shattered. Back in Iran, the mass executions had accelerated, as the Islamic Republic eliminated political and religious groups that stood in the way of its totalitarian ideology. The so-called Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khomeini, had famously said that "criminals should not be tried, they should be killed." Accusation and guilt became one and the same before the Revolutionary Courts, and holding a contrary opinion or belief, became a crime punishable by death.

My family belonged to the Bahá'í religious minority. In Khomeini's murderous theology, we were condemned as a wayward sect, infidels and apostates, who should either convert or be killed. He found our belief in the equality of men and women particularly infuriating. Among those who were arrested was my sixteen-year-old contemporary Mona Mahmudnizhad from the city of Shiraz. She was defiant and deeply committed to fighting for justice. In a high school essay in which she was expected to praise the revolution, she wrote:

> *Why am I not free to express my ideas …? Why don't you give me freedom of speech… Yes, liberty is a Divine gift, and this gift is for us also, but you don't let us have it*

Mona's inspiring courage would exact a heavy price. On 18 June 1983, she and nine other Bahá'í women were executed by hanging.

When news came of Mona's execution, I asked myself: "Why her, and not me?" What divided us was that my family had the good fortune of moving to Canada, while hers remained in Iran. The injustice seemed so random in this world of extremes. Her heroism exposed the emptiness of the consumerist culture that surrounded me in Canada. "What was my freedom worth" I asked, "if it was wasted on selfish mediocrity?" I was confronted with the stark contrast between a meaningless life and a meaningful death. Faced with these existential questions, the pursuit of global justice was not a career choice; it was my only path of redemption.

As I grappled with the grave injustice in the home I once knew, I set out on a painful journey in pursuit of justice. I found many others, also in search of answers, whether in the unlikely encounter between an Inuit and an Iranian, or in the many other places around the world that I would discover. What I would learn is that all human beings suffer the same, that amidst the pain and sorrow there is also a profound joy in defending the downtrodden, in helping others heal. I would discover that the shared humanity that binds us together is more powerful than anything that divides us. The journey that followed those dark years in the 1980s took me to extraordinary places and people that I would otherwise have never met. From Bosnia and Rwanda to Guatemala and Cambodia, Iraq and Myanmar, I would encounter many wounded souls, wailing and wandering, also in search of answers, crying for justice in a cruel world.

Upon graduating from law school, still in my 20s, I had the good fortune of being one of the pioneers of the ad hoc International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, established by the UN Security Council in 1993. It was an unprecedented response to the horrors of "ethnic cleansing" in Croatia and Bosnia. My first UN flight to besieged Sarajevo was memorable. At the check-in counter, someone had scribbled a sign: "Maybe Airlines." Maybe you will arrive, maybe you won't! Upon arrival, driving into the city from the airport, with sniper fire and artillery attacks and the dead people scattered on the streets, the graffiti on a wall said: "Welcome to Hell". The scenes were shocking. In a village called Ahmići, we discovered in a burnt home the charred remains of a family with small children. I

came to Bosnia trying to save the world, but I would leave just trying to save myself! Some things can never be unseen; they leave lasting but invisible scars that others might not see or understand. And they leave us with moral certitude, that justice must be pursued, no matter how unrealistic, even against overwhelming odds,

The success of the Yugoslav Tribunal was far from guaranteed. While the Nuremberg Tribunal was criticized for dispensing "Victor's Justice", it could at least arrest the vanquished Nazi leaders without impediment. But in the former Yugoslavia, the war was still raging, and there was no means of arresting the accused. In the years that followed, circumstances would change with numerous arrests by UN peacekeepers, and the extradition of President Milošević in 2001 to stand trial in The Hague would become a defining moment for accountability in global politics.

The Yugoslav Tribunal was followed in 1994 with a second ad hoc International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, in response to the horrific genocide of the Tutsi that claimed almost one million lives. There too, trials such as that of Prime Minister Kambanda would represent a significant step forward for accountability. These were the first post-Nuremberg criminal jurisdictions, some 50 years after the trial of Nazi leaders first introduced the idea of international accountability. In the post-Cold War window of opportunity that existed in the 1990s, they became the catalyst for the establishment of the International Criminal Court at the Rome Diplomatic Conference in 1998. At long last, there would be a permanent court in The Hague for holding world leaders accountable, even if its jurisdiction and enforcement powers were quite limited.

These developments were unimaginable when I was a law student, dreaming that such a day would come in the distant future. The Court is still marginalized in global politics, and it has been accused by some of politicization and "lawfare". It is praised when its accusations are politically expedient and criticized when such accusations are inconvenient. The Court is at a crucial crossroads, where it must navigate the complexities of global politics such that it maintains its impartiality and independence. A Court that is weak in a heavily politicized international order must at least have legitimacy in the eyes of the world community. It must uphold the highest standards of professional competence and integrity. The Court faces several challenges, and it could certainly improve. But its mere existence reflects the tremendous progress

that has been made in the historical evolution of global justice. It is an institution representing the shift from signing human rights treaties that are violated with impunity to a means for their enforcement. This is a difficult and complex historical process, and no doubt, there will be many mistakes and setbacks.

While these developments are cause for hope, it is difficult to disregard the terrible ordeal of survivors around the world, for whom justice will always remain inadequate. It is easy looking at the arena of suffering from the safe distance of The Hague "bubble" and other elite circles, to remain aloof from the reality of life-long trauma that many must endure. There is also the bigger philosophical question of whether it is ever possible to punish crimes such as genocide in light of their exceptional magnitude. As Hannah Arendt said after the Nuremberg Judgment, the Nazi atrocities "exploded the limits of the law." For the victims, justice is at once essential and elusive. Justice, however, is not just about punishing this or that political leader or military commander. In a deeper sense, it is about reclaiming a lost humanity; it is about reckoning with the past to build a better future. And we have much to learn from those who have lost everything, who, in their resilience and determination, remind us why human rights matter.

Hope is much more than a passing sentiment. It is the lodestar, the astonishing light of our being, that guides us in the darkness of despair. We witness it in the resistance of a political prisoner in the torture chamber, the youth crying for freedom in front of bullets and batons, the tears of a mother mourning her unjustly killed child, the dream of a refugee braving the sea in a rubber dinghy in search of a better life, the prayer of an orphaned child in a war-torn land wishing for peace. But beyond such extreme circumstances, we also witness hope in our daily acts of humanity. We witness it when we choose to help those in distress that cross our path, when we stand in solidarity against bullying and intimidation of the vulnerable, when we reach out to others beyond our own community to build bridges, when we open our eyes and refuse to become a bystander.

It has been said that all it takes for evil to triumph is for good people to do nothing. But doing something cannot be equated with ideological posturing in the ivory tower or virtue signaling on social media. We cannot achieve meaningful change without struggle, sacrifice and suffering. When we are withered by life's disappointments, when cynicism weighs on our soul, we do have the

choice, to turn wounds into wisdom, to become better instead of bitter. In fact, we discover the power of our resilience only when confronting the depths of despair.

When we ponder the corruption and violence surrounding us, we must be mindful of the disease and not the symptoms. It has been said that the Holocaust did not begin in the gas chambers; it began with words. It began with the demonization of others, in denying a shared humanity. "Propaganda is a truly terrible weapon in the hands of an expert" Hitler wrote in 1924, when he was still a marginal figure in German public life. Throughout history, authoritarian leaders of all stripes have understood the imperative necessity of creating imaginary enemies, of demonizing others as a means of homogenizing the ignorant impressionable masses, exploiting fear and hatred to incite the mob and ultimately, to achieve totalitarian control. What we see today not far from here is no exception.

It is also remarkable that radical evil has always been committed in the name of the Good. In justifying the extermination of European Jews, Heinrich Himmler said that: "Anti-Semitism is exactly the same as delousing. Getting rid of lice is not a question of ideology, it is a matter of cleanliness." In Bosnia, slaughtering the innocent was elevated to a glorious act of "ethnic cleansing." The Serb leader Radovan Karadžić had proudly said of the Muslims: "they will disappear! Sarajevo will be a melting pot in which 300,000 Muslims will die." In Rwanda, the *génocidaire*s equated the extermination of Tutsi children with cleaning an infestation: "A cockroach gives birth to another cockroach" was their slogan. In Iraq, ISIS condemned the Yazidi as "devil worshippers and satanists" to justify their murder and sexual enslavement in the name of religious purification. The victimization of others is always preceded by their dehumanization; it is always justified by appealing to an ostensibly lofty goal.

We cannot destroy those we consider to be equal in dignity, equal in rights. In creating enemies in our fertile imagination, we are not concerned with the truth. Rather, we seek to portray others as monsters to rationalize our own monstrosity. Those identified as the enemy become a blank screen on which the hate-monger projects all the fears and fantasies of his own making, all the negative qualities that threaten his own fragile self-image. It is a desperate want of power masquerading as real power. As Jean-Paul Sartre famously said in 1944 after the liberation of Paris: "Si le Juif n'existait pas, l'antisémite l'inventerait." "If the Jew did not

exist, the anti-Semite would invent him." The demon to be destroyed exists first and foremost in the twisted mind of the practitioner of hatred. Scapegoating is an expression of cowardice, a defense mechanism, that allows us to blame others for our own inadequacies. It is a self-destructive deflection, to avoid the hard work of reflection and transformation without which we can never grow. This is a psychological reality that we need to confront more so than ever as demagogues offer us illusions of glory in an imaginary past that never existed, making chauvinism and violence great again.

Hatred is ultimately a form of self-harm because it brings with it the negation of our own humanity and the problem of identification with the suffering of others. At the Nuremberg trials, Paul Blobel, one of the members of the murderous Einstzgruppe extermination squads, testified that "our men who took part in these executions suffered more from nervous exhaustion than those who had to be shot." It was a twisted empathy for the perpetrators, and none for the victims, but it does say much about the self-inflicted consequences of violence. The SS troops who shot thirty-four thousand Jews in Babi Yar ravine near Kyiv were also devoted family men at home. Many were traumatized and suffered breakdowns. Just as they murdered children in cold blood, they would also sit around the dinner table sharing a meal and adoring their own children. Somewhere in their conscience, they would have had to reconcile these two extremes, with the comforting words of Himmler that they were doing the noble work of eliminating lice.

Perhaps the reality today is not the same as the Nazi past, but we must remain vigilant against cynical and cruel currents seeking to normalize hatred. After all, who could have imagined that racial supremacists and corrupt oligarchs would occupy such a prominent place in the mainstream of American politics? I used to watch *House of Cards* on *Netflix* some years ago. Its cynical absurdity was quality fiction writing. Today, I could get a better show watching Fox News.

And just as we look critically at our neighbours to the south, let us not be too self-satisfied in Canada. We have witnessed in recent years the premeditated murder of a Muslim family run over by a truck in London, Ontario, this following the massacre of worshippers at a mosque in Québec City. We have witnessed an alarming resurgence of antisemitism, including arson attacks against Jewish schools and synagogues. There was during the COVID-19 pandemic, a sharp rise in racial violence against Chinese Canadians, on the pretext of the so-called "Wuhan virus".

And racism against Indigenous peoples remains a historical affliction on our society. I cannot forget the hearings of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls that I attended in Winnipeg in 2017. The testimony was truly shocking. We are certainly not immune from such dark divisive forces in Canada. We must remain vigilant. We must prepare to defend the fortress of human dignity, because times will become more difficult.

Divisive ideologies are especially appealing in times of turbulence and transition, when the psychological comfort of blaming others is an expedient solution. Our fragile psyche craves false confidence over confusion and chaos, a delusional certitude that is resistant to reason and reflection. In fact, we are witnessing this entrenchment primarily because of the acceleration of an already inextricable and inescapable interdependence. The divisive boundaries we have created in our imagination for so long, the construction of our identities by the exclusion of others are rapidly eroding, whether we like it or not. The narrow self-definitions of the past are now under assault as we confront not the romantic feel-good sentiments that were once associated with globalization, but the quite difficult realities of an obsolete and collapsing order that must be replaced by new ideals and institutions. We are witnessing the unfolding of a new world with both unprecedented perils and possibilities. We live in an age that requires us to walk into the unknown with courage and unity.

We are inexorably moving towards a world-embracing identity that is forcing us to embrace a planetary civilization, not because it is a lofty vision or ideal, but because of the inescapable reality that our destinies have become so intertwined, that we have no choice. The rise of insular identities, whether it is xenophobic nationalism, racial supremacy, religious fanaticism, or illiberal ideologies; these resemble a collective infantile regression, a futile retreat from the maturity and wisdom of adult life, when we invariably learn that we are not at the centre of the universe; that we must live in harmony with others. The intensification of these forces is exacerbated by the social media space and the rise of artificial intelligence, that despite its enormous benefits, has also made much worse the social alienation and communal fragmentation that is the malaise of modern life; a malaise that often leaves us in search of meaning and belonging in all the wrong places.

In the most prosperous parts of the world, we are witnessing an unprecedented psychic

pandemic, a prevalence of anxiety and depression, of self-harm and substance abuse, as a corrosive consumerist culture devours our spiritual core; as it eats away at our capacity for authenticity, compassion, and living in community with others. The political struggles that we confront in this age of rage appear more as a question of mental health than political ideology, an increasingly unhinged and misguided search for answers in an imaginary past, at a time when long venerated ideas about our place in the world and our relation to each other must give way to radically new conceptions.

In a world saturated with noise and distraction, greed and narcissism, we must understand the vital necessity of reflection, of a deeper self-understanding of what makes us human. We must pursue genuine engagement in service to society, not as an empty platitude, but as a transformative political act, ushering in new beliefs and behaviours that are not only morally commendable, but also consistent with the reality and requirements of our time. And just as we are poised between religious fanaticism on the one hand, and secular materialism on the other, we have to ask, beyond the law and democratic institutions, that we must protect against the onslaught of authoritarianism, whether it is possible to build a culture of human dignity without a grassroots spiritual revolution. The revolution that we need is one that empowers and transforms people in their most essential social contexts, in the family, in neighbourhoods, in communities and places of work, where much of our meaning and purpose is generated, in daily habits and routines. That revolution is not achieved by ideological control, finger-pointing and cancel culture. It is achieved by compassion and concern for the welfare of others.

Is this not the frontline in the struggle for lasting progress, beyond the whims and fortunes of politics or the clever musings of pundits and experts? The seismic shifts in consciousness that are the truly revolutionary moments in history do not come from the top down, as they do from the bottom up. Do we not witness, even amidst the divisive discourse and hateful polemics, the emergence, especially among the younger generations, of a new consciousness, that is both local and global, that distinguishes between difference and discrimination, that concerns itself with justice, that speaks truth to power? Even if it is sometimes confusing and chaotic, it is the glimmer of a new world with new possibilities. We must ask how we can steer these forces in the right direction.

Whether we are secular or religious, and whatever identity we assume, or whichever

community we belong to, we must recognize that beyond a legal abstraction or intellectual concept, human rights is a moral belief and social vision. It must take spiritual root among the grassroots if we are to inoculate ourselves against the corrosive and corrupt forces that have come to threaten the democratic ideals that we may have taken for granted. The idea of a life of dignity is not so much a rational argument or utilitarian calculus, as it is a faith in the nobility of our essence; it is the post-modern conception of the sacred, that brings us together in common worship.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in 1948 in the shadow of the most cataclysmic conflict in history, declares in Article 1 that:

> *All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.*

Against the blood-stained pages of history, we must not forget that for centuries the enslavement and extermination of the weak by the powerful was accepted. In that light, the widespread belief today in the inherent dignity and rights of all human beings is truly astonishing. We have come so far, even if the journey ahead is long and full of peril. As we watch the unraveling of the liberal societies that we assume represented the end of history, or the consummation of our social evolution on the planet, let us pause and consider what this faith in human rights requires of us.

We come back to the realization that the pursuit of justice is not an abstraction. Its meaning comes to us through empathy and authenticity, feeling the pain of others and assuming responsibility for the world beyond our familiar and comfortable silos. But beyond concerns about middle-class guilt or compassion fatigue, let us also consider the tremendous joy in serving others, the immense power of a shared humanity that eliminates barriers. In living a life of purpose at a time when loneliness and despair have inflicted such profound harm on our spiritual well-being, we should be mindful that in helping others, we are first and foremost our own saviour. We have equated the pursuit of happiness with egotism whereas we must escape the ego to realize our most profound potential. In the words of Rumi, “why do you stay in prison when the door is so wide open?”

This brings me to another poem from the land of my birth, written by Saadi of Shiraz, born in the year 1210, towards the waning years of the Golden Age of Islam. He wrote with prophetic prescience:

Human beings are members of a whole
In creation of one essence and soul
If one member is afflicted with pain
Other members uneasy will remain
If you have no sympathy for human pain
The name of human you cannot retain.

This poem, reflecting the ancient wisdom of the Persian civilization, was familiar to children of my father's generation. He was born in Iran, sometime during the winter of 1928. The exact date is unknown, but the birth date of summer 1929 in his Canadian passport is definitely not correct. The discrepancy is explained by the fact that parents would typically wait a few months to see if the newborn child would survive before registering the birth. The infant mortality rate at the time was about 50%; average life expectancy just 27- years of age. A mother would typically bury half of her children before they reached the age of 5. There wasn't much time to grieve the loss. There were other hungry mouths to feed, in a home without modern conveniences – like running water or electricity. Life had to go on. If you had the misfortune of belonging to a persecuted minority, the fear of violence by an angry mob supplemented the fear of hunger, cold, disease, and premature death. The idea of human rights, let alone ideological debates about identity politics, was scarcely imaginable. People weren't preoccupied with cancelling others; they were more worried about being cancelled by life.

I was reflecting on the exceptional contrast between the pre-modern and post-modern worlds, as my father celebrated his 96th birthday last year on a Zoom call with his adoring grandchildren; a technological convenience that was still the stuff of science fiction well into his adult life. A man who completed his homework by candlelight in childhood now enjoys stimulating conversations with ChatGPT. His meditation on the poetry of medieval mystics now competes with cat videos on Instagram.

Beyond the tightly knit traditional community to which my father belonged, a world without the modern means of communication and transportation, the idea of belonging to a wider world embracing all humankind would have been at most a moral exhortation, or perhaps a prophetic vision. But as I have suggested, today, the inextricable interdependence of all people seems more an inescapable reality. Except that while we are hyper-connected electronically, we experience only the most superficial connections with others, searching for purpose in the emptiness of an on-line existence, supplanting the inspiring universe with the insolent metaverse. We are liberated from the misery of survival, yet against the

onslaught of social media algorithms and emotional isolation, we sink ever deeper into despair. What's more, our gospel of greed, our cult of consumerism, has unleashed catastrophic climate change, all in the name of progress, and the pursuit of happiness. But I raise this with the suggestion that this dawning realization should fill us with hope. Because for the first time in history, and despite whatever divisive ideology may be the seductive political fashion now, we have reached a point where our survival leaves us with no choice but to set aside our differences and cooperate in common cause.

For some time, the Inuit elders have been saying that the earth has tilted, that its axis has shifted, that the stars have moved. The idea was ridiculed as magical thinking until recent times when scientific evidence discovered a shift in the earth's axis because of the redistribution of mass on the planet, primarily because of the melting of ice sheets and glaciers in the Arctic and Antarctic regions. The most fundamental of human right, it would seem, is the right to a healthy environment, a climate system suitable for human life, without which we would perish.

The recent wildfires here in Manitoba is a powerful reminder that catastrophic climate change is not a distant threat; it is already at our doorstep. The laws of human rights are often violated with impunity, with little recourse for the victims, but now we are up against the laws of the earth, and none can escape its consequences. Ancient wisdom and modern science have converged, and their message is loud and clear: we have reached the limits of a materialistic civilization, and we are now learning the painful way that we are but an insignificant speck in an infinite universe. The earth will go on, with or without us. We are confronted with the reality that whether we like it or not, there is only one planet, with only one people, a single indivisible race, whose continued existence depends on living in harmony with the miraculous natural balance that has made life possible in an otherwise inhospitable galaxy.

Having survived the winter trip to the Arctic in 1984, I returned to Nunavut the following summer to see my friends. I could barely recognize the place that I had previously visited. The constant darkness was now transformed into constant light. A luminous bewildering day had come. The land was resplendent and full of life. All of creation had awakened from the bitter cold. The universe was dancing in ecstasy in the warm embrace of the sun, a reminder that we must be patient with the rhythm of the seasons; a reminder that it is exactly in the

darkest moment of the night that dawn will come.

With gratitude for your patience, for your presence, and for your commitment to human betterment, I will end with a poem inspired by Hafez, from Shiraz, where Mona drew her last breath:

Even After All this time
The Sun never says to the Earth
"You Owe Me."
Look What happens
With a Love like That
It lights the whole sky.

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MAURO CENTRE FOR PEACE & JUSTICE AT ST. PAUL'S COLLEGE

Fostering Hope in A Divided World
On the Politics of Belonging

Abstract

Moderated by Dr. Christopher Adams, Rector of St. Paul's College, University of Manitoba, three panelists Dr. Sami Helewa, SJ (President, Campion College, University of Regina), Ms. Tanya Brothers, JD (Vice-Chair, St. Paul's College Foundation Inc.), and Ms. Joanne Seiff (Author and Educator), raise the problem of belonging and share their personal stories of what it means to belong in a polarizing and divided world. While acknowledging that today's political environment is far from ideal and not a source of much hope, they courageously act *as if* there is the possibility of hope. Hope for what? For claiming their voice and rightful place in our divided world. They refuse to accept that their belonging cannot be a reality. Tanya Brothers' selection of Dr. Martin Luther Kings' quote captures the imagination and hope of all panelists:

> *I refuse to accept the view that mankind is so tragically bound to the starless midnight of racism and war that the bright daybreak of peace and brotherhood can never become a reality…. I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word.*

Picture, from left to right: Dr. Niigaan Sinclair, Tanya Brothers (JD), Dr. Stanley Amaladas, Ms. Joanne Seiff (MA, M. Ed.), Dr, Christopher Adams, Dr Sami Halewa SJ.

My Hope in Politics: Personal Reflection

Dr. Sami Helewa, SJ
Campion College at the University of Regina.

Hope in politics intrigued me for several weeks. Hope seems relatable to politics, though it may be hard to discover it at the onset of things through news coverage. When we hope, we anticipate for something to happen and that makes hope political. There is also a subjective side to hope that yearns for a positive outcome. Naturally, no one hopes for the worse, even in politics that correspond to signs of the time. Hope, in its intrinsic nature, is good.

Regarding politics, I have a similar understanding: Politics is good in as far it can bring about the greater good, and to never be satisfied with the status quo, all for the sake of a just existence. I regard civic politics as an idea born of a desire for proper governance, a force pushing social progress, a capacity large enough to ensure human rights of all citizens, to offer border protection, and to promote fair trade for social stability. Like hope, politics is intrinsically good. Hope and politics are two sides of the same coin – we thrive by hope and just politics.

Subjective Hope

At a personal level, my early life was quite different than my life today. I was born stateless, and I belonged to no country with a future to reckon with. I had a culture, a family, and lived in a geography that forced me into a cultural history of dispossession. I had no birth certificate or had any rights granted to a citizen in the first twenty-five years of my life. Even, later, as a Canadian citizen, I always stood on foreign ground, and my feet never touched the land of my ancestors. I have experiences in two camps: a stateless experience and an experience of citizenship. They stand in contrast to each other, and each has a different level of hope, either through religious faith or by the promise of a sound democracy. A stateless person hopes for stability, while a citizen hopes for flourishing. As such, the business of hope brings about the two themes of personal belonging and personal becoming. To say that I "belong" and/or I "flourish" is a testimony of a fulfilled hope. My question hence: Are today's politics, carriers of hope for belonging and for flourishing?

I did not choose to be of a Palestinian heritage, or to be stateless, but I chose to be a Jesuit in response to a grace-filled calling. I chose consecrated poverty, chastity, and

obedience for my life of service for others. Jesuits search for God in all things which is politically spiritual. Spirituality, as Dr. Blair Stonechild recently reminded me in a conversation, is "the highest level of politics." There is a hierarchy in the heavenly realm, with higher authority like the Divine Supreme Being, the angels, and the good spirits versus the lesser good spirits. In religions, there are founders of religious movements, prophets, priests, heretics, and orthodox theologians – all of whom belong to an order of organized politics within religions.

Equally true, in response to being stateless, I chose to be an immigrant because I am obliged from statelessness to be interested in the "foreign other." My Christian faith formed my humanity to relate to the unknown God as a potential providence, to love the Lord as a companion, and to consequently serve the neighbour. My faith led me to study Islam as means of deeper understanding of the foreign other. Meanwhile, the Parable of the Good Samaritan constantly inspires me in its application where the love of neighbour could not escape, and necessarily so, the politics of Judaism at the time of Jesus between Jews of the Temple in Jerusalem and the Samaritan branch of the Jewish community. Spirituality and politics since ancient time are relatable, not just in heavenly realm but earthly as well; they are relatable by hope, even though in our modern times, we have a workable separation of politics from religions.

Status - Quo of a World of No-Peace

Today's politics is far from ideal, and not a source of much hope. Why is that? Did politics lose its core value? In a way, and sadly perhaps it had lost its vision of its prime directive: that of the greater good for all. It is no wonder that democracy is under review for critical evaluation of its capacity to bring out the expected common good. Some events challenge us for reconsideration at hand with respect to the state of politics today.

Forced migration challenges us, and the narratives of migrants confront politics of exclusion at a time when societies are increasingly racially diverse. Diversity is a context-reference and daily reality of many nations. Canada is diverse because it is an immigrant country on Indigenous lands. The discourse on equity, which is very political and necessary to improve on social justice, has become integrated in policies of each institution and government. But there is also the challenge of inclusion that testifies against the deliberate discrimination of any kind. However, neither diversity nor equity nor inclusion would mean anything if the impact of their combination does not produce what hope points to: a sense of belonging.

My hope today helps me insist on searching for politics of belonging for all members of the human family. The future of democracy could thrive as it potentially depends on politics of belonging. Kim Samisolation: book *On Belonging* reminds us that belonging is a milieu where someone or people, in general sense, can express freely their opinions without being threatened by ideologies; her book starts dealing with threats against belonging such as loneliness and social isolation;[1] it is a milieu where people could become what they dream for themselves, despite all the challenges of life. Belonging is also a milieu for healing of wounds that we identify with in our social contexts of diversity.

But in contrast, we have wars: in Ukraine and Russia, Gaza, the West Bank and Israel, Lebanon, northern Yemen, Iran, Afghanistan, Southern Sudan, and in Haiti – to name a few. Sadly, some nations are involved, and they support these wars. Apart from the political wars, our environmental deterioration is causing many living species to permanently disappear from their habitats. Each of these war-types is an assault against belonging, sometimes by willful exercise of imposed security supported by exclusion politics.

There is an emotional attachment to either experiences of exclusion or belonging (Yuval Davis, 2006).[2] At times of personal reflection, the emotional reasoning behind any experience for or against belonging could lead a debate from a personal point of view. I felt it when I had the privilege this summer to visit and tour several European countries as soon as I finished my work as President of Campion College at the University of Regina. Although I knew a few things about the diversity of European cultures from personal training and reading, I learned from such a trip more about three intricate histories: royalty, wars, and human aspirations for a better world. The military history shows what the two great wars of the twentieth Century tried to accomplish in terms of liberation, but one sad reality dawned on me during my trip: The Love of Neighbour remains hard political lessons. We need hope to obtain new insights of such events.

Nearby Future?

Today, my religious hope and civic aspirations lead me to aspire to fill the gap in

[1] Samuel, Kim. *On Belonging: Finding Connection in an Age of Isolation*. New York: Abrams Press, 2022: 18-30.

[2] Yuval-Davis, Nira. (2+006) Situating Contemporary Politics of Belonging, in *The Situated Politics of Belonging.* Nira Yuval-Davis, Kalpana Kannabiran, and Ulrike Vieten (Eds. London: SAGE Studies in International Sociology 55, 2006: 2.

what I call "politics of belonging." It is not a new subject of enquiry especially among scholars in the fields of sociology and political philosophy. What I find relevant to today's state of international relations is that the ideal politics of belonging stands in sharp contrast to the effects of the politics of exclusion. Alongside with this contrast, politics of belonging could be a connection from the heart of a nation to the hearts of migrants at its border, by way of example – an alternative political perspective. Many citizens want the best for migrants because of their potential contributions; however, their governments do not risk compassion when needed most. I come back to migration because migrants keep growing in number due to politics of exclusion, military wars, and environmental deterioration, but migrants are carriers of hope that remind citizens of less-troubled countries that for which they also hope. Unfortunately, today's politics in general have devolved to being an exercise in interpersonal criticism of other political colleagues or of diversity in political ideas.

I take consolation in the fact that hope and politics are good in themselves. As a starting point, I continue to hope that no political philosophy should parochially promote harmful ideologies of the "foreign other." I trust that rulers who pursue the common good could do so even for the welfare of their political opponents: this is what I envision politics of belonging to accomplish. We can exclusively belong to specific cultures, but we all belong to one planet that suffers from effects of exclusion and exploitation. We need to ascend to an imagined world of belonging which we hope to experience in our local contexts, otherwise we have false hope in politics and in ourselves.

Jewish Hope: Work that Aims to Repair the World

Ms. Joanne Seiff, (M.A., Religious Studies, M.Ed., English Education)

I'm Joanne Seiff. I am a dual citizen (Canadian/US). I moved to Canada in 2009, but polarizing politics aren't new to me. 20 years ago, we lived in a Kentucky college town - my husband's a professor. I was a lonely, feminist, Jewish writer who kept my last name when I married. I wrote articles and books in my home office. I voted! I called my representatives! And nothing worked! My candidates never got in!

But being 'a citizen' is actually a new thing historically for Jewish people in the diaspora, a product of the Enlightenment. Women got the vote even later. Getting the opportunity to vote is a privilege. As a dual citizen, I now vote in two countries for

candidates who often don't win! This is also how I see Jewish hope. We live in a fractured world. According to one mystical Jewish tradition inspired by Rabbi Luria in the 16th century, the world was once like a beautiful pot, a vessel, but it broke into many pieces.

Everyone has one of those pieces inside, it's our soul. It's our job to put together the pot again. We call this "Tikkun Olam"- Fixing the world. Every day, we wake up and say Modeh Ani- a prayer where we thank G-d for returning our souls and getting up in the morning to make the world a better place. We're human partners with G-d in the act of ongoing creation. This doesn't just happen. It takes work.

I grew up in Virginia and often felt isolated. I was often one of only 2 or 3 Jewish kids in my class at school. It was up to me to explain Judaism. Although I've lived in a lot of places, when I moved to Kentucky, the first thing people asked was where we went to church. They invited us to their church. They'd never met a Jewish person before. This awkward moment doesn't get easier, but I continue to try.

Many Jews have felt hopeless in the face of rising hate since October 7, 2023. Our place as Canadian citizens feel precarious. Antisemitic activity has increased rapidly in Canada, with many politicians only acting to condemn it after it occurs. In this context, when I mentioned this panel, some Jewish friends said – "I wouldn't have it in me to do that right now." So, how can we keep finding hope?

For me, it isn't just about waking up but finding gratitude and wonder. I take a walk every morning with my dog. I see woodpeckers, deer, fox or hawks. It's offering greetings and small kindness to neighbours when I can. Yes, I'm devastated when I read the news. I see misinformation proliferate through both social media and traditional media outlets. I hear directly from those affected by war in Israel, and witness antisemitism in my neighbourhood. The next step is to act. I report the crimes. I often have to explain antisemitism to the police while making the report. More generally, I write articles about human rights issues like literacy and homelessness. I contact government officials. I speak out.

Finding hope isn't just about me or a personal world view. That said, one can use a personal vantage point to spur on hope for others in the community. An example: I'm a mom of twins. During the 2024-2025 school year, my grade 8 twins won several awards at divisional science fair. I was proud! My kids asked good, intellectually curious questions and worked hard. These are Jewish values.

Fixing the world means fixing real problems and doing good science and discovery. Jewish scientists have made a big contribution to research, including creating vaccines that have saved many lives. My twins' research contributes to that tradition, as they focused on protecting human hearing and reducing harmful noise exposure.

For thousands of years, Jews have fled when we've been expelled. We were forced out of the land of Israel (twice), from Spain and Portugal (and their New World colonies) during the Inquisition, as well as from England, Germany and many other European countries. There were multiple expulsions in the 20th century, including from much of North Africa and the Middle East. A good education and an agile mind can travel. This helps us contribute wherever we go. This academic success brings joy, too. Our community felt proud when my kids were interviewed on the CBC and were on the national news. Yes, this middle school achievement's a small thing, but we can all take a moment to feel pride when we see the next generation succeed.

We participated at our congregation before October 7, but we've leaned in. We attend and volunteer more. Jewish tradition isn't just Torah, the five Books of Moses. We also rely on Oral Torah, the Talmud -- thousands of years of rabbinic wisdom. This ancient quote from Pirke Avot, *Sayings of our Fathers*, attributed to Rabbi Tarfon applies: "It's not up to us to complete the work, but neither are we free to desist from it." We must keep up this work. We hope things will improve.

Jews are a small, diverse, ethno-religious minority. We're 1% of the Canadian population and 0.2% of the world population, about 15 million people in the world. Half that population lives in Israel - For many in Canada, Israelis are relatives and friends. We're an ethno-religious group, a tribe, and we're connected. For generations, our allies, friends, and neighbours - upright individuals - helped us survive. When I am asked to explain about Jewish holidays, concepts or invite someone to my Sabbath dinner table, and it feels safe to do so, I always do.

Connections matter. Hope comes from building bridges and relationships…supporting those in need: Yazidis, the Vancouver Filipino community's recent loss of life at a street festival, & the 2025 Manitoba fire evacuees. My tradition teaches us to keep trying. Hope is work, rooted in action rather than belief. Educating, speaking out, creating connections, fighting against hate and making positive change takes

work, but this hopeful work also 'repairs the world.'

Remembering My History, Claiming My Agency and My Place

Ms. Tanya Brothers JD
Province of Manitoba

The American author Toni Morrison said, "If you are really alert, then you see the life that exists beyond the life that is on top." Not knowing our collective history erases the past and detaches us from the possibility of learning from it. Knowing our own history allows us to see how the stories before ours fit into what we know of that time. My family history on its face is about oppression and resilience, but it is also so much more than that. Their lived history of aspiration and black joy has become part of my everyday approach to the world, and it makes me believe in the possibility of hope in a polarized time.

The United States was polarized in 1907, particularly the Oklahoma Territory, which became a state that year. The first bill passed in the new state legislature restricted African Americans to separate schools, and separate seating on streetcars. The Anti-Black newspaper editorials and the lynching, burning and beating of Black citizens which had occurred before statehood continued and became common occurrences. Politicians won seats by promising to introduce segregation into all aspects of public life, and African Americans were denied participation in the elections.

There were once fifty "all Black towns" in Oklahoma, many of which were built by people who were just one generation from slavery and would have understood that being owned denied their humanity and possibly the human need for a sense of belonging. My ancestors were from one of these towns, Clearview, a place where the inhabitants had community, agency and safety.

The segregation laws were challenged in courts, and protests were organized, but ultimately people who could, voted with their feet and left Oklahoma. By 1907, what was known as the "Black Trek" had begun. On March 21, 1911, a group of 200 African Americans arrived at the Emerson border station in southern Manitoba, and asked permission to continue to Amber Valley, an all-Black town they formed in Northern Alberta. As an indication of their desire for a better circumstance and as an act of hope, in that group were my mother's people: Samuel Carothers, his wife Buelah and their children, which included my great grandfather Maceo.

Canadian immigration policy at the time was focused on attracting farmers to settle the

Prairies. When this group arrived at Emerson, they were not considered ideal candidates due to the fear borne of racism - that Black people would take over Canada. As a result, they were required to pass strict tests proving that their health, finances, and literacy knowledge met certain criteria, all in an effort to limit the numbers allowed to enter. Despite being given a difficult time at the border by the Canadian officials, all requirements were met, and no one was turned back.

Things became more difficult as they approached and then arrived in Edmonton. Petitions had been circulated, and editorials appeared in the local papers, none of which were welcoming to the African American settlers. In response to agitation from Alberta and other political motivations, on August 12, 1911, the government of Wilfred Laurier drafted and approved an Order in Council which would have prohibited any "Negro immigrants" from coming to Canada for one year because "…the Negro race…is deemed unsuitable to the climate and requirements of Canada." It never became law but it, and the other actions of the government, illustrate why R. Bruce Shepard, author of *Deemed Unsuitable: Blacks from Oklahoma,* describes these racist acts in Canada as a "campaign of diplomatic racism", in that the power of the Government was used to limit African American immigration.

In the settlement of Amber Valley, the settlers survived the weather, the poor farming conditions, and the hostile neighbors. They not only survived, but they also thrived. They left what they had known and were open to the possibly of something better - they created community in Canada. It is perhaps not a stretch to think that there might have been valuable assistance from Indigenous peoples whose very land they had settled on.

The *Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters* was a union of Black railway porters that served a significant role in ending employment-discrimination. It was the first trade union in Canada organized by and for Black men and serves as another example of how African American immigrants created belonging and community. Along with seeking better wages and working conditions for union members, the Brotherhood also pressured federal and provincial governments to create legislation prohibiting discrimination in employment and housing. My grandfather Douglas Carothers, from Amber Valley, was a sleeping car porter.

As a multi-generational Canadian, there are many aspects of my history that resonate with this theme of hope and belonging. Along with the various threads of my history, this is

one half of my maternal story. My paternal history is one of the Black Loyalists, enslaved people of African descent who fought with the Loyalists in the American Revolution. After the war, the Black Loyalists who had been promised freedom and land by the Crown were transported from New York to Nova Scotia. The "Book of Negroes", a remarkable document produced in 1783 by the British, lists 3000 names of these formerly enslaved people. The Brothers name is in the "Book of Negroes" and documents the families' continuous presence in Nova Scotia and Canada for over 220 years.

I know where I am from and who my people have been all my life. The fact that on both sides of my family I have deep Canadian roots is meaningful to me. I know it is a story that is not unique to me; many of you will have stories of discrimination and challenges in your own family histories.

There are lessons to be learned from knowing and understanding one's family history. I have shared that it was a history of oppression and resilience, but also aspiration and Black joy. They had to "dream while wide awake". Alert to the danger and limited life available to them, they had to actively envision what they wanted instead of what they did not have and set out to create it. As an adult, and a mother, I can now see the choices they made as an act of hope, for themselves and their families, and ultimately for me. They hoped for a better life and worked towards it through building ways of belonging on Canadian soil, and in the fabric of Canadian life.

How did they do it? With courage, my ancestors fostered community in each other and sustained that hope as they created a new reality. They seeded hope in the community and beyond by showing what was possible. In 1915, men from Amber Valley formed a baseball team that was renowned for its skill. While due to racism the Amber Valley, First Nation and Metis teams played exclusively against each other (and reportedly traded baseball skills for instruction in northern survival), the greater population of the region was aware of the team. Through their actions and interaction with others they showed that they were not to be 'feared' and were in fact more like them than not.

They had faith and tolerance. The settlers of Amber Valley belonged to a variety of different Christian denominations, some congregations held services in the school while others held Sunday school and services in private homes. In 1915, Shiloh Baptist Church was formed in Edmonton Alberta by former residents of Amber Valley. It was necessary to create a place of worship, as they

were not welcomed in other churches. The church exists to this day as a legacy to their faith and is one of the largest Black churches in Western Canada.

I don't always know how to feel about the past. Pride in my ancestors' survival, their creativity, their many contributions to community and society… and yet a profound sadness at the many limitations to their lives that were the result of this time in our collective history. They persevered, they were resilient, they celebrated each other and their many achievements and sadly but not unexpectedly, their experience of living in a time and place when society would not acknowledge them as equals was a hardship that ripples through the generations that follow them. Despite this "cost" of their Hope, my ancestors have given us the great gift of knowing that there is no way forward but to act on what we hope for. I leave you with the words of Martin Luther King Jr.

> *I refuse to accept the view that mankind is so tragically bound to the starless midnight of racism and war that the bright daybreak of peace and brotherhood can never become a reality…. I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word.*

My family and I belong to this country, and this country belongs to us.

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Hope Rising from a Sea of Inhumanity: Imagining a Compassionate Vision into Reality in Winnipeg's Community Safety Team

Robert Chrismas, Ph.D.

Abstract

Fostering hope in our divided world: Winnipeg's Community Safety Team was created with a ground-breaking vision of compassionate service to those most vulnerable in society while improving public safety. Drawing on Jean Paul Lederach's hopeful idea of the moral imagination, the author contends that hope can rise from the sea of inhumanity, if we develop empathy and the strength to carry it out. This article explores how seminal peace-keeping strategies such as sustained dialogue can empower networks to build collective peace. The paper also highlights the importance of protecting protectors, as this type of work carries a high risk of trauma for caregivers.

Keywords*: compassion, empathy, ubuntu, safety teams*

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Canada has high living standards. We also struggle with disparity that can rival almost any of the impoverished nations in the world. Many Canadians suffer from the structural violence of poverty, living unhoused or in communities with unstable power, undrinkable water, and insecure food supply. In larger urban centres, people have become accustomed to stepping over others dying in the streets, often suffering untreated mental health issues that are compounded by addictions and poverty.

Indigenous, First Nations, people are overrepresented among the unsheltered and in Canada's prisons. They experience unique health challenges, poor educational achievement and higher unemployment in relation to the national averages. Many of their deep traumas can be directly attributed to the lasting transgenerational effects of

colonization (Chrismas, 2013, 2020, Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, Volkan, 1997).

While Canada has made official government apologies, the country still has a long way to go to make amends for the wrongs committed during the colonial settlement. The reserve system and sixties "baby scoop" that removed Indigenous children from their parents on mass created traumas that carry forward into the present (Chrismas, 2013, 2020, Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015).

Many feel that if these social wounds are out of sight, and "not in my back yard" (NIMBY) then they are someone else's problem (Chrismas, 2020). In the fast-paced contemporary world we are all often too wrapped up in our own first world problems to concern ourselves with improving society. However, we all should feel responsible for overcoming this culture of indifference and silence.

When people are not called to action, feeling social issues are someone else's problem (NIMBYism), there is a high societal cost to everyone, regardless of their station in life (Chrismas and Schellenberg, in press). Some do feel responsible, and survivor's guilt is more commonplace among our modern-day majority population than denial was in our past. Yet, we still have a long way to go in acknowledging and rectifying the inequities of our troubled past.

While it is critical that we acknowledge our historical and ongoing injustices, the prognosis is not all doom and gloom. Hope springs from adversity, and compassion is a mantra for many who now serve the public. Assimilation that prevailed in the discourse that drove many of Canada's failed colonial policies has now given way to a new public discourse that respects and embraces diversity and social justice (Chrismas, 2012; Chrismas & McFee, 2020).

The geographical distance that once separated countries and cultures is collapsing into an Internet based reality in which time and distance is decreased between us (Chrismas, 2013). This accessibility is improving our mutual understanding and appreciation of differing cultures and the challenges they face. Greater knowledge of the strengths we each can bring to a multi-cultural society is empowering for all of us. The challenge for modern society is to decipher what to attend to in a growing sea of information. Artificial intelligence is a new and exciting frontier full of potential, but we must navigate wisely or suffer its perils.

Hope can rise from the belief in basic human rights and dignity, and that every person has value. For those of us who embrace it, humanitarian work can be a rewarding and fulfilling pursuit. In this paper, I explore one such initiative in Winnipeg's newly established Community Safety Team (CST).

Over the past decade, the police in Winnipeg became overwhelmed with calls for service they could never keep up with. The burden is due in large part to the well-documented phenomenon of too many duties being offloaded onto police from other service sectors. Police have taken on health, social service, and child welfare roles to the point of failure in achieving their core mandates around responding to emergencies and crime (Chrismas, 2024, 2013).

For about eight of the last 13 years of my 34-year policing career, I worked as a Staff Sergeant overseeing all frontline police operations for the city (Chrismas, 2024a). As a Duty Officer, I saw the system gaps grow, with police and fire paramedic resources deployed in the struggle to maintain public safety and help our vulnerable citizens.

The common colloquialism was/is that the police are the only service available in the middle of the night when all others are closed. As a result, they end up dealing with child welfare and mental health issues that more appropriately should be managed by other service sectors. I knew that a more upstream approach was required to help people rather than reacting and not addressing the root causes of problems.

With increasing demands and insufficient resources, my colleagues and I have witnessed the erosion of the ability of emergency services to provide compassionate service. The fire and paramedic services have worked at a burnt-out pace, responding to endless addiction fueled medical emergencies.

Things have evolved such that there is no safety net for many of our most vulnerable citizens (Chrismas, 2024a). Despite the growing network of service providers struggling to help our exposed population, more was needed. Hence, the CST was established. I was selected as the inaugural Team Lead.

With the support of Mayor Gillingham and Council, Chief Administrative Officers Mike Jack and then Sherwood Armbruster, and all city departments, we all pulled together to stand the team up in record time. Establishing this new CST, for the city of Winnipeg, I was determined to take a humanitarian, trauma informed approach, based on compassion and valuing the dignity

of every individual we work with (Chrismas, 2024b).

The CST was established in 2023 to fill the gaps that had grown over recent decades within our service delivery systems. The investment was also driven by demands for improved safety in Winnipeg's public spaces and bus transportation system (CST, 2025; Chrismas, 2024a, 2024b). In Winnipeg, as in most major cities across North America, social conditions have deteriorated over recent decades. Public perception of safety declined in the face of endemic addiction and mental health challenges along with the associated violence and disruptive social behaviour.

This type of work requires empathy, understanding the other person's situation, and the discipline to treat people well, even as they are attacking you in a meth-induced psychosis. The work also requires careful protection of our safety officers' mental health. The risk for moral injury, trauma, and physical injury is high, as we deal on an intimate and intense level with the most difficult elements of humanity, and with limited resources.

Winnipeg's Community Safety Team was established with a vision of a unified society, providing compassionate service to an oppressed population while improving public safety. In this paper I describe how we've coped and strived to keep the focus on compassionate service. Drawing on some seminal peacebuilding and conflict resolution theories, I explore how the CST are striving to be peacebuilders and force multipliers in the community of service providers.

Becoming a force multiplier for peace

My colleagues in policing and I could see the growing service gaps, as demands increased and social conditions deteriorated, especially during and after Covid. My peace and conflict studies at the Mauro Institute for Peace and Justice, University of Manitoba, deepened my understanding through knowledge of how things could be better. Travelling and study peacebuilding in Africa, India and Asia gave me further context as I gained a deeper sense of what we do well in Canada, and what we could improve.

Former Police Chief Devon Clunis had a vision of crime prevention through social development. It aligned with my view that we need to address the root causes of violence, and not just the symptoms. For several years, I worked full time on police-community collaboration, looking for synergies between the police and partner agencies, to improve public safety.

In 2016, I travelled to Kitchener/ Waterloo with the then Deputy Mayor Pagtakhan and Community Services Director Clive Wightman. I was still a Staff Sergeant in the police service and searching for ways to gain better synergies in public safety. At the time, Kitchener and Waterloo were leaders in Canada in collaborative approaches to public safety. We came back with a resolve to implement a similar approach in Winnipeg. For a variety of reasons, the city didn't take that approach.

Fast forward to 2023, I was in my 34th year of policing and seeing continually worsening social conditions. The police and fire paramedic services were experiencing a growing chasm between service agencies' inability to improve conditions. Mayor Gillingham promised in his electoral campaign to do something for public safety, starting with our public Transit system that had also worsened over the past decade.

As I took on the role of team lead I drew on all I had experienced and my peace and conflict studies education. I envisioned a collaborative team to fill system gaps, taking a compassionate approach that meets peoples' needs. The Community Safety Team was established as a collaborative safety net, with a compassionate, trauma-informed approach that respects the dignity of every person we deal with.

With the new team we have the time to work with people for as long as it takes to do something positive for them. I also knew going in that it would be difficult work, with a high risk of trauma and moral injury for the practitioners. We built--in safety mechanisms to protect them.

Ubuntu, and hope on the horizon

One year since inception, it's hard to believe how far the CST has come. It is now well established as a significant element in our city's public safety network. With 25 Safety Officers, we've seen positive impacts in safety in and around our transit system and Winnipeg's public spaces. The budget was approved in 2025, by City Council, for 15 more officers to be added over the next two years.

The decision to deploy safety officers in hi-visibility uniforms and without weapons (outside of the baton) has been integral to overcoming several barriers. It reduced the tangible 'trigger of the uniform' and its representation of 'enforcement' and the related fear and trauma that goes with it for many in our vulnerable population. As a result of being basically unarmed, the safety

officers have been able to work quickly towards being accepted as trusted resources among some of Winnipeg's most vulnerable citizens.

Taking a trauma-informed, compassionate approach with many of Winnipeg's most vulnerable citizens, the CST has filled services gaps and assisted people in immeasurable ways. The safety officers have interrupted thousands of disputes, fights, and disturbances and rendered first aid daily, saving over 15 lives with life-saving trauma care. They offer safe rides and provide a reassuring presence in the community, connecting people with resources and collaborating with other service providers to assist.

For example, in March of 2025 the CST was asked to connect with some unsheltered people living in an encampment in the city. They met repeatedly and built trust with the squatters, giving them water and food, and checking in on them. The safety officers helped the residents fill out paperwork to receive identification and approvals for transitional housing. Eventually, within a few weeks, the couple had moved into a house and the encampment was cleaned up.

The CST takes part in community and cultural events, building trust to better serve our city. The leaders have accommodated many media ride-a-longs and interviews, striving to be transparent and keep the city informed on our progress. They continue to collaborate and coordinate with our emergency services and the entire network of government and non-government service providers to fill system gaps.

Studying reconciliation while travelling across South Africa, I learned a beautiful Zulu word, "Ubuntu." The concept of Ubuntu is simple yet profound. It means, “I am because we are," highlighting the importance of community and the interconnectedness of all human beings. Ubuntu is a reminder for society about how we should treat others.

In kindergarten, we learned about the golden rule: “treat others the way you'd like to be treated.” To me, Ubuntu speaks to that. We are all the same people, and we are all connected. We have no English word that equates to Ubuntu, but that doesn't mean that we can't emulate the concept in our everyday lives.

A scholar named Mbigi (1997) wrote the five core values of Ubuntu are: survival, spirit of solidarity, compassion, respect and dignity. These words, defined by Mbigi, resonate with the work we are doing in our CST. It is the common thread of the United Nations's Global Goals, and the motivation in

the mission to end extreme poverty, so that everyone, everywhere, can live equally.

Ubuntu refers to behaving well towards others and acting in ways that benefit the community. Such acts could be as simple as helping a stranger in need or involving a more evolved coordination for the good with the community. I equate Ubuntu to compassion in our current context, for those of us who feel the drive to respect humanity and treat those less fortunate with respect and basic dignity that every human being should have.

Our small team could not make an impact on community issues without collaboration with other stakeholders. Our success depends on the network of social service providers to see themselves as part of an interdependent network. New solutions require stakeholders to envision themselves as part of collective community-based approaches.

Renowned peace scholar Jean Paul Lederach (1997, 2005, p. 5) defined the term, "moral imagination." He described interventions that can "work with the existing social geography, relational networks, and be flexible enough to adapt to challenges that will emerge during the process" (Lederach, 2005, p.84). In the moral imagination participants view themselves as a part of the social web that brings all the relevant parts together for greater peace.

Collective goals could be achieved through conflict resolution processes, including getting the right people to the table for "sustained dialogue" (Saunders, 2003; Lowry & Littlejohn, 2003). To do this, we must identify the type of conflicts and processes through which they may be resolved (Simmel, 1908/1955, Schellenberg, 1996; Rothman 2001, 1997; Rothman & Olson, 1992).

The collaborative public safety work we've been doing among a network of about 60 different government and non-government agencies in Winnipeg resonates as a sustained dialogue. We've strived within the CST to imagine a better world and play a part in bringing the right agencies together to achieve it. Part of the work has involved identifying what we are striving to achieve together.

Rothman (2001) has pointed out the importance of bringing out the deep truth about the issues that are at the root of conflicts. In our case, it requires honesty among the stakeholders working with the CST about what we are all trying to achieve. We are seeking to find common ground and ensure our added new resources truly fill the

gaps in our systems that serve our most vulnerable.

Kriesberg (1998) highlighted that social conflict between persons or groups tends to polarize people. He stressed prizing the social context of conflicts (1998). In Winnipeg, it has become clear that the people we are working to assist are some of our most vulnerable citizens. Hence, our success will involve bringing the right people to the table and seeking sustained dialogue around sustainable solutions to overcome conflicts. This requires understanding the perspectives of the people we are trying to support, as well as the people and organizations we seek to collaborate with.

Bringing stakeholders together and finding common ground, through sustained dialogue we've been able to overcome territorialism and conflict among normally competing agencies. For example, we resolved concerns from several unions that the CST might be taking their members' work. By meeting and clarifying exactly what we are doing, we were able to resolve a grievance and work together for the common good.

Empathy

We talk in our team about what is compassion, understanding the others' pain and wanting to ease it. To have compassion we need empathy, the ability and heart to understand and feel the other's perspective. In public service this often means opening yourself up to others' pain. Sympathy is understanding others' pain or joy but not necessarily taking steps to rectify the cause of their pain.

Having worked in public service, in various justice related roles for over 40 years, I've gained some wisdom around the concept of service. In my books on policing, I described the paradox of wanting to connect with people and help them on an emotional level. Yet, the more you open yourself up to others' pain, the more vulnerable you become to emotional injury (Chrismas, 2013, 2024). Compassionate work requires a deeply held belief in human dignity, and an understanding that life's lottery largely determines where each of us winds up in the world. It is having the empathy to put oneself in the other's place.

We understand that the unsheltered person in a drug-induced psychotic crisis, could be any of us. In fact, it is conventional contemporary wisdom that in today's credit economy, most of us are only a few missed mortgage payments away from being unsheltered. I have met many people who had stable families and homes and then

suffered a mental health crisis, fell into addictions, or lost their job, rendering them suddenly, and to their surprise, out in the street.

Empathy, or putting oneself in the others' shoes, can drive our desire to help others. If we believe in the aphorism, "there but for the grace of God go I," it can fuel our humanitarian drive to assist people. It is important to think correctly about who the "other" is who we are helping. Othering is an important concept related to understanding positions and perceptions in conflict. It is a highly relevant concept in peacebuilding and conflict resolution.

Edward Said described the process by which people develop perceptions of the 'other.' In his seminal book, *Orientalism* (1978), Said described how many Westerners have often held an obscured view of people from other parts of the world as strange and exotic. Othering or viewing people as "less than" or "different" could be said to be at the root of some of history's worst atrocities. It can be an obstacle to meeting people with empathy and treating them as we would like to be treated if our roles were reversed. Feeling 'othered' could also prevent people on the fringes from coming forward and accepting help or taking part in peace-building processes for fear of being further labelled and ostracized.

Social labels contribute to othering, by categorizing people as different. It is important that we look at people first as fellow human beings, not as "unhoused", "mental patient", or "drug addict." Every person has their own unique story, regardless of their station in life. If we are to meet them where they are and help provide resources, we must see them as fellow human beings.

My dissertation research sought to understand and interrupt sex trafficking in Manitoba (Chrismas, 2017, 2020). A key finding was the significance that labels and categories play in stigmatizing women who are involved in the sex industry (Lozano, 2010; Pheterson, 1996). Lozano (2010, p. 229) wrote, "othering" occurs in the way modern-day prostitutes are identified as such. They are labelled as bad women as opposed to virtuous, distinguishing them along other similar dichotomies including normal vs. abnormal, wife vs. prostitute, virgin vs. whore, chaste vs. licentious, reproductive vs. un(re)productive (Bell, 1994, p. 39-41; Kempadoo & Doezema, 1998, p. 5-6).

Lozano (2010) highlighted that prostitution exists because of power differentials through which women are objectified and dehumanized. This is a form

of othering. My research confirmed that women are objectified, targeted and dehumanized by the organized sex industry.

Some have contended that it is a free choice by many to enter the sex industry as a business. My findings, however, were clear that the majority of women and children who enter the sex industry are targeted and forced into it against their will (Chrismas, 2020). In many cases any money the exploited woman can keep for herself, goes to buying alcohol and street drugs for self- medication to numb the psychological distress of living with the previously noted social stigmas. The vast majority of earnings, in most cases, goes to the trafficker.

The same type of categorization of some people as "unsheltered", "impoverished", "addicted", "suffering mental health issues" can cause service providers to treat 'others' differently according to their preconceived perspectives. People do not choose to live in the street. They are victims of an unlucky roll of the dice if life. If we can overcome the human tendency to categorize people and assign labels, then we can begin to think and act compassionately towards them.

Compassion

Compassion and ***empathy*** both refer to a caring response to someone else's distress. While ***empathy*** refers to actively sharing in the emotional experience of the other person, ***compassion*** adds to that connection a desire to alleviate the person's distress. Ten years ago, I wrote an editorial, which was published in the Winnipeg Free Press. It highlighted the humanitarian culture in Winnipeg, and the heart that front-line emergency responders invest in protecting our vulnerable (Chrismas, 2014). As the cycle of things goes, we seem to continuously revisit social issues and solutions to them. Perhaps the lesson in this is that we need to find solutions for the urgent issues, but then we have to sustain them as well.

One constant has been the compassion and devotion of front-line emergency services, police, fire, paramedic, medical staff, and social workers who all carry the burden of dealing directly with social issues and community safety on the front-line. I see now, more than ever, the passion that public safety personnel have for the vulnerable, and the burden they bare, the moral injuries and operational stress that they carry always striving to do more with less. Having completed 34 years in front-line policing, as well as my post-doctoral fellowship with the Canadian Institute for Public Safety Research and Treatment, I am acutely aware of the

emotional burden that is continually imposed on contemporary emergency services.

Lederach's moral imagination of humane ways to help our most vulnerable citizens is needed now more than ever (2005). While social justice is not their primary mandate, emergency services are the ones who, day in and day out, strive to help homeless people get in from the cold, protect people suffering debilitating substance-abuse or mental-health issues and advocate for them. In the vast majority of cases, they do their best for people in need.

This phenomenon is not unique to Winnipeg, but our history has a particular social-justice character. We are a compassionate city, perhaps because of our diversity and the deep social issues we have struggled with as a community. Ten years ago, I wrote (Chrismas, 2014),

It is no accident the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, the first national museum established outside the Ottawa capital region, was opened in Winnipeg to serve as a beacon for human rights and social justice. This intellectual underpinning is part of our compassionate culture. However, it is the people at street level who look out for vulnerable peoples' basic human rights. It is the people who do the right thing for fellow human beings when nobody is looking that are our real protectors of human dignity. It is the businessperson who volunteers at a soup line and the child who stands up for a bullied peer at school. Each of us plays a part in our own unique ways, but we are all a part of our community. The thing we know for sure is that working together we are all stronger. As long as we continue to have problems in our community, we all must ask ourselves what we have done today to help make the situation better. "A little knowledge that acts is worth infinitely more than much knowledge that is idle." (Khalil Gibran). We all know ways we can contribute, but until we act, we know we haven't unleashed our full potential.

Now we have the CST stood up to help take the burden along with existing resources, to improve a feeling of safety in the city (Winnipeg. 2025). Transit is our first priority, and it seems fitting as many of our community's problems are intensified in our public transportation system.

The more we all collaborate and find collective multi-sectoral, multi-faceted ways to combine and focus our efforts, the greater synergies and momentum for peace and the brighter our future will be. The CST was built with a culture of compassion for our most vulnerable citizens, with a goal of connecting people with the right resources, but also with the tools to protect them. Coming from a lifetime devoted to law enforcement, I can say with confidence that this new team feels like the perfect element to fill many of the system gaps that I've watched grow over the past two decades.

As a graduate of the Arthur V. Mauro Institute for Peace and Justice, I am grateful for the critical thinking, peacebuilding and mediation skills I developed there; I am also grateful for the voice that education gave me. I've been in public service for many years, and I've had a growing clarity and resolve about the need for compassion as well as proactive problem solving in public service. We cannot simply respond without addressing the root causes of social issues and expect to solve them.

The basis for my desire to provide compassionate service does not have a lot of academic rigour behind it, although I am sure there is a theoretical explanation could be provided. It also is not faith-based, although compassion is a fundamental value in most, if not all faith systems from Christianity to Hinduism. Fundamentally, I feel it is respecting others and treating them well.

From my perspective I will say my drive for compassion is based in spirituality, in the sense that I've always identified as a spiritual person, if not strongly religious. Philip D. Kenneson (1999) wrote that many identify as spiritual but not strongly affiliated with a specific church or belief system. Some, according to Kenneson, feel a tension between their personal spirituality and membership in a conventional religious organization. They value curiosity, intellectual freedom, and an experimental approach to religion.

A spiritual life doesn't require a belief in deities or adhering to a specific religious belief system. An atheist can see God as energy or a spirit, not as a deity. This is the basis for spiritual atheism (Kenneson, 1999). I am not an atheist, but I've always felt a strong spirituality within me. I was raised Christian; in fact, my mother was on the alter guild of our local Anglican church for 40 years. I spent many Saturdays in my childhood helping her set up the alter for the Sunday services.

I've always viewed myself as a philosophical person, even in childhood, and even as I dropped out of high school to join the workforce young. In my case, I felt I wasn't getting much out of high school and moved on to other things in life. I always knew I would, and in fact did continue my education, but later in life, after I'd been in the workforce for many years.

For me, I believe my drive for compassionate service was born and nourished many years ago, from my work. Over forty years in public service, all in the justice and law enforcement public safety realm, has exposed me to a great deal of the inhumanity that people experience and daily.

Many of the things I've witnessed and experienced in my police work cannot be unseen and have left mental and emotional scars on my soul. I cannot imagine how vulnerable people can endure this trauma without relief day in and day out. The exposure to so much violence has driven home for me some ideas about human nature and what people are capable of, both bad and good.

Based on a lifetime of working with people at their worst, I've concluded that without some social control, some people WILL exploit and hurt other people. Whether people are inherently violent or if it is learned behaviour is beyond the scope of this article. In my opinion, Thomas Hobbes was correct about the social contract (Hobbes, 1651). We all live within the constraints of a set of laws. We need them, otherwise, as Hobbes said, "life would be nasty, brutish, and short" (xliii).

From a young age, I became a protector. I had a strong sense of right and wrong. I'll say my values developed from what I was taught as a child and from my experiences along the way. Here again, it is beyond the scope of this article, and also not relevant whether I or anyone's values are innate or learned, and whether we each adopt the values of the culture we grew up in. We all have values; the question is what these values are. For whatever reason, I grew up with a respect for humanity and tried to live by the golden rule; do unto others as I would have them do unto me.

My sense of duty and compassion grew from all those years I served in social organizations and law enforcement. I devoted my life to serving and trying to protect the vulnerable. So did all my colleagues, some from a basis in their faith, and some from their upbringings and the culture they were raised in.

A clinical psychologist could analyze people like me and might be able to explain why my values developed the way they did. They also might find that the compassionate basis in my work grew from the cognitive dissonance associated to working with the inhumanity I was exposed to. Feeling bad for victims, realizing the frailty of life through police work required me to be stoic and help people deal with violence and death daily. My colleagues and I had to remain professional and help people who had been shocked by life, with a sudden loss of a loved one or the trauma of being violated.

Those of us in public service and especially the emergency services feel the incongruity and pain of not having the time and resources to serve people the way we

want to. It is the definition of moral injury, not being able to do what we signed up for, and knowing we could do better if we had more time and resources. In their book, *Soul Repair: Recovering from Moral Injury after War*, Brock and Lettini (2012) first coined the term moral injury, in describing the trauma that soldiers have undergone in waging war.

Moral injury is the trauma we feel when we feel compassion for people but cannot help them as well as we wish to. The work we are doing in the CST comes with a high risk of moral injury. We are working with people who are dying in the street of drug overdoses and suffering the extreme structural violence of poverty.

It is difficult and troubling work, but also deeply rewarding to help people who are highly vulnerable. We are also asking safety officers to make themselves vulnerable in order to connect and build trust with people we are trying to help. Hence, the final section here is dedicated to how we protect people doing this arduous work.

Protecting the Protectors

Mental health among public safety personnel has declined over recent decades in Canada. Eight retired and serving police officers in the province of Ontario committed suicide in 2018. It was a wake-up call about frontline mental health and well-being in Canada (Milliard & Chrismas, 2023). The Federal Government funded $20M to supplement ongoing research and development of mental health resources for public safety personnel (Chrismas, 2023). My 34 years of policing experience, coupled with a one-year post-doctoral fellowship in 2023 with the Canadian Institute for Public Safety Research and Treatment has ingrained a deep desire to protect the mental health of members in this new CST (Chrismas, 2023).

In my experience, the constant and increasing demand on police officers never allowed time for thorough regular debriefs. Hence the stereotypical stoicism that the policing culture is known for. Under normal conditions, stoicism is a way to be emotionally resilient and boost inner strength by accepting what you cannot control and focusing on what you can. Conversely, stoicism practiced as the primary method for coping can cause officers to detach from their feelings, resulting in a lack of empathy that is integral to community policing.

Policing today is increasingly fraught with challenges beyond the control of individual officers, including staffing gaps and excessive work hours. They are constantly asked to do more with less. These

stresses are exacerbated by increasing demand and intensifying social scourges of poverty and addictions.

The stoic mindset in policing has traditionally been to leave your problems at home, even if the problems were directly work related (Gill, Milliard & Chrismas, 2023). In the past, officers avoided seeking help for fear of being stigmatized as weak or unfit (Chrismas, 2013 & 2024; Milliard & Chrismas, 2023). While the value of regular debriefing is now conventional wisdom, it is still not embraced in most work environments due to factors such as budget, manpower constraints and organizational cultures (Chrismas, 2023, 2024). It is a preventative exercise that can pre-empt the micro-traumas of daily emergency services work from compounding into full-blown disorders.

We were well aware of the potential challenges and dangers Winnipeg's first public safety team would experience. Hence, we integrated a thorough briefing and debriefing process from day one, and not just after critical incidents (Chrismas, 2024b). The need was intensified by the lack of opportunity to perform field training following an initial five weeks of in-class training. We established a permanent circle in the office, for sharing and joint learning in a safe and open environment.

We also embraced the circle as a process for continuous learning. In his seminal book, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*, Peter Senge (2006) described how organizations can perpetuate continuous improvement through self-reflection. Our debriefings allow every individual to gain from the experiences, mistakes, and victories of our colleagues. In this way, it creates a virtuous learning loop. The circle is an ancient configuration found in the traditions of many North American Indigenous people and recognized for facilitating sharing. Sitting in a circle amongst peers creates a feeling that it is a safe space in which to share. It is impossible for anyone to hide when seated in a circle, so sharing is enhanced.

As we unpack our daily interactions and experiences, we learn from everyone's strengths, knowledge, and vulnerabilities and how we can each contribute to the betterment of the team and our community. We learn from each other's mistakes as a team, which is easier than on an individual basis. Our members have experienced challenges and growing pains– - learning on the fly, where we fit in the community and within our team. Sharing daily has allowed us to empower

people based on their strengths. We've capitalized on moments to challenge, motivate, and encourage team members to perform to their full potential. This also helps us balance their skills and address areas for improvement. Debriefing in the sharing circle has been truly rewarding. It has also allowed us to recognize achievements and support each other by applauding members in gratitude and appreciation of each other's contributions. While this is an unfamiliar and innovative approach for most, it has allowed us to deal with issues at a deeper, more emotional level (Welsh & Chrismas, 2025).

As expressed through observations by Winnipeg's safety officers: "Through the sharing circle, the team is able to express the stress of 'what could we have done better' which helps with easing burdens on our shoulders." A second officer said, "The sharing circle allowed me to let go of the burden that's hidden inside my heart."

Every team member takes part in the debriefing, sharing their feelings and lessons learned. By taking the time to unpack things, we have made significant strides overcoming the culture of denial that has thrived in emergency services over recent decades (Chrismas, 2023). Taking the time to share at each debriefing has allowed a wonderful cohesive culture to emerge. It is also a great opportunity to share our successes and perform team-building exercises. Creating this positive space fosters emotional well-being, strengthens team cohesion, and allows for meaningful reflection, making a significant difference in how we cope and grow as a team.

Hope Rising

Our Community Safety Team is empowered with a clear image of empathy and compassion in public service. It is an example of moral imagination (Lederach, 1997, 2005). We've imagined a better society, in which all citizens have dignity and the right to have their basic human needs met through a collaborative safety net. Now it is just a matter of time and pressure to bring the vision into reality. Through sustained dialogue with partner agencies, we find that a compassionate approach is infectious and inspiring (Saunders, 2003; Lowry & Littlejohn, 2003). The safety officers inspire and support each other to continuously improve, not only our service, but our shared vision of compassionate public service.

More research on the cost and/or benefits of investing time in better briefing and debriefing would be useful. For instance, would it reduce sick leave usage by reducing

the effects of trauma for frontline emergency service staff? There is room for research on the effectiveness of briefings/debriefings on organizational and individual learning. More research would also be welcomed on the effectiveness of sustained dialogue on developing a shared vision among service sector partners.

The work is groundbreaking in that service delivery has become reactive in the fast-paced contemporary world. Yet, the capacity for love of our fellow man can be increased by making ourselves vulnerable to connection and an idealistic and empathetic idea that we are equal under nature. Striving to provide non-judgmental and compassionate service, our safety team has sought to raise hope from the sea of suffering inhumanity of our modern world. Seeking the ideal of pure compassion within the modern context, we've strived to foster hope in our divided world.

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Fostering Hope through Peace Leadership: A Reflective Review of the Field

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Abstract

This reflective review posits that the emergent area of peace leadership may be the beacon of hope needed in a world riddled with conflict and divisiveness. Exploring over 60 pieces of peace leadership literature, this review highlights the skills, practices, and competencies spanning the continuum of personal and interpersonal peace leadership and describes the existing conceptual models and frameworks of peace leadership. Core traits, characteristics, and behaviors embodied by effective peace leaders are identified through analyses of renowned leaders throughout history, alongside Indigenous, religious, and spiritual philosophies that continue to influence peace leaders today. Interpersonal peace practices are described through the intentional application of these embodied peace leadership traits, characteristics, and behaviors, fostering peace through intentional connection, shared decision-making, conflict resolution, and a collective view of the world. The peace leadership models and frameworks guide leaders in implementing the delineated peace leadership traits, characteristics, and behaviors through approaches to fostering personal peace, interpersonal peace, and connecting both personal and interpersonal peace perspectives. Taken together, this literature considers the importance of promoting individual peace toward building and sustaining collective peace, positioning the work as a guide to foster hope for creating collective and sustainable peace in our world.

Keywords*: peace leadership, peace leadership frameworks, peace leader competencies*

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There is little doubt that we live in a divisive world with upticks in conflict at local, national, and global levels. It is easy for us to spend our time mired in bad news and "doom scrolling" our way through life. Focusing on the negativity and the harm that arises from this divisiveness rarely helps us to feel motivated to step into the role of changemaker, action taker, and peacebuilder. While we must consider the negative, we need to foster hope, to find ways that we can unite to challenge the negativity and conflict

in the world, and build spaces for positive, peaceful change. Enter the world of peace leadership, a space for individual and collective change to bring about the world we wish to see. This reflective review introduces the reader to the scholarly literature of peace leadership and frames this work as the hope we need to challenge our divisiveness and build together in unity.

Building from the fields of leadership studies, peace studies, conflict transformation, and peace psychology, peace leadership is an emergent and growing area of scholarship and practice. Peace leadership has developed significantly over the last 15 years, necessitating a reflective review of the literature to examine recent expansions on theoretical frameworks, models, and competencies that continue to support peace leadership scholarship and practice, as the last comprehensive review was in 2016 (McIntyre Miller, 2016). This reflective review examines over 60 pieces of literature, primarily from the past 15 years, to articulate the peace leadership skills, practices, and competencies spanning the continuum of personal and interpersonal peace. Also included are the peace leadership conceptual models and frameworks developed as ways to understand personal and interpersonal peace leadership skills and practices and delineate peace leaders' interconnected engagement toward collective peace. Therefore, this reflective review demonstrates that the recent work emerging from peace leadership scholarship has the potential to give us hope as we navigate the current challenges we face in the world and move us toward a more peaceful society.

Peace Practices, Skills, and Competencies

Many scholars have discussed peace leadership in terms of the skills, practices, and competencies necessary to engage in this work. In fact, a 2024 *Journal of Leadership Studies* symposium featured articles, which are included herein, linking core leadership competencies to peace leadership (McIntyre Miller, 2024). This literature often stems from authors profiling individual peace leaders or those who engage in the work of building peace within organizations and social movements. This literature can be organized around the personal peace practices embraced by these individuals and the interpersonal practices that peace leaders use to engage with others in their peace leadership work. The next two sections detail both areas of the literature.

Personal Peace Practices, Skills, and Competencies

The reviewed personal peace leadership literature demonstrated that peace leaders often share core embodied traits, characteristics, and behaviors that support their efficacy in promoting peace and resolving conflict among communities and structures. For example, by exploring peace leaders working within ethnopolitical conflicts, Byrne (2018) found that peace leaders are shaped by their socialization and personality, including their worldview, and through this, are motivated to make a difference in their contexts. They possess strong communication and analytical skills, are compassionate, humble, trustworthy, and have compelling visions of nonviolent democratic futures. Finally, they have moral power and authority and are credible actors in their communities. Matesi (2013) worked aligned, demonstrating that in 17 Nobel Peace Prize winners' speeches, these peace leaders used communication skills to share a strong vision for the future using both intellect and imagination.

These strong communication and visioning skills are also reflective of Lieberfeld's (2009; 2011) work that defined Abraham Lincoln, Nelson Mandela, and Chile's Michelle Bachelet as reconciliation-oriented leaders who focused on empathy, cognitive complexity, optimism, emotional self-control, and their leaning toward forgiveness and reconciliation in their peace leadership efforts. These also aligned with van Zyl's (2019; 2019b) reflections of Nelson Mandela and Kofi Annan as emotionally intelligent leaders, focusing on themselves first before leading others. The idea of emotional intelligence for peace leaders is also outlined in Campbell's (2019) writing and further explored by Haber-Curran (2024), who argued that emotional intelligence and emotionally intelligent leadership are essential for fostering leadership journeys that promote justice, inclusivity, and sustainable change.

Many of these peace leadership skills, traits, and characteristics are aligned with Reychler and Stellaman's (2005) research that defined characteristics of peace leaders, including future-orientation, analytic thinking, reflexive, adaptive, integrative, flexible, relational, patience, nonviolence, ethical, motivated, and use courage, humility, and sense of humor. Several authors discussed some of these concepts in additional detail. For example, Ledbetter (2016) discussed the importance of ethical leadership and strategy when promoting peace leadership in business settings. Also,

Widner and Smith (2024) shared the importance of using adaptive leadership principles, such as those aligned with Ron Heifetz's work, for peace leaders hoping to use their skills to mobilize others. Finally, Sowcik and Johnson (2024) further explored the importance of humility to peace leadership in their work, emphasizing self-reflection, adaptability, and resilience.

Much of the above research focused on general skills for peace leaders, while some research focused on gender to provide additional context for peace leaders' work. Adler (1998), for example, believed in the importance of including female leadership to help move spaces into peace. Adler's belief is that being inclusive, particularly of women in peace work, would yield more successful peacebuilding efforts.

Relatedly, Tegerstrand (2021) found a dearth of literature on women peace leaders and therefore studied the role of contemplative praxis in the development of Christian female peace leaders. Four themes emerged as foundational to female peace leaders' practices: inner life development for peace leadership, finding and living vocation, returning to one's best self, and contemplative stance for peace leadership (p.410). Tegerstrand's (2021) work also highlighted Lederach's "moral imagination" as being critical to these female peace leaders' peacebuilding and conflict resolution efforts. Interestingly, a study by Spisak et al. (2012) demonstrated that those with more feminine faces, regardless of assigned sex, were more likely to be seen as peace leaders.

Additional literature has also focused on the personal peace work of leaders in various contexts. Integrating a focus on inner peace, positive self-oriented and nonviolent behaviors, and moral values reflects the evolving perspectives of peace leadership and education built upon ancient Eastern and Western cultures (Groff, 2002; Salomon, 2002; Yablon, 2013). As Yazzie (2000) demonstrated, in traditional Navajo communities, there has been a history of selecting leaders to serve on peace councils that oversee economic development, dispute resolutions, and diplomatic relationships based on the leader's character, charisma, and speaking abilities.

In looking at peace leadership in education and schools, Duckworth (2024) found that both cognitive and affective elements were important to engage in peace leadership work. These practices included critical thinking, problem-solving, tolerance of ambiguity, agency, empathy, and positive self-esteem, and encouraged creating environments of peace. Also important was a

nuanced understanding of communication, identity, religion, and culture for success in peace leadership engagement. Duckworth (2024) identified that educators, policymakers, and curriculum developers needed skills to work on the critical areas of reducing power imbalances, increasing representation of groups from lower-status groups, increasing community connections, and fortifying cognitive and affective skills to reduce violence, particularly in schools. Also focusing on peace education programs, Yablon (2013) shared the importance of the learner's motivation for obtaining peace, whether inherently intrinsic or instilled through the education itself, which is why education programs should be tailored to specific contexts, considering the needs of the learners based on an assessment of the state of existing social relationships.

Yablon (2013) also regarded the inner peace of individuals as a critical component of world peace, positing that attaining inner peace is a necessary foundation for cultivating peaceful relationships. Yablon (2013) highlighted the importance of personal responsibility in peacebuilding interventions and processes, demonstrating a connection between both personal and interpersonal peace, as will be discussed below, including the role of religious beliefs and attitudes as tools for increasing peaceful relationships. Correspondingly, Mishra et al., (2023) found that components of Buddhism are often reflected in the practices of peace leaders, discernible through reverence for nature, recognition of the interdependence of humans and the environment, compassion for all living things, and the belief in the transient nature of suffering.

Therefore, the personal peace skills, competencies, and practices found in the literature are those that peace leaders can grow and develop. These are opportunities to know oneself better and to feel prepared to be the best version of oneself, to engage in peace leadership. Peace leaders focused on these personal skills can be prepared to take up the work of peace leadership and lead with the hope and courage it takes to challenge the destruction of the world.

Interpersonal Peace Practices, Skills, and Competencies

Existing peace leadership literature also focuses on the work of interpersonal peace, or how it is that peace leaders move through their own personal peace leadership work to interact with others. For example, Goulah and Urban (2013) argued, based on Daisaku Ikeda's work, that there is a need to move through inner transformation to dialogue

with others and, ultimately, global citizenship. Similarly, Mishra et al. (2023) cited Thich Nhat Hanh, an exemplar whose mindfulness peace practices are infused with spirituality: "peace and happiness must first be developed from within, and then one can bring peace to others" (p.13). Through mindfulness, intentional presence in the moment allows peace leaders to engage in "deep listening" while suspending judgment or thoughts of the past or future and promoting a true understanding and respect for the perspectives of others by aligning words and actions and maintaining peaceful interconnectedness.

Mishra et al. (2023) discussed attaining sustainable peace leadership through leaders applying these personal skills and competencies toward interpersonal peace practices, specifically those rooted in spirituality. Effective peace leaders can motivate, influence, garner trust, mentor, and empower people through non-violent approaches, humble servitude, and sacrifice. Further, to achieve sustainable peace, leaders must shift focus from personal gain to what is best for the larger movement, allowing room for opposing views, shared decision-making, and seeking solutions that benefit both sides of an issue. Jumaa (2022), similarly, claimed that successful peace leaders collaborate to find common ground, avoiding advocating for the needs of one group of constituents. The following sections discuss the interpersonal peace leadership literature, with particular interest on Indigenous practices, and those that includes power and politics, and education.

Indigenous Traditions

Aligned with the aforementioned personal peace practices, many interpersonal peace practices are also rooted in Indigenous traditions. For example, Jeranyama and Mpofu-Hamadziripi (2022) recognized the spiritual threads present in the peace practices of negotiation or carrying out rituals and further drew parallels between traditional healers and peace leaders in their study of local, traditional practices in Zimbabwe. Lessons from Jeranyama and Mpofu-Hamadziripi (2022) focused on the importance of relationships in conflict resolution practices, both for traditional healers and modern peace leaders. The African female leaders that Ngunjiri (2010) studied also demonstrated a spirited leadership that contained spaces for tempered radicalism, critical servant leadership, and spirituality to create peace leadership movements.

Similarly, Moonga's (2017) work, focusing on conflict resolution within a local

chiefdom in Zambia, demonstrated that negotiation among Indigenous communities favors traditional methods, moving past assigning blame and consequences and focusing instead on relationship development and collaboration. Moonga (2017) emphasized the impact of the cultural and Indigenous underpinnings in reconciling conflict and community building in African societies, which proved essential to sustainable peace. In these communities, relationship repair is prioritized over corrective or retaliatory approaches to problem-solving. Moonga (2017) further described an approach to peace education that coalesces traditional and modern means of conflict resolution, recognizing the usefulness of each method in mitigating disputes in communities.

In examining the impacts and challenges of conflict between migrants and host communities in Zambia, Tembo (2018) noted the lack of a formal method for conflict management as a primary barrier to effective peacebuilding. Further, Tembo suggested developing a collaborative conflict resolution group to address tension points between the migrant and host communities, centering efforts on the promotion of cultural and religious principles of tolerance and the peaceful sharing of space.

Much of this aligns with Haastrup and Nwakibea's (2024) research, which cited human rights advocacy, social justice, equality, and safeguarding the environment as effective peace leader practices. Haastrup and Nwakibea (2024) discussed the efficacy of peace leaders in resolving conflict by cultivating trust and collaboration, considering diverse perspectives, and engaging multiple stakeholders in inclusive decision-making. These ideas were also reflected in the work of Christiana Thorpe of Sierra Leone, who used similar skills to build organizational capacity in several organizations as a way of creating peace leadership space (McIntyre Miller & Wunduh, 2015). Similarly, these organizational leadership, accountability, and decision-making processes were also important elements for Ganz (2010), who focused on leaders of peace movements utilizing narrative and creative practices to challenge those with power. Narrative was also an important element to peace leadership for Bolden and Gosling (2024), who focused on the value of narrative in facilitative leadership for conflict resolution and peace.

Peace Leadership, Politics, and Power

Often, then, there is an important dynamic of power and politics to be considered. Several authors focused on these key elements when discussing interpersonal peace leadership. Some spoke to the importance of peace leaders being savvy through political challenges and those who wish to spoil peace actions (Boyer, 1986; Stedman, 1997) and balancing the need to be peacemakers, those who resolve conflict, and peacebuilders, those who create long-term peace to become peace actualizers (Sarsar, 2008). Aligned with the identified personal peace practices, these actualizers must be able to communicate and realize their visions and strategies for peace.

Ledbetter (2012) asserted that peace leadership work should utilize a dialectic approach to connect the divide between power and resistance in sustaining peaceful, moral progress. Framing this argument for considering resistance as a critical component of building sustainable peace, Ledbetter (2012) introduced the following four propositions: (1) Mapping a process of leadership for peace requires a dialectical approach; (2) Resistance leadership for peace must be moral; (3) Moral resistance for peace assumes the idea of moral progress; and (4) Moral progress and the work of resistance for peace depends on the next generation. The dialectical approach, dating back to Plato, requires the ability to recognize relevant pieces of each contradictory idea to conceptualize their utility within a larger view. In the context of peace leadership, Ledbetter (2012) described the power/resistance dialectic where resistance is perceived as "a form of power where power is seen as influence, exercise as resistance as not as power over and against" (p. 13). Peace is therefore reached through resistance.

Consequently, leaders need to be more concerned with creating peace than they are with power, appearance, and maintaining credibility (Auerbach & Greenbaum, 2000; Stedman, 1997). In the case of local leaders, international pressure can help maintain the focus and the course of peace (Peake et al., 2004). Amaladas et al. (2023) emphasized the importance of a deeper examination of distinctions between groups and public leaders' roles in developing and maintaining community peace. Despite the knowledge already gathered in this area, Khalil and Hartley (2022) called for a deeper understanding of the practices and political savvy of leaders involved in peacebuilding efforts.

Scholars also considered interpersonal skills as important for leaders who work in community spaces. For example, Augustine (2022) reflected on the writings of Saint Augustine and the notion of *paterfamilias* to understand peace leadership. While originally thought of as males leading family units, these ideas could broaden in today's world to be reflective of anyone leading for peacebuilding and might, in some cases, be associated with community elders. *Paterfamilias* can now be thought of as those who serve in peacebuilding roles across familial, community, and societal levels, where peace and justice are promoted through a belief in the common good. "A good and responsible paterfamilias is one who not only instructs those under his care in the virtue of justice but also ensures that justice is practiced by everyone" (p.12). Therefore, peace leaders are those who lead others with an eye for justice for all.

Lee-Koo and Pruitt (2024) believed in the idea of peace leadership as belonging to anyone when they discussed the idea of intergenerational peace leadership, which aimed to recognize and integrate young women into peace initiatives, where they have been, historically, broadly excluded. This targeted inclusion speaks to the increased acceptance of a more diverse group of peace leaders over the past decade. Lee-Koo and Pruitt (2024) advocated for a shift in the "traditional hierarchies and social privileges" (p. 4) that have systematically discounted the credibility of youth and women leaders due to assumptions tied to age and gender. Further, recognizing the ways women and youth lead informally also includes more opportunities for both formal and informal leadership positions, creating opportunities for members of all generations. The inclusion of youth voice in peacebuilding was also essential for Alomair (2016), who reviewed relevant youth-oriented peacebuilding literature to make a case for providing access to youth and youth voices within peace leadership in political systems, schools, and communities.

Chunoo and Schellhammer (2024) echoed these ideas of creating opportunities in their scholarship, which highlighted the importance of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging principles in peace leadership in order to address societal divisions and to build sustainable peace and harmony. As peace leaders, we can be intentional about inclusion work when we understand and expand our networks. The idea of social network approaches to peace leadership, a concept that explores the ways peace leaders can utilize their relationships as a way of

accessing resources and influencing outcomes for peace and stability, was presented by Weinberger and Carter (2024). This social network thinking sets the stage for a further understanding of systems thinking and the ways that peace leaders can utilize the interrelationships and patterns within their systems to address the complex, wicked problems of peacebuilding to find more collaborative and community-driven solutions to peace efforts (Sheridan & Satterwhite, 2024).

Educating Interpersonal Peace Leadership

Other scholars discussed building interpersonal skills and competencies for peace leadership through educational practices and programs. These programs often focus on interpersonal skills and relationships and exist both in schools as well as in community settings. Teig and Walsh (2024), for example, implored leadership educators to cultivate students' skills in relationship-building, making connections with people across identities, practicing openness and vulnerability, and maintaining the dignity of others while addressing societal challenges. Ricke-Kiely (2016) also called for a global focus for developing peace leaders, one that respected diverse points of view and provided opportunities for authenticity, and Schellhammer (2016) believed that peace leadership education ought to focus on mindsets, values, and competencies that are aligned with creating a culture of peace. Gott (2025) discussed the importance of leadership educators practicing their peace leadership skills in the classroom as part of the work they are doing to teach students, implying that educators with a practice orientation might create more transformational learning environments.

Harber and Davies (2003) recommended that schools should do no harm and lower the level of pain by including democratic practices as ways to challenge conflict education and provide for a sustainable future. Msila (2024) suggested highlighting social justice in schools' peace education curricula to promote harmony and equality and counteract violent themes in the media. Similarly, Nkechi (2020) posited that peace education should include human rights and leadership training, which must be made available across multiple societal levels, social settings, and age groups. Nkechi (2020) further argued that these programs ought to reflect the community's morals to promote peace literacy so that individuals might be peaceful in their homes, places of business, and communities. Chitah (2017)

recommended that governments increase resource allocations toward advancing peace and education and partnerships with youth networks as an investment in future conflict resolution and peacebuilding engagement.

In the community sphere, Topuzova and Horsman (2022) described the Jesuit Worldwide Learning's Peace Leadership Certificate program in refugee camps around the world as an example of building interpersonal peace leadership practices through online education. Topuzova and Horsman (2022) detailed a servant leadership view of peace leadership, where servant leadership values and skills are taught as foundational principles for establishing a culture of peace. These principles align with a notion of heartfulness, or the centering relationship between the heart and the mind, and Jesuit education ideals around educating the whole person. Taken together, they discussed a view of peace leadership that is holistic and collective in efforts to promote justice and peace.

It is clear to see from the literature on interpersonal peace leadership skills, competencies, and practices that there is a push to prepare leaders to holistically engage with others in meaningful ways. This often takes leaders who have engaged in personal peace work and are willing to build their expertise in practices such as dialogue, conflict transformation, building collaborative spaces with diverse groups, and understanding any power and political dynamics at play. Each of these skills, while also working to challenge violence and aggression, has a strong focus on building the positive, sustainable change needed in our world. When taken together, seeing work being facilitated to develop and improve these skills, competencies, and practices may well provide us with the hope we need to continue this work when it feels like hope is a rarity.

Peace Leadership Conceptual Models and Frameworks

In addition to scholarship focusing on personal and interpersonal peace leadership skills, practices, and competencies, there have been scholarly efforts to create conceptual models and frameworks to begin to understand the ways in which peace leaders might engage with the aforementioned skills, practices, and competencies. These conceptual models and frameworks often incorporate components of existing leadership theories, philosophies, and approaches while envisioning new ways of being and engaging in peace leadership in the world. This next section presents peace

leadership conceptual models and frameworks in a similar fashion to the aforesaid skills, competencies, and practices, by aligning those that focus primarily on personal peace leadership, those that focus on interpersonal peace leadership, and a new category, those that align both personal and interpersonal peace leadership.

Personal Peace Leadership Models

Personal peace leadership models provide frameworks that depict ways leaders foster inner peace through the embodiment of skills, competencies, and behaviors. These skills, competencies, and behaviors support leaders in their approaches to peace leadership and further provide examples to encourage and guide others toward successful peace leadership. The personal peace leadership models explored below represent structures that reflect compassion, inclusion, respect for Indigenous knowledge, and change-making through intentional human connection.

Authentic Peace Leadership

In his 2018 chapter, Schellhammer outlined the principles and practices of authentic peace leadership. The authentic peace leader utilizes compassion with democratic leadership to build trust and motivation, all in the service of creating a culture of peace. Spawning from a 1999 United Nations General Assembly effort, a culture of peace is seen as providing respect for life, a movement away from discrimination and intolerance, and the use of nonviolence for creating a strong, peaceful civil society. Schellhammer (2018) saw authentic peace leadership as the ultimate multiplier; authentic peace leaders create and empower more authentic peace leaders. To get there, though, authentic peace leaders need to embrace humility, empathy, and integrity. Where traditional leadership favored a top-down, authoritarian, linear style, Schellhammer envisioned current leaders as now needing to unify diverse individuals and communities with varied worldviews under a shared vision of peace. This requires leaders to align their personal values with those of the larger society, and in so doing, a leader must employ both humility and self-awareness.

Indigenous Ways of Knowing and Peace Leadership

Higgins Parker (2022) oriented peace leadership work to that of Indigenous Ways of Knowing. These are traditional practices that recognize that all things are part of a single whole. While traditions vary, many Indigenous Ways of Knowing are those that focus on seven teachings: love, wisdom,

respect, truth, humility, honesty, and courage. For Higgins Parker, the challenge for peace leaders is to embrace Indigenous Way of Knowing through these seven teachings and to recognize their work as part of the greater whole by finding the connections between each other and the land.

Peace Dwelling

Amaladas (2024) viewed peace leadership as the work toward peace dwelling. For Amaladas, peace leadership is the interaction between four ways of being: being a guardian, being a curator, being a welcoming presence, and being a neighbor. Amaladas maps these principles of being alongside what he calls the 4Hs: the Head, the Heart, the Hands, and the Holy. Amaladas uses this structure, expanded from Heidegger's (1977) concept of *the fourfold,* to invite us to live into the four ways of being and the 4Hs to create spaces where we might all dwell in peace.

In his earlier work, Amaladas (2021) asserted that the *head*, or minds, among the group must recognize and acknowledge their prejudices toward others to "show what is hidden" and become cognizant of their way of thinking (p. 80). The *heart* carries the sentiment, "we are all in this together," encouraging the sharing of stories to evoke feelings, which Amaladas (2021) asserted is the catalyst needed for real change through deep-level connection (p. 80). The *hands* are explained as the mechanism of transformation, a component of human action that serves a higher purpose. Amaladas described the sharing of conversation over a meal prepared by human hands, an "ordinary event" free from "internal and external coercions," where participants can listen and speak with the higher purpose of understanding, healing, and reconciling (p. 81). Finally, *holy* encapsulated the shared purpose of loving reconciliation through protecting others from harm.

Interpersonal Peace Leadership Models

While personal peace leadership models describe the individual embodied skills, competencies, and practices that contribute to peaceful leadership, interpersonal peace leadership models focus on how leaders apply these skills, competencies, and practices to engage peacefully with other individuals, communities, and globally. These frameworks guide leaders in connection-building, communication, and conflict resolution, all essential to cultivating and sustaining environments of peace. The following highlights interpersonal peace leadership models that promote shared power

dynamics, active acknowledgment of conflict, subsequent collaborative resolution, and empowerment of constituents to encourage leader accountability and shared decision-making processes.

PEACE Powers

Chinn and Falk-Rafael (2018) created the PEACE Powers models to reflect the critical caring needed from peace leadership. PEACE is an acronym for praxis, empowerment, awareness, cooperation, and evolvement, and PEACE Powers involve the power of the whole, of sharing, of nurturing, and of consciousness. These PEACE powers involve empowerment, enabling power, and collaborative power to be inclusive rather than engage in power-over practices. Groups working within this framework do not completely ignore the power-over approach, but instead, acknowledge the conflict between power over and peace power practices and work through them collaboratively (Chinn & Falk-Rafael, 2014). The outcome of this dialectic is an "emancipatory group process" (p. 67). PEACE leaders are, therefore, those who are reflective, change-makers, who build solidarity to transform conflict.

A Participatory Model of Leadership Toward Peace

Spreitzer (2007) argued the need for a participatory model to engage in peaceful leadership and business strategies through increasing trade, engaging in two-track diplomacy, enhancing economic well-being for more collective agency and a shared sense of peaceful action. Spreitzer further discussed the importance of citizens being emboldened to assume an active role in holding their leaders accountable, resulting in perceived justice and decreased incidence of discontent and unrest. This model, present in democratic political systems, can be applied to organizations where employee voices are integrated into decision-making processes.

Models Aligning Personal and Interpersonal Peace

The frameworks above represented peace leadership models that described either personal or interpersonal approaches; first, by identifying embodied skills, competencies, and behaviors that scaffold effective peace leadership, and then by discussing how these attributes are leveraged to foster peaceful engagement with others. Below, the alignment and connection of personal and interpersonal peace are shared through two leadership models. These holistic models acknowledge the importance

of and interplay between individual and collective peace, describing components of self-awareness, connection, mindfulness, and collective action toward peacebuilding at multiple levels.

Conscious Peace Leadership Model

Dinan's (2012) Ubuntu leadership prioritizes a relational model of peace leadership that balances between the many stages of self to global mastery, creating space for collaboration and connection across social, economic, and environmental sectors based on compassion, dignity, and humanity. Drawing from systems and relational theories, and servant and transformational leadership, Dinan utilized this framework in her conscious peace leadership model (2018), which highlights the importance of positive intention, methods, and values; self-awareness; and deep connection with others, all to create harmony, interconnectedness, and the higher evolution of humanity.

Integral Peace Leadership

Conceived by McIntyre Miller and Green (2015) and then honed by McIntyre Miller and colleagues in additional publications, the integral peace leadership framework considers the relationships between four interrelated sectors of peace skills and practices: Innerwork, Knowledge, Community, and Environment. Within these distinct areas, individuals strengthen personal peace practices through self-reflection, apply conflict transformation practices through mindful interaction with others, engage the community in peacebuilding through collective action, and address peace at the systemic and structural levels. At the nexus of this work, peace leadership occurs when individuals and groups are intentionally and actively operating in all four areas. The integral peace leadership framework has been used to study women peace leaders (McIntyre Miller & Alomair, 2019; 2022), school settings, including campus culture and teacher and administrator perceptions (Abdou et al., 2025; McIntyre Miller & Abdou, 2018; McIntyre Miller et al., 2024a), and community-based peace leadership programs in the United States and virtually around the world (McIntyre Miller et al., 2024b; McIntyre Miller et al., 2025).

Peace Leadership as a Chance to Hope

Emerging from the field of leadership studies, and aligning with the work of peace studies, conflict transformation, and peace psychology, peace leadership has been a growing movement to help challenge the negative, doomsday narrative that is prevalent in our world. Peace leadership

scholarship does not attempt to ignore or devalue the real concerns about inequity, conflict, and abuse of power in our world. Rather, peace leadership strives to become a means of fostering hope and finding ways that we can both challenge our world's hardships and strive to build a world that is at peace, both among global peoples and with our planet.

The personal and interpersonal peace practices outlined in this reflective review give us the tools we need as peace leaders to strengthen our own peace leadership practices so that we might be better prepared within ourselves to work with others for peace. The models and frameworks shared here provide us with some structure to help us achieve and implement these peace leadership skills, competencies, and practices. Taken together, we can create spaces of our own and with others where we can grow and develop our abilities to bring peace into the world. The increase in scholarship in peace leadership scholarship and the growing number of training and development programs around the world with a peace leadership focus (McIntyre Miller et al., 2024b; McIntyre Miller et al., 2025; Topuzova & Horseman, 2022), demonstrates that there is a mounting movement of hope that we can do something in our world to bring about peace. Therefore, the advances in peace leadership demonstrate that there are plenty of scholars and practitioners who are willing and able to embrace peace leadership as the critical hope we need to bring positive, peaceful change to our world.

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Exploring post-normal peace: The Role of Hope in an Ever-Divided World

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Abstract

In an age marked by systemic upheaval, protracted conflict, and widening global divides, the concept of peace is being redefined. This reflective essay explores the idea of post-normal peace, "the in-between period where old orthodoxies are dying, new ones have not yet emerged, and nothing makes sense" (Sardar, 2010). Utilizing the concept of a polylogue—dialogic spaces that provide for "multiple logics, perspectives, voices, and existences," and bring people together to generate critical insights (Kristeva, 1977; Sardar & Sweeney, 2016)—the authors each examine how traditional paradigms of peacebuilding are being challenged and how new approaches, rooted in hope, trust, and inclusive dialogue, are emerging in response. The authors (i) propose a reimagining of both leadership and peace practice - one in which peace is not imposed but practiced, and leadership is redefined as relational, inclusive, and anchored in radical imagination; and (ii) offer a powerful framework: radical hope as the moral compass, non-formal education as the vehicle for change, and trust as the essential fuel for a more just and peaceful future.

Keywords: hope, polylogue, protracted conflict, trust,

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Introduction

If the pandemic taught us anything, it is hard to keep faith or trust in what we previously considered normal, conventional, or orthodox. Recent global events—including ongoing and emerging conflicts and the disruption to global order following the return of the Trump administration in January 2025—confirm that we are in post-normal times, "the in-between period where old orthodoxies are dying, new ones have not yet emerged, and nothing makes sense" (Sardar, 2010). Conventions about how society is supposed to function have been undermined, and the assumptions that served as the bedrock of the global order have also evaporated. Thus, the conventional and the orthodox do not work anymore; we find ourselves face-to-face with new and emerging realities that we have yet to grasp, and we must abandon the ideas of control and management and rethink cherished notions (Sardar, 2010).

In this space of peace being reimagined as being implemented through strength, we enter the realm of Post-normal Peace. The concept of building peace has been disrupted, from diplomacy and negotiation to using leverage and force to push through to results. For the first time on a global scale, we, as thinkers and practitioners, are being challenged in how we approach these issues and ideas. Post-normal Peace offers a framework for making sense of how we navigate the perilous perspectives of building peace with each other during times of heightened uncertainty. Through this lens, we investigate the ethical (and practical) implications of the 'peace through strength' praxis, which increasingly dominates global dialogues.

We postulate that it is only through a diverse exchange of ideas that we can gain a shared understanding of our current context and the potential opportunities and develop an inclusive way forward; therefore, we deploy the concept of a polylogue in this essay. Envisaged as spaces that provide for "multiple logics, perspectives, voices, and existences," polylogues bring people together to generate critical insights (Kristeva, 1977; Sardar & Sweeney, 2016). In a polylogue, questions are more important than answers. It enables us to focus on the dynamic interconnections amongst complexity, contradictions, and chaos of post-normal times and develop new approaches to navigate astonishing diversity, contradictory possibilities, and chaotic potentials. In writing this polylogue, we ask some questions for internal reflections:

1. What is the key thing that struck you in terms of peace practice and thought?
2. How have "post-normal times" shaped and reshaped peace thought and practice?
3. What are the most challenging parts of these experiences?
4. How can we approach things differently?
5. What alternative peace paradigms can be envisioned?

In addition to creating a space for reflection and sharing, it is our hope that our approach contributes toward a more robust theoretical and methodological approach to the polylogues concept when reflecting on building peace and understanding this within the broader context of post-normal times theory.

Peace Prize

This section delves into the machinations of geopolitical permutations since Donald Trump became President of the U.S, the inherited and new conflicts, and the modality and viability of attempting to orientate towards peace based on the U.S. foreign policy strategy of *"Peace through Strength."* This is interspersed with analysis of the juxtaposition of Donald Trump's quest to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize through the *"Peace Through Strength"* foreign policy strategic doctrine. Since President Donald Trump's new administration assumed power, it inherited two major conflicts between Israel-Hamas in Gaza, Russia-Ukraine, and others that have flared up between Pakistan-India and Israel-Iran which have caused ripple effects across multiple fronts in the Middle East, Europe, South Asia, and beyond.

As Trump was being inaugurated as President of the U.S. for the second time, the sound boards were being echoed that if Trump can establish peace in the two major conflicts of Israel-Hamas and Russia-Ukraine, he deserves to receive the Nobel Peace Prize which former President Barack Obama received in 2009. U.S. National Security Adviser Mike Waltz echoed the same sentiments in the CPAC Conference 2025 by exclaiming that Trump will receive a Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts to end conflicts in Europe and the Middle East.

Steve Witkoff, Trump's Middle East Envoy reiterated the U.S. administration new foreign and defence policy goal of "peace through strength" at the FII Priority Summit 2025, a term that Ronald Reagan also used during his tenure, where Witkoff stressed at the Summit that it was U.S. leverage that helped the ceasefire between Hamas and Israel to materialize at the time Trump was inaugurated as President of the U.S. for the second time on January 20, 2025. The Trump pressure tactic of "all hell will break out"

played a critical role in bringing the conflicting parties towards a tentative ceasefire and sticking to the fragile three stage Gaza ceasefire and hostage exchange deal for a limited period of time, until it ended on 18 March 2025 when Israel launched surprise attacks on Gaza and recommenced its onslaught in the war-torn strip.

The "peace through strength" policy also carries the risk of blowback if the contextual historical, heritage, cultural, and religious sensitivities of impacted communities are not considered as part of any agreement. We have witnessed early manifestations of this with Trump's utopian "vision for Gaza" and the subsequent reactions from Arab countries of rejecting the displacement of Palestinians while not directly negating the Trump idea partially based on the geo-economic and political ties the Arab countries have with the U.S. This is in part in direct response to public statements made by Trump in which he said he hopes the U.S. financial assistance to many of the Arab countries does not have to be used as part of the conditionality and bargaining process for his grandiose Gaza plan.

When it comes to Russia-Ukraine, the Trump Administration has met with Putin, as well as the Russian Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov, where the message was that Trump wants the killing to stop, and that the U.S. wants peace and is using its strength around the world to bring countries together. Trump then applied the pressure tactic of calling Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky a "dictator" and accused Zelensky of "refusing to have elections" where Ukraine has been under martial law since Russia invaded in February 2022, meaning elections are in fact suspended.

We also witnessed the unprecedented, heated exchange when Zelensky met with Trump at the Oval Office and openly challenged Trump on his softer approach to Putin and urged him to make "no compromise with a killer" to which Trump responded "You're gambling with the lives of millions of people. You're gambling with World War III, and what you're doing is very disrespectful to the country, this country that's backed you for more than a lot of people say they should have." It went on with Trump stating to Zelensky, "You're right now not in a very good position…You don't have the cards right now with us, you start having problems right now." After the disastrous meeting at the White House, Volodymyr Zelenskyy was promptly escorted out with Trump affirming he can return when he's "ready for peace."

The "peace through strength" U.S. policy is intertwined with transactional diplomacy tactics to orientate conflicting parties towards a peace agreement in the Russia-Ukraine conflict. At the World Economic Forum 2025, Trump told NATO members to spend 5% of GDP on defence where it currently hovers between 2%-2.5% of GDP. Trump also put pressure on Ukraine to agree to a minerals deal, which Zelensky deemed as unfavourable to Ukraine at the time where the U.S. is promising to co-invest with Ukraine in its economy and natural resources. This deal was subsequently agreed and finalized in April 2025. Similarly, transactional diplomacy was also at play between Russia and the U.S. when they discussed cooperation on energy projects in the Arctic at a meeting in Saudi Arabia.

There is no doubt, despite the changing balance of power dynamics that are affecting our global polity, that the U.S. still holds significant leverage on the international stage in pivoting and steering conflicts towards deconfliction and or escalation. British Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer has stated that the UK is "ready and willing" to put UK troops on the ground in Ukraine to help guarantee its security as part of a peace deal. At the same time, he reiterated to President Trump in February 2025 that a "U.S. security guarantee is essential for a lasting peace, because only the U.S. can deter Putin from attacking again."

We are entering a period where country-first doctrines and national economic and geopolitical interests will trump transnational and supra-national frameworks. The U.S. introduction of a 25% tariff on all steel and aluminum imports is an example, along with Indian Prime Minister Narinder Modi's recent visit to Washington DC where he coined the phrase "MAGA plus MIGA becomes MEGA" in terms of India-US partnerships for future prosperity.

The counterbalance to the "peace through strength" foreign policy strategy the Trump 2.0 administration is deploying is that currently we are witnessing the "strength" arm of the strategy but there are very little modicums of "peace" to write home about. This dimension was visible during the heightened escalation of tensions between Israel and Iran, where Israel launched surprise attacks on key military and nuclear facilities in Iran on 13 June 2025 using the pre-text of pre-emptive strike in international law. These attacks by Israel into the sovereign territorial integrity of Iran, which led to many civilian casualties and eliminated a lot of the top brass of the Iran's military and intelligence strata, are categorized as illegal in International

Humanitarian Law, as there was no credible evidence presented to justify the "imminent threat" that the Iranian nuclear enrichment program was having.

During the Israel-Iran commonly phrased Twelve-Day-War, there were multiple missile reprisal attacks carried out by Iran in Israel as a response to Israel's first and subsequent attacks on Iranian territory. The War came to an abrupt halt, after the U.S. launched attacks on three nuclear facilities in Iran, Fordo and Isfahan on 22 June 2025 using "bunker buster" bombs and the Iranians launched missile attacks targeting Al Udeid US Air Base in Qatar as part of a forewarned retaliation on 23 June 2025.

The Trump factor and U.S. leverage was on display again when Benjamin Netanyahu announced that "in light of the achievement of the operation, and in full coordination with President Trump, Israel has agreed to the President's proposal for a bilateral ceasefire." The "strength" of U.S. military muscle and diplomatic leverage was used to establish a modicum of "peace" between Israel-Iran in a situation of heightened escalation and tension.

May 2025 witnessed an unprecedented flare up in South Asia between two nuclear neighbours, Pakistan-India. The conflict which lasted between 6-10 May 2025 saw a series of military strikes which both countries struck deep into the territory of the other, with military and civilian casualties in both countries and along the line of control in Kashmir.

As tensions had reached boiling point, Trump spontaneously announced on the Truth Social Platform: "After a long night of talks mediated by the United States, I am pleased to announce that India and Pakistan have agreed to a FULL AND IMMEDIATE CEASEFIRE: Congratulations to both countries on using Common Sense and Great Intelligence."

Trump used the lure of economic and trade opportunities (transactional diplomacy) that can materialize for both countries in their deals with the U.S. to broker a ceasefire. The U.S. initial stance in the conflict between the two nuclear neighbours was that it is a bilateral issue and they would not be intervening. However, after reports started to circulate in the U.S. that JD Vance called Prime Minister Modi to encourage a ceasefire talks after receiving "alarming intelligence", the door and pathway to brokering a peace subsequently materialized. Since the ceasefire that has been agreed between Pakistan-India in May 2025, Trump has been openly taking the credit in the U.S. role in brokering the peace and preventing these two nuclear neighbours going at loggerheads against each other.

The diplomatic dance and geo-politicking in attempting to appease Trump and his quest to receive the Nobel Peace Prize was notched up another level when Pakistan formally recommended Trump for the Nobel Peace Prize, citing his "decisive diplomatic intervention" following the spike in violence and worst regional conflagration between India and Pakistan since 1971. The Peace Prize appeasement of Trump did not stop with Pakistan's formal recommendation. During a White House meeting in July 2025, Benjamin Netanyahu told Trump that he would nominate him for the Nobel Peace Prize. At the beginning of the meeting, Netanyahu presented Trump with a letter that he said he had sent to a committee for the Nobel Peace Prize commending Trump's efforts to end conflicts in the Middle East.

Many international observers have been perplexed by the irony of witnessing Netanyahu putting forward a recommendation for the Nobel Peace Prize when he himself is facing warrants of arrest from the International Criminal Court (ICC), including the war crime of starvation as a method of warfare and the crimes against humanity of murder, persecution, and other inhumane acts.

During Trump's 2.0 tenure, at the time of writing this essay, the protracted wars of Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Gaza have not come to an end, with regular escalatory flare ups continuing via Israeli military interventions across multiple states in the Middle East and the diplomatic route still in a state of deadlock on the Russia-Ukraine brief.

The international rules-based order that was constructed after World War II is being dismantled, ignored, selectively applied and disapplied at the whim of nation states and their leaders based on their own vested interests. When attempts are made to bring perpetrators and protagonists to justice, we are witnessing a concerted campaign of "lawfare," malicious maligning of individuals and organizations that work as part of the global institutional frameworks that are working and campaigning for peace, justice, human rights, and accountability for the victims of crimes.

This is evidenced in the recent U.S. sanctions on Special Rapporteur Francesca Albanese via a U.S. Presidential Executive Order alleging that Ms. Albanese had "directly engaged with the ICC in efforts to investigate, arrest, detain, or prosecute nationals of the United States or Israel, without the consent of the two countries" which he called a "gross infringement on national sovereignty." This Executive Order came shortly after a Human Rights Council report was published in July 2025 titled

"From Economy of Occupation to Economy of Genocide" on the *situation of Human Rights in the Palestine territories occupied since 1967.* The sanctions have drawn criticism from many, including UN Spokesperson, Stephane Dujaric, who called them unacceptable and emphasized that Special Rapporteurs are independent experts appointed by the Human Rights Council to monitor and report on human rights issues worldwide. They serve in their personal capacity; they are not UN staff and receive no financial remuneration for their work. Similar pressure tactics have also been used to sanction ICC Chief Prosecutor Karim Khan in February 2025 for seeking to investigate U.S. and Israeli nationals and has successfully sought arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former Defence Minister Yoav Gallant.

The quest for peace and indeed the drive to receive the Nobel Peace Prize by Trump cannot come about by dismantling the international rules-based order system and orchestrating it to dance to a tune based on illegal, misaligned personal and collective vested interests that are at odds with the virtues and principles of institutionalism, justice, peace, and humanity. The global polity is also witnessing a rebalancing exercise with many countries that are conventionally coined to be from the Global South becoming apprehensive and disenchanted by the power imbalance and institutional structures that exist where there is a perceived pre-conceived bias to favour the countries who are from the Global North. We have begun to witness the emergence and unfolding of new power blocks based on geo-political realities incorporating many countries from the Global South such as BRICS that seek to challenge these conventional global power structures. Many geopolitical and geoeconomic observers have opined on the process of de-dollarization where the new geopolitical landscape could affect the dollar's future, including its worth and status.

However, the Trump administration has been quick to weaken its emergence by using the transactional diplomacy pressure tactics by threatening to impose 100% tariffs on a block of nine members of the BRICS group of developing nations if they were to create a rival currency to the U.S. dollar and stating "the group would end very quickly if they ever formed in a meaningful way." For "peace through strength" strategic doctrine to succeed, it is imperative that the international rules-based order that champions the causes of justice, humanity, proportionality, equity, human rights, environmentalism, and the

responsibility to protect are universally adhered to and are not neglected at the whims of democratic, autocratic and undemocratic dictators.

If President Trump can establish a modicum of peace in the Middle East, Russia-Ukraine conflicts, a plausible case for receiving the Nobel Peace Prize is certainly in the offering. However, suppose the Nobel Peace Prize is received by adopting a top-down vertical carrot and stick, good cop, bad cop foreign policy-peace through strength approach dynamic that does not factor in or address the contextual root causes of the conflicts in the regions that have been spotlighted. In that case, the likelihood of achieving long-lasting sustainable peace shall diminish along with the glimmers of hope the innocent victims and parties of these protracted conflicts carry to see these conflicts come to an end.

Reassembling Peace: Trust, Hope, and Non-Formal Education in an Age of Flux

The world is experiencing a moment of **peace flux**—a state characterized by transitional peacefulness, pervasive conflict, and escalating structural violence. This flux reflects a broader global condition of fragility, complexity, and contradiction. Over the past decade, the nature of violent conflict and peace has undergone dramatic evolution. Challenges to the established order now arise from a multitude of interconnected drivers: political upheaval, climate stress, economic inequality, demographic shifts, faith-based and cultural identities, and demands for autonomy. These pressures generate instability that transcends borders and identities, producing complex vulnerabilities.

Today's communities are no longer defined merely by geography; they are ideological and aspirational. External crises mirror a deeper collective unrest. The geographies of conflict now include city streets, healthcare systems, schools, places of worship, and digital spaces. This societal and internal erosion of peace is evident in the rise of mental illness, non-communicable diseases, systemic exclusions, and intergenerational inequalities.

The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed and exacerbated these fissures. While some states appear stable, many are fragmenting from within. Marginalized populations feel increasingly alienated, often lacking access to legitimate channels for redress—sometimes turning to radicalism or violence. In this landscape, violence is not merely political; it is psychological, cultural, environmental, and systemic.

These forms of conflict are not confined to traditional battlefields but spill into homes, streets, and minds—manifesting in fractured communities, declining well-being, and generational despair. In such a world, peace cannot be reduced to the absence of war. It must be redefined as the creation of conditions—social, emotional, structural—under which people can live with dignity and difference. Understanding and building such peace requires upstream strategies rooted not only in policy, but in practice, education, and hope.

To create sustainable peace, we must understand how these risks intersect. Crisis response alone is inadequate. We must invest upstream to build societies capable of addressing conflict without harm. This vision aligns with the concept of positive peace: societies where justice is fair, power is accountable, safety is assured, prosperity is equitable, and well-being is sustained. In such societies, conflict does not necessarily lead to violence.

This current peace flux is not only a sign of turbulence -it is also an opportunity. It opens a space to question, critically and collectively, what peace should mean in an unjust world. As global power dynamics regress into Cold War-era logics of securitization and deterrence, young people find themselves both the inheritors of unresolved histories and the architects of emerging possibilities. In recent years, they have been called to navigate an interwoven crisis of violence, inequality, ecological collapse, and social fragmentation—with both vulnerability and extraordinary agency. Rather than waiting to inherit the future, many are already building it through community-led responses, cultural reimaginings, and deeply rooted forms of care.

The following section draws on the experiences of the Big Six Youth Organizations, particularly through the Global Youth Mobilization (GYM) initiative, and reflections from an intergenerational polylogue process. It explores how youth-led solutions, supported by non-formal education (NFE), constitute a form of radical hope in praxis: not abstract optimism, but grounded, intentional, and transformative action fit for post-normal times.

In this sense, peace must be radical, proactive, and inclusive. It demands a reimagining of educational systems, leadership models, and civic engagement strategies that are participatory, equitable, and rooted in human dignity. This is the foundation upon which young people around the world are building—not through formal

structures alone, but through a vibrant ecosystem of non-formal education and youth-led solutions that embody what we call radical hope. Together, these elements suggest a new ethic of peace—one that is dialogic, distributed, and grounded in lifelong learning.

Charting Peace: Radical Hope and Youth-Led Praxis

Radical hope, as Sardar (2010) describes it in post-normal times—an era marked by chaos, complexity, and contradiction—becomes a strategy, a goal, and an ethic. In such times, traditional policy responses and conventional peacebuilding paradigms often struggle. It is within these spaces of uncertainty that youth voices are not only heard but actively engaged as proactive forces for reimagining peace.

Drawing on Lear's (2006) conception, radical hope is the belief in a future goodness that transcends the current horizon of understanding. It endures even when the foundations of cultural life collapse—when the future becomes unimaginable in terms of present-day values, systems, or meanings. Through the story of Plenty Coups, the last great Chief of the Crow Nation, Lear illustrates how radical hope requires the courage to envisage a future that cannot yet be fully understood. Unlike passive optimism, it is grounded in ethical resilience and openness to the emergence of new ways of being. It enables individuals and communities to move forward with integrity, even when the path ahead is uncertain. Hence, radical hope offers young people a framework to reimagine peacebuilding and community cohesion through daily acts of community care, resistance, creativity, and collective organizing. It ensures that hope does not remain abstract or unattainable but becomes a lived and actionable force for transformation.

The Global Youth Mobilization (GYM) initiative, launched in 2020 by the Big Six in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, exemplifies this ethic of radical hope in practice. In its first phase, GYM funded over 600 youth-led projects across more than 100 countries, tackling issues such as mental health, digital literacy, climate action, gender equity, and education recovery. These were not top-down initiatives. Each project was designed, implemented, and evaluated by young people embedded in their communities—seeking small-scale support to turn local ideas into meaningful action.

In its second phase, GYM has received nearly 20,000 applications across two rounds and is expected to support over 1,000 additional youth-led projects. Once again, the model of youth assessment and peer review

remains central. This overwhelming response signals the deep and urgent desire of young people to be heard, supported, and accompanied as they claim their voice and agency.

What unites these diverse initiatives is not a common methodology but a shared ethos: action rooted in agency, co-creation, empathy, and mutual trust. These efforts reject the narrative that “youth are the future” and instead assert youth are here and now. By trusting young people to lead, GYM moves beyond symbolic participation—it demonstrates what peacebuilding looks like when radical hope becomes praxis.

Non-Formal Education: A Vehicle for Peace

Non-formal education (NFE) remains a core part of this story. It is the story of the Big Six Youth Organizations collectively aiming to reach 250 million young people annually. Recognized for its learner-centered, experiential, and voluntary approach, NFE offers the flexibility, relevance, skills, and trust-building capacity necessary for promoting peace in volatile environments. It develops critical life skills—such as empathy, intercultural understanding, negotiation, and non-violent communication—that are vital for both personal and collective transformation.

The Big Six Joint Position Paper on NFE (2023) stresses that this form of education helps young people become "active citizens and agents of change." These are not just aspirational labels; they represent real lived experiences. Youth-led solutions supported by NFE platforms foster agency and develop new leadership styles, especially among those often excluded from formal systems. It encourages critical thinking and motivates young people on a lifelong path of service, imbued with the values of volunteerism and framed within emotional intelligence.

One example is the Youth as Agents of Behavioural Change (YABC) initiative, which integrates experiential learning, arts, reflective practices, and peer education to promote peace, dignity, and inclusion. Initially developed within the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement for an education program, YABC has since influenced programs across other thematic areas such as climate and sport. It exemplifies the pedagogical dimensions of radical hope, offering practical tools to develop emotional resilience and ethical leadership.

NFE also plays a crucial role in fostering intercultural and intergenerational dialogue. By creating spaces where differences are neither erased nor ignored but genuinely explored, NFE helps to reduce fear and

mistrust while strengthening community cohesion. In settings as varied as post-conflict zones, urban outskirts, and rural communities affected by climate change, these practices are transforming the potential of education for peace. NFE must be integrated into national education frameworks, supported through public policy, and recognized for its contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals. Moreover, learning must be intergenerational, place-based, and inclusive of the diverse ways people come to know and act in the world.

Trust: The Fuel for Peace

If radical hope offers the moral compass and non-formal education (NFE) serves as the vehicle, then trust is the fuel that propels peace forward. Youth leaders across diverse contexts have consistently cited mistrust—in institutions, in leaders, in systems—as a primary barrier to meaningful engagement. Trust, therefore, must be viewed not as an assumed condition, but as a constructed, dynamic force essential to peacebuilding. In fragmented societies—those living within what has been called the "peace flux"—trust becomes the critical element that holds the pieces together. Like the broken shards of a mirror, our shared humanity is fractured along lines of power, identity, and history. Rebuilding peace in these contexts requires reassembling trust, not to erase difference, but to honour complexity and enable plural truths to co-exist.

Trust is not just a value—it is a set of practices and relationships that sustain inclusion, cooperation, and resilience. I have previously outlined (Saleem, 2023) a powerful framework for this relational rebuilding through the 5 R's of Trust-Building:

- Responsibility – Taking ownership of one's actions, biases, and impacts is the foundation of integrity. Acknowledging harm and modelling accountability is crucial, especially in postcolonial contexts where institutional trust has often been undermined.
- Relationships – Trust is forged through empathy, co-creation, and enduring solidarity. It is inherently relational, cultivated through consistent and reciprocal engagement.
- Respect – Recognizing the dignity, perspectives, and agency of others allows for vulnerability and inclusive dialogue. Respect is foundational in intercultural and intergenerational spaces.
- Reflect – Deep self-awareness, humility, and critical reflection on

power and positionality ensure that trust is not performative but structurally embedded.

- Renew – Trust is not static. It requires continual investment, repair, and re-commitment to endure.

Complementing this, I have also drawn on the Trust Quotient model by Maister, Green, and Galford (2000), which evaluates trustworthiness through four factors: credibility, reliability, intimacy, and low self-orientation. In peacebuilding contexts, high self-orientation -when institutional actors prioritize their control over community ownership -erodes trust. Conversely, redistributing power and fostering accountability strengthens it.

These frameworks are not abstract; they are actively embodied in initiatives like the GYM. GYM places trust in the hands of young people—resourcing them to define local problems, co-create solutions, and assess peer-led projects without external imposition. It operates on the principle that youth are not just the future—they are leaders of the present. Trust, in this model, is not earned through consultation but enacted through co-governance. It decentralizes leadership and grounds accountability in community agency.

Trust also plays a decolonial role. Colonialism's most enduring legacies include the erosion of epistemic trust—the silencing of voices and the denial of community wisdom. Rebuilding trust post-colonially requires more than reform: it calls for the restoration of cultural agency, historical dignity, and the affirmation of multiple truths. Inclusive dialogue, intersectional reflection, and intergenerational co-learning become radical acts of care.

Thus, trust is not merely the foundation of peace—it is its lifeblood, its fuel. It allows fractured communities to imagine new futures, fosters relational repair, and enables the practice of radical hope. Trust doesn't come from being invited to the table. It comes from knowing your voice will shape the menu.

An Ethics for Post-normal Peace Reassembly

In analyzing youth-led practices from the Global Youth Mobilization (GYM) and the broader Big Six ecosystem—particularly through the lenses of radical hope, non-formal education, and trust-building—three core ethical orientations emerge:

- Empathetic Listening: A disciplined and open engagement with uncomfortable truths and silences. It resists the temptation to prematurely resolve difference and instead holds space for complexity and discomfort.

- Shared Vulnerability: A conscious shift away from performative certainty toward mutual learning, humility, and emotional openness. It allows youth and adults alike to be learners, not just leaders.
- Polyphonic Power: An ethic that values multiplicity. It embraces many truths, ways of knowing, and forms of leadership, recognising that collaboration across difference is essential to systemic change.

These ethics require not only recognition but support and scale. Yet scaling does not mean standardizing. It means deepening these values across the systems that shape our lives -education, governance, civil society, and humanitarian action.

Together, radical hope directing non-formal education, powered by trust, points toward a broader vision of lifelong learning as a foundation for just and resilient societies. This requires a redefinition of who counts as a learner, what knowledge matters, and how learning is practiced over time. Peace must not be reserved for moments of crisis. It must be lived, learned, and renewed throughout life. The experience of GYM and the Big Six is clear: when young people are trusted, resourced, and included, they don't just transform their communities—they begin to rewire the very systems around them.

From Compass to Praxis: Charting Peace in Post-normal Times

In a world marked by fragmentation, uncertainty, and systemic exclusion, peace can no longer be imagined as a fixed destination. It must be understood as a journey—messy, nonlinear, and continually negotiated across differences. This journey requires direction, tools, and energy. It requires youth at the helm.

In this context, I propose an interlocking framework: radical hope is the compass, pointing us toward futures that are not yet fully visible, but still worth pursuing. Non-formal education (NFE) is the vehicle, offering flexible, inclusive, and locally grounded means for navigating that path—particularly for young people at the margins of formal systems. And most critically, trust is the fuel. Without trust—between generations, across institutions, among peers—neither the vision nor the vehicle can move forward.

Peace travels at the speed of trust -in post-normal times, it is the most vital fuel we have.

Non-formal education creates space for trust-building. It transforms the adult–youth relationship from directive to dialogic. It affirms that young people are not future

peacebuilders, but present ones. In NFE spaces, youth are not passive recipients of knowledge or trust—they become its architects. In this way, non-formal education becomes not just a means of learning, but an infrastructure for peace.

Radical hope is not wishful thinking. It is the disciplined, ongoing work of relationship-building, power redistribution, and imaginative courage. Youth-led solutions, grounded in non-formal education and supported by global movements like the Global Youth Mobilization (GYM), offer a compelling pathway forward. The work of the Big Six and initiatives like YABC show that young people are already leading. They are not passengers or inheritors; they are designers, builders, and navigators of peace.

Through youth-led solutions, radical hope becomes praxis. Through NFE, learning becomes liberation. Through trust, fractured systems begin to repair. I conclude not with answers, but with an invitation: To rebuild peace is not to eliminate conflict, but to transform how we live with it. And to move toward justice in post-normal times is to keep hope as our compass, learning as our vehicle, and trust as our fuel. It is to recognize youth not as subjects of peace interventions, but as authors of ethical futures. And to invest in non-formal education as the space where radical hope can be practiced, scaled, and sustained.

Transforming Leadership: Centering hope, compassion, and collective action

For those of us engaged in or dedicated to peacebuilding, humanitarian work, and social justice, the violence and upheaval of recent years has resulted in a deep sense of collective grief. Many of us are grappling with feelings of anger and sorrow for the widespread and often unnecessary suffering happening throughout the world- fueled by political, economic, and social forces that remain unchanged or worsen the harm. This is compounded in contexts like the United States, where I live, where there is growing hostility toward the very ideals of human rights, justice, and equality. Leaders increasingly frame the work of activists, educators, and peacebuilders as unpatriotic or irrelevant, despite the critical roles these individuals play. Combined with budget and program cuts, it is no surprise that burnout is widespread and hope in the future is faltering for many.

This despair is not limited to those engaged in peace and social justice; it is pervasive in many communities in the U.S. and worldwide. Alongside this fading hope - fed by and instigating rising tensions,

inequality, and uncertainty - is growing fear. This fear breeds polarization, and as we retreat into familiar identities, viewing those outside our group as "other", our collective imagination has narrowed and made space for harmful, fear-driven leadership to take root.

To counter this we need leaders who offer an alternative - rather than leaders who exploit our fears to achieve their agenda or stoke greater tension and divisions among us, we need leaders who can lead from a place of hope, humility, and shared humanity. We need leaders who foster connection instead of division, build trust across differences, and help us remember that a more just and peaceful future is still within reach if we are willing to reimagine how we lead and who gets to lead.

In recent years I have had the privilege of working with and learning from two organizations - Euphrates Institute and the Center for Compassionate Leadership (CFCL) - who are pushing back on dominant leadership ideals in favour of models that centre compassion, care, empowerment, and shared leadership. While their contexts and strategies differ, these organizations and the individuals who participate in their programs share a deep commitment to peace, justice, and liberation, and to leading change through nonviolent, inclusive, and compassion-centered approaches. Their example has been a powerful source of inspiration for me, and a reminder of what is possible, even in times of chaos and grief.

The following section discusses the Euphrates and CFCL leadership programs and the leadership ideals and approaches they embody and cultivate in others through their work. Most of these ideas are not new; they are rooted in peace and justice movements and existing scholarship and practice. However, they are being uplifted and reframed in our current context, and with that offer us the opportunity to imagine what could be possible if these ideals and lessons were extended to broader audiences and integrated in our broader societies and cultures. The section concludes by exploring how this time of upheaval might hold the potential for a cultural shift—one that more boldly supports and sustains this kind of transformative leadership.

About the leadership programs

The mission of Euphrates Institute is to equip, connect, and uplift peacebuilders around the world, working toward a future where humanity collectively chooses and practices peace to end all forms of violence. Their Peace Practice Alliance (PPA) program was created to cultivate communities of peace

leaders and provide them with the tools, practices, and support needed to thrive. Since 2020 over 200 peace leaders from 61 countries have participated in this virtual, 6-month intensive program. The PPA program is grounded in integral peace leadership (McIntyre Miller & Green, 2015) and centers around four pillars of peace practice: personal, interpersonal, community, and global. Participants learn with and from one another through bi-weekly calls, an online learning platform, and small group discussions.

The Center for Compassionate Leadership's mission is "to advance compassionate methods of leadership by integrating best practices of modern leadership, evidence-based science, and contemplative wisdom" (Center for Compassionate Leadership, 2025, training page). They pursue this through thought leadership, research, trainings, community building, and collaborations. Since 2019 more than 800 leaders from organizations and institutions, representing at least 65 countries, have participated in their Compassionate Leadership Certificate Training. During this virtual, eight-week program, participants come together for interactive monthly calls in which topics related to compassionate leadership are taught and discussed.

Within each organization's target audience, there are a diverse set of individuals who have participated in their programs. The peacebuilders who have completed Euphrates' PPA program are diverse in terms of age, experience, and geography, as well as the focus and type of peace work they are engaged in. CFCL Training participants come from various sectors (e.g., government, private sector, nonprofits, academia) and vary in their levels and type of formal and informal leadership. The curriculum of both programs brings together theory and practice, with an emphasis on providing participants with practical, real-world practices and examples. They are grounded in research from various fields - social science and leadership studies, as well as neuroscience, contemplative practice, religious studies, and other fields.

Inspiring hope, not fear

Many of the great leaders of our time have been driven by a deeper purpose and their steadfast belief in the possibility of a better future. They inspire hope, foster connection, and mobilize collective action. They understand that while fear may be effective in driving action in the short-term, it rarely leads to sustainable change, and instead often fosters more aggression and distrust, which can further exacerbate issues.

Euphrates and CFCL share this approach and embed it in their leadership programs. Euphrates believes in "the transformative power of individuals to create positive change in the world" (Euphrates Institute, 2024) and that through the collective practice of peace leadership at personal, interpersonal and community levels, sustainable global change will be possible. According to CFCL, "Compassion is the means to lead humanity forward from a world of competition and conflict to one of understanding, cooperation, equity, and justice... a more compassionate, peaceful world where individuals are free to express their full, innate potential for the greater good of all" (2025, vision page). They do not shy away from the ugliness of the world or the complex challenges that lie ahead; they approach them head-on and inspire others with a radical vision of hope for the future.

Redefining strength

Both organizations define and demonstrate leadership strength very differently from what many think of traditionally and certainly quite differently from our world leaders who are guided by the political and military concept of 'peace through strength'. Rather than defining strength as dominance over others or pursuing peace through military or economic control, they favour leadership approaches centered in compassion and collective leadership.

To them, *how* one leads is critically important to achieving lasting change. As a result, they emphasize approaches and practices that create supportive, inclusive spaces. For CFCL, the focus is on building a culture of compassion, which includes psychological safety and applying a growth mindset. In the PPA, Euphrates emphasizes the importance of deep listening, nonviolent communication, creating safe spaces for dialogue and collaboration that bring together diverse voices and perspectives, and the importance of inviting others into leadership - recognizing that all members of the community have unique gifts to offer. In both cases, the program leads demonstrate their teachings in action by creating warm, welcoming, and non-judgmental spaces for dialogue and exploration. Their care for the participants is evident, and they create a culture of mutual respect and care within each cohort of their programs.

Building inner strength and personal peace

In both programs, the leaders' ability to be truly effective in their work and to contribute to transformative change begins from within.

They recognize that a leaders' state of mind and physical wellbeing will have a major impact on their behaviour, capacity to reason, creativity, and ability to empathize. In order for leaders to show up fully, even in times of stress, and to practice compassion with others, they need to have practices that enable them to develop and maintain inner peace and strength.

As a result, both programs emphasize the importance of increasing self-awareness, cultivating compassion for the self, and practices that promote personal wellbeing. The Euphrates PPA program begins with a focus on 'personal peace', which includes getting in touch with their mind, heart and body; practices for self-regulation and self-care, and self-compassion. Similarly, a core focus of the CFCL training is inner strength, "leverag[ing] awareness, self-compassion, and vulnerability to elevate your leadership presence and potential" (Center for Compassionate Leadership, 2025).

Fostering connection

In addition to elevating inner peace, both organizations (and their programs) emphasize the importance of connection in creating the conditions for transformative change to take place. The PPA program includes leadership approaches and practices designed to promote partnerships and foster collaboration across generational, cultural, and faith-based lines. By inviting leadership from diverse voices, partnering with others, and nurturing inclusive dialogue, they help build a sense of shared purpose and mutual support. In the CFCL program, deepening connection is a core theme, and includes discussions on fostering high-quality relationships, creating cultures of safety, increasing belonging, and navigating difficult conversations skillfully within the workplace (Center for Compassionate Leadership, 2025).

In addition, the program models of PPA and CFCL double as a means to restore and re-energize participants, many of whom are suffering from burnout and faltering hope, or who may feel isolated in their desire for and belief in change. Each program is designed to be very interactive, with opportunities for participants to get to know and connect with one another throughout. Through the act of coming together and sharing their stories, challenges, and ideas, participants gain a renewed sense of belonging and hope.

Supporting systems transformation

While both programs target individual leaders and hold a steadfast belief in the power of individuals to create positive

change, Euphrates and CFCL also recognize that we operate within a complex set of systems and structures. To achieve long-term, sustainable change, we also need to address the root causes of issues and take multidimensional approaches that account for these complex factors. This takes time and collective action.

For Euphrates, as an organization and in their PPA program, leadership requires more holistic approaches that emphasize nonviolent solutions and the promotion of positive peace—creating the conditions for collective flourishing by addressing the root causes of conflict and advancing justice. Participants in the PPA program learn about and discuss systems thinking and mapping, social networks and nonviolent action, and decolonization. While the CFCL program has a narrower focus on workplaces and institutions, they also include content and discussions focused on creating and maintaining cultures of compassion within these spaces, considering the influence of the broader culture and other systems in which they are held.

Reimagining leadership

The events of recent years have exposed the deep cracks in our systems—and with them, the limitations of leadership models rooted in dominance, division, and fear. Organizations like Euphrates and the Center for Compassionate Leadership are daring to imagine a new possible future in which leadership is centered around compassion, driven by hope, and creates opportunities for collective action that drive meaningful change. The interest in their programs demonstrates that there are many people worldwide who are ready for and interested in this type of change, and the evaluations of these programs demonstrate the transformational potential of these types of programs.

History shows us that times of great disruption can also be a turning point, and moments of profound grief and upheaval often open opportunities to imagine and build something better. *What if this moment is such an inflection point—not only for our world, but for how we lead within it?* If we can transform this moment into a catalyst for reflection and renewal, there is an opportunity here to reimagine and help reshape leadership: not as control, but as compassion; not as individual heroism, but as shared responsibility. This kind of leadership—rooted in hope—has the potential to create positive change in our communities, workplaces, families, nations, environment, and world.

Conclusion: Radical Hope as Leadership for Collective Transformation

The world today teeters between transactional diplomacy and transformational leadership. The resurgence of "peace through strength" as a dominant foreign policy doctrine—articulated in military coercion, economic leverage, and vertical diplomacy—seeks to engineer geopolitical stability through pressure and conditionality. But as recent events have shown, such approaches risk perpetuating cycles of resentment, disempowerment, and unsustainable peace. When peace is imposed without context, without care, and without dialogue, it becomes brittle—an agreement on paper, not a transformation of reality.

Against this backdrop, this essay has offered a different proposition: that peace must be practiced—not merely negotiated—and that leadership must be redefined. True peace is not the result of force or fear, but of relationships, rootedness, and radical imagination. Across the polylogue, a powerful framework emerges—one that situates **radical hope** as the moral compass, **non-formal education (NFE)** as the generative vehicle, and **trust** as the vital fuel. This triad is not idealistic; it is already alive in the world. It is embodied by the young people mobilizing through initiatives like the Global Youth Mobilization (GYM) and the broader Big Six ecosystem, and the work being done by Euphrates Institute, the Center for Compassionate Leadership, and many others worldwide.

What this moment demands is not just new agreements or institutions, but new *ethics of engagement*. It requires **empathetic listening**, **shared vulnerability**, and **polyphonic power**—practices that resist simplification and honour complexity. If the Nobel Peace Prize is to mean anything in this age of shattered mirrors and deep rupture, it must recognize not only outcomes, but **processes rooted in justice**. Peace cannot be engineered from above while trust is eroded from below. It cannot be brokered through dominance while truth is suppressed or awarded while communities are silenced. Peace, to be lasting, must be relational. And leadership, to be ethical, must be rooted in radical hope.

We are living in post-normal times -times of uncertainty and contradiction -but also of tremendous possibility. The mirror may be shattered, but it is not beyond repair. Youth-led movements, NFE ecosystems, new models of leadership, and cross-cultural solidarities are already gathering the shards—not to restore an illusion of unity, but to assemble a new mosaic of shared humanity. In this

mosaic, each voice matters. Each act of courage counts.

Let us then reimagine leadership not as command, but as accompaniment. Let us invest in the spaces—non-formal education, polylogues, intergenerational movements—where peace is lived, not theorized. Let us treat hope not as an abstraction, but as a commitment: to do the hard, relational work of reassembling peace with care, justice, and trust at its heart.

*This is not only possible. It is already underway***.**

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