

**Catholics Building Peace:  
Tools, Materials and Strategies from Around the World**

**Report based on the**

**First International Conference  
of the  
Catholic Peacebuilding Network**

**Hosted by the Joan B. Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies  
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"Peacebuilding in the Catholic community is something new," according to Scott Appleby, Director of the Joan B. Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies. It is new as a concept if not as a practice, Appleby explained at the 2004 consultation of the Catholic Peacebuilding Network (CPN). Peacebuilding is not unrelated to peacemaking, which has historically referred to "a tradition of largely papal and episcopal internationalism...conducted primarily at elite governmental levels." For peacebuilding, however, "the local is the center of gravity, and efforts for peace begin from the ground [and move] up...Local and regional conciliators have become essential actors...Peacebuilding thus both precedes and follows upon peacemaking...Peacemaking is a specific moment in the larger process."

To discuss and explore the phenomenon of Catholic peacebuilding, some forty participants from Asia, Africa, Europe, Latin America, and the United States gathered in a consultation at the University of Notre Dame's Center for Continuing Education from May 17-19, 2004. Hosted by the Kroc Institute, the conference was dedicated to sharing experiences, analysis, and insights regarding peacebuilding initiatives in Colombia, the Philippines, and Rwanda, as well as stories of peace and conflict from across Africa. The meeting was structured as a series of presentations and discussions concerning the diverse efforts of Catholics and their partners in peacebuilding. It was aimed at helping the CPN to discern the most appropriate ways to contribute to peace practices as it grows and develops. Besides fulfilling this hope, the consultation yielded a wealth of insights of potential relevance for a Catholic theology of peace and peacebuilding.

The purpose of this paper is to provide a compilation of insights from the consultation in terms of lessons learned in Catholic peacebuilding, useful practices, and gaps between theory and practice.<sup>1</sup> The paper therefore focuses upon substantive points emerging from each of the major presentations. Its purpose is not to summarize the major

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presentations of the consultation—that has been done elsewhere.<sup>2</sup> To adhere to the “building” metaphor in Catholic peacebuilding, perhaps the best way to describe this paper is as a more-or-less orderly presentation of tools, materials, and strategies utilized by Catholics building peace. These are presented as direct quotes or paraphrases of participants’ statements and questions. To be sure, some of the tools described herein are crude implements, some of the materials are rough-hewn, and some strategies not yet tried and true—but this is as it should be. If any certainty emerged from the consultation, it is that Catholic peacebuilding is and always will be a work in progress.

While all participants in the consultation made valuable comments, not every participant is cited or quoted herein. Due to space limitations, only a comparatively small selection of participants’ comments—with a few exceptions, those with most direct significance for a Catholic theology and praxis of peace—are included.

This paper is organized in terms of key themes relevant to Catholic peacebuilding that emerged in the course of the consultation. The broadest themes are: I. Useful Practices and Lessons Learned; II. The Catholic Charism for Peacebuilding; III. Catholicism’s Institutional Assets for Peacebuilding; and IV. Challenges for Catholic Peacebuilding. Under each of these, a number of sub-themes are developed. The placement of a given quote or paraphrase in terms of key themes is somewhat subjective, since several comments could have fit easily under more than one theme.

### **I. Useful Practices and Lessons Learned**

This section presents comments and insights on useful practices and lessons learned in Colombia, the Philippines, and Rwanda. The comments and insights from each country are listed somewhat differently, reflecting the differences in the presentations themselves. Useful practices or lessons learned are listed first, followed by a selection of quotes from the presenters.

#### Colombia

Useful practices for peacebuilding:

- the establishment and nurture of communities of nonviolent resistance to violence and oppression (such as San José de Apartadó);
- the intervention of Catholic Church leadership as a permanent and legitimate mediator (for example, when individual bishops and priests have served as mediators in talks between government and guerilla forces);
- the staging of events to influence public opinion (such as the Week for Peace);
- initiatives for economic development to help establish the conditions for peace (such as the Peace and Development Programme of the Magdalena Medio region, in existence since 1995);
- the enactment of scenarios to build trust and create an environment for thoughtful solutions to emerge;
- the designation of safe spaces to advocate a negotiated solution;
- the staging of listening sessions for communities to convey their needs and learnings (such as the "Mutual Help Groups" in many dioceses);

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<sup>2</sup> See “Concise Final Report, Catholic Peacebuilding Network Consultation, May 2004,” which also describes the criteria for the countries selected as the focus of the consultation. Its appendices include a list of participants as well as a schedule of the sessions.

- the establishment of venues for permanent and participatory conflict analysis (among them, efforts of the Jesuit research center CINEP);
- the creation of opportunities for political and moral accompaniment by peacebuilders. Martha Ines Romero (Catholic Relief Services, Colombia): “We need a general mobilization of civil society and churches around a common agenda... We need to include ethnic and gender perspectives in peacebuilding.”  
 Msgr. Hector Fabio Henao (Director of Social Ministries, Colombian Episcopal Conference): “In the pastoral work of the Church, how can we deal with people who are both victims and perpetrators?”  
 Amanda Romero (Andes Branch, American Friends Service Committee): “We need to work with women and ethnic minorities, indigenous peoples in remote places. We need peacebuilding beyond training courses...we need to organize speaking tours to lobby Washington, the OAS, UN bodies...and send delegations of U.S. citizens and churches to Colombia.”

### The Philippines

Useful practices for peacebuilding:

- community-based projects (such as the Catholic Relief Services-supported "Youth Peer Program for Peace" and the agency's small-lending programs in Maguindanao) bring Christians, Muslims, and Lumads (Indigenous Peoples) together across lines of conflict; they build peace by addressing the acute needs of the people while simultaneously cultivating constructive relationships.
- Culture of Peace workshops, which promote an understanding of Mindanao history and attempt to break the cycle of violence through a dialogue of faith, life, and community;
- interreligious dialogue, e.g., the Bishops-Ulama Forum/Conference which involves high-level Muslim and Christian religious leaders;
- establishment of “Zones of Peace”/“Sanctuaries of Peace” (sites of sacred, religious, historic, educational, cultural, geographical and/or environmental importance, protected and preserved by their own communities. Ideally, these operate within ethical principles of nonviolence, free from weapons, acts of violence, injustice and environmental degradation).

Lessons learned:

- The importance of dialogue;
- The importance of building identities and solidarity vis-à-vis framework of tri-people in Mindanao (for example, through the Culture of Peace workshops that help foster appreciation of similarities and differences among Christians, Muslims, and Lumads);
- Balance working with minority and majority;
- Peace process must be a sustained effort;
- Relationship building: Bonds of friendship between members of different sides of a conflict help keep peace initiatives alive even in a context of deepening hostilities and mistrust.

Rudy Buhay Rodil, Kalinaw Mindanaw (Peace to Mindanao): “[Opposing groups in Mindanao need to] “find a way back to ritual brotherhood [sic]” that existed before the subjugation of the Philippines by “Christian” empires. “They are trying to create a new relationship out of an old one where history made us ‘enemies.’ Now that the old players

(Spaniards, Americans) who fanned the conflict and division in the old days are gone...we need to imagine a new consciousness of brotherhood.”

Myla Leguro (Catholic Relief Services, Philippines): “To create a culture of peace we need to break the cycles of violence through creative and nonviolent ways of resolving conflict by engaging in dialogues of faith, life, and action...Through participation, cooperation, and dialogue, we transform relationships and eventually transform societal structures toward sustainable peace.

Grace Rebollos, Peace Advocates Zamboanga (PAZ): "Peace is about people...bringing people together, building relationships...Investing in the friendship and being able to nurture the good relationships has become the antidote to loss of confidence and interest. Thus, it has been fruitful for friends to constantly keep in touch and care enough to check on how the other is.”

#### Rwanda

What Catholic peacebuilders have learned in the wake of the genocide:

- the "unbelievable efficacy" of radio as a means of communication, a particularly tragic lesson of the genocide. There is a need to establish a Catholic radio station to reach out with a message of peace and reconciliation.
- The need to include peace education in Catholic school curricula.
- The need to disseminate peace education materials and teaching aids (brochures, posters, video) in the local language.
- The importance of regular meetings between state and church officials, and contacts between regional and international actors, to coordinate actions and share information.

Fr. Antoine Kambanda (Justice and Peace Commission, Archdiocese of Kigali): It has seemed as if “the devil has transferred his headquarters from hell to Rwanda. We have to overcome the trauma of neighbor killing neighbor, family members killing other family members, priests/religious/clergy betraying their faithful...we have to overcome deep injuries...It is difficult to speak of forgiveness, reconciliation while you are still under trauma.”

Therese Nduwamungu (Caritas Rwanda): “We have to wake up from the nightmare and commit ourselves to peacebuilding. We have to share everything, practice solidarity, but it is not easy to change people’s minds...there is still a long way to go to build real peace.”

Paul Rutayisire (CRS Rwanda): “The challenges [that face us] are the heritage of impunity and weak political participation. Lack of good governance remains...Our society is still divided and fragile. Justice issues remain, and our first emotions are still fear and [the desire for] revenge.”

## II. The Catholic Charism for Peacebuilding

The conference devoted considerable discussion to the distinctively "Catholic" contribution to peacebuilding. Three elements in particular emerged as essential to peacebuilding as a Catholic endeavor: the centrality of relationship, the prophetic role of the Church, and peacebuilding understood as vocation.

### The Centrality of Relationship

John Paul Lederach of the Kroc Institute invoked the theological notion of *relatio*: "that life locates meaning only in relationship. This notion of space suggests a theological *locus* that encourages a relational base from which sociological spaces of the Church

embrace the challenging presence of humanity in its fullest expression, the friendly and the like-minded, alongside the dangerous, the violent, and the enemy." *Relatio* is "not applied exclusively to an understanding of the Trinity, but is seen as rising and finding its way as to how Divine redemptive presence through the Church is articulated in the maze of socio-political violence." Lederach offered examples from Colombia and the Philippines, where local Catholic leadership moves "at great risk and in deeply ambiguous situations to promote justice and peace by building relationships."

In a similar vein, Scott Appleby explained that for Catholics, peacebuilding has to be "first and foremost about relationship building...*Relatio* is the way God is...Communion, relationship building, has these theological roots."

A commitment to the common good, rooted in Catholic Social Teaching (CST), is a second aspect of the role of relationship in Catholic peacebuilding. Marie Dennis, Director of the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns, spoke of *right* relationship as a prerequisite for peace: "You understand the need to cross borders, to look at life through the 'lens' of the other, allowing yourself to see with new eyes and be changed by that experience... 'The peace of the other is my peace,'" she said, quoting Cesar Villanueva of Pax Christi Philippines. "The same applies to security...security must be inclusive or it will not be at all." The responsibilities of relationship have to extend beyond boundaries, to a "global" and "universal" common good.

Commitment to the common good impels us to seek out common ground, which in turn helps to provide a broader basis for relationship. Grace Rebollos described the search for common ground between Muslims and Christians comprising the Interreligious Solidarity Movement for Peace on the Zamboanga Peninsula. Sometimes "common ground" has amounted only to shared feelings of fear in the midst of mounting violence. But remarkably, members of the movement have also found common ground in:

- faith—a living experience of a God of life, justice, and love;
- respect for human rights;
- dynamic interest in current, urgent issues;
- special concern for vulnerable/marginalized sectors; and
- sharing in the proactive search for solutions.

Identifying common ground means, in Lederach's phrase, "expanding the space of engagement" which the walls of enmity may not divide.

A third aspect of the centrality of relationship in Catholic peacebuilding is solidarity, a major theme from CST. Solidarity is expressed through accompaniment. In what Lederach called "a lived theology of *relatio*," he described Catholic clergy in Colombia who, at great risk to themselves, "choose to stay physically present in settings of great ambiguity, and in that ambiguity they continue to relate across the violent social and political divides."

While solidarity and accompaniment were recognized as Catholic values in peacebuilding several times throughout the consultation, members of the Colombia panel in particular pointed out the ways they have yet to be realized both for and within their country. Martha Ines Romero spoke of the need "to build bridges among church groups, with the bishops, as well as coordinate with other civil society groups...we need to build solidarity and think globally...we must think in terms of permanent accompaniment." Msgr. Henao stated that the challenge for Colombian Catholic peacebuilders is "to get

together with other people working on peace within and outside our country.” Amanda Romero spoke of the need to “build and strengthen ecclesial linkages.”

Appleby indicated that solidarity is in opposition to the “false consciousness of dualism—seeing the Good against the Evil in ‘cookie cutter’ ways.”

Denouncement has a place, said Lederach, but the evil to be denounced is in the walls that divide us. Even responding to terrorism, Lederach argued, comes down to solidarity. The “terrorist” list of the United States and European Union, he pointed out, names insurgent groups in such countries as Nepal, the Philippines, Spain, Colombia, and Uganda as “evil,” implying that they are to be “shunned, isolated, and destroyed.” But “people seeking to build peace cross the lines of isolation.” They “dwell in the prohibited threshold” between “us” and those labeled “evil.” Similarly, Dennis reasoned, “To stop terrorism we have to build right relationships with people around the world, emphasizing global cooperation.”

### The Prophetic Role of the Church

To be in right relationship requires addressing justice concerns. If the first kind of change necessary for building peace is “personal relational change,” according to Myla Leguro, “structural change” is the next step. In Dennis’ words, we have to “address the reality of a world sharply divided between rich and poor.” Colombian participants addressed the connection between violence and injustice, pointing out the ways that the needs of certain groups are easily overlooked. “Ethnic perspectives—for example, that of indigenous peoples—need to be part of our work for peace,” observed Martha Ines Romero. Amanda Romero commented on the importance of working with women in the promotion of peace, and expressed a need for training of Colombian peacebuilders in international human rights standards.

The Christian belief in the dignity of every human being must lead inevitably to work for a peace rooted in justice, and specifically to a concern for human rights. Rebollos reported that “basic human rights” and “dignified human living” are essential issues for the work of PAZ. Human rights were said to be a primary victim of the violence in Colombia; panelists from that country called for “a humanization of the conflict” that would address issues such as kidnapping, the release of political prisoners, and the needs of internally displaced persons. A comment by Dennis revealed the radical nature of the Catholic commitment to human dignity, with its potential to raise political hackles: “Every human life is sacred—the lives of Osama Bin Laden, Saddam Hussein, prisoners at Guantanamo Bay, and the children of Afghanistan or Iraq are as precious in the eyes of God as the lives of our own loved ones.”

Appleby described a third constitutive component of the prophetic role of the Church in peacebuilding. This is the “long tradition of engaging the state...and international and transnational structures beyond the state. Catholics have never shied away from engaging with the powers that be...This has brought moments of great service from the Catholic tradition and moments of scandal and shame,” but Catholics are called to “resist the compartmentalization of public and private.” Speaking out against those who perpetrate injustice can sometimes be dangerous and may not lead to immediate or obvious change for the better; still, Andrea Bartoli of the Sant’ Egidio Community noted, “Sometimes history helps those who are audacious in making peace.”

Peter-John Pearson, representing the South African Bishop’s Conference, invoked the experience of the Church in South Africa: “We must continue to speak with the

language of the prophets...Clarity and honesty in dialogue is important, especially when perpetrators try to deny responsibilities for atrocities of the past.”

Dennis listed a set of “prophetic and pastoral tasks” for the Church in the United States if the latter is to be a nation at peace, free from the threat of terrorism. “Religious leaders, pastors, and educators have to help us [in the U.S.] grapple with our fear and insecurity, enabling us to live with vulnerability...in a world where a majority of people are *always* vulnerable.” We need help to “rework our value system—beginning with an unwavering commitment to the value of every life...reset our priorities from the accumulation of power, wealth, and consumer goods to nurturing right relationships with other people and the rest of creation...move from individualism to emphasize community...and reexamine our symbols and myths to strip them of their ability to isolate and blind us.”

Such an enormous task cannot be undertaken without the spiritual undergirdings attendant upon peacebuilding as a vocation to which the whole Church is called.

#### Peacebuilding as Vocation

“Peacebuilding is not an academic degree,” remarked Msgr. Henao. “It is a vocation.” Appleby suggested that “Catholic peacebuilders might see peacebuilding as a vocation rooted in the Catholic sacramental and anthropological world view.” Catholicism brings to peacebuilding its sacramental tradition, its articulation of social ethics in CST, and in the rich spiritual resources to which it has given birth over the course of centuries.

#### The Sacramentality of Catholic Peacebuilding

Appleby elaborated on the sacramentality of Catholic peacebuilding:

To say that Catholic peacebuilding would in some way be sacramental would mean ...a notion that grace (God’s own life) shared by us informs and shapes our encounters with our neighbors in need in every concrete situation...Through the created world, we encounter the invisible realm of spirit in a transformative way, seeking and celebrating through tangible signs, symbols, and rituals, the intangibles of human freedom and dignity. A sacramental imagination would see the created world as the arena of God’s saving action...God is always, already at work in the situation, but...human response is important and necessary to advance that work.

Lederach addressed himself specifically to the centrality of the Eucharist as “the pulsating heart” of the expressed faith of peacemakers, citing Robert Schreiter:

I am not so much focused here on the ritualistic expression of...Holy Communion but rather on its place of giving foundation, meaning, and space to the mystery of God’s presence that binds people together. Robert Schreiter referred to this as the “sacrament of reconciliation.” He suggested that the Eucharist makes “space for important ritual moments that reach beyond the life of the Church...provide an ongoing schooling in the spirituality of reconciliation...[It] can show the powerful symbol of the presence and absence of the Lord, and how that heals and brings new hope.”

### The Roots of Catholic Peacebuilding in CST

Appleby quoted an influential line from “Justice in the World,” a document issued by the World Synod of Catholic Bishops in 1971: “Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appeared to us as a constitutive dimension of preaching the Gospel.” To participate in the “transformation of the world” was thus explicitly acknowledged as a “constitutive dimension” of the most basic work of the church, that of evangelization. Building peace is a way of proclaiming on earth the Good News of salvation in the person of Jesus Christ. At the heart of CST is the fact that faith is not a matter separate from working for justice and peace; rather, such action is a way of making real one’s faith. Lederach alluded to this reality in describing his work with Catholic colleagues in settings like Colombia, Mindanao, and Ghana: “Though not always fully explicit in theological terms, they seem to live a theology of engagement in reference to their immediate and very challenging environments.”

Participation in “the transformation of the world,” is not only the province of clergy or pastoral leaders, but is properly the work of the whole Church. Grace Rebollos remarked that in the multi-religious environment of the Philippines, “Stakeholdership in peace is not the monopoly of those engaging in religious occupations, i.e., clergy, ustadzes [Muslim religious teacher or scholar], ministers, religious nuns, etc., but is also inclusive of peace actors in the laity or in secular occupations.”

### Spirituality in Catholic Peacebuilding

Appleby drew attention to the importance of “plumbing the rich history of Christian spirituality in order to make Catholic spiritual traditions and practices available to peacebuilders in various settings” to help them “wed spirituality with social transformation.”

Bartoli called to mind the importance of prayer in bringing about peace, and invited participants to ponder whether there are saints living today who can capture imaginations and inspire a vision of peace: “We [can] help each other remember our new martyrs, our most precious treasures—our people, our faith, our journey for peace.”

Maryann Cusimano Love cited as relevant the Gospel for the following Sunday, John 14:24: “Peace I leave with you...not as the world gives peace.” The world gives peace without justice, a peace that is imposed by military victory, a “winner takes all” peace without the participation of civil society or marginalized groups. The kind of peace that the world gives is reached only by governing political parties, a peace rooted in amnesia and denial. On the other hand, Cusimano Love pointed out, the peace of Christ is a peace with justice, participation, solidarity, reconciliation, and forgiveness. It is rooted in relationship, connectedness, and community. The peace of Christ is creative; it can move beyond deadlocked politics and cycles of violence. It is open to previously excluded groups and their wisdom; it remembers and revises.

### **III. Catholicism’s Institutional Assets for Peacebuilding**

John Paul Lederach pointed out an often overlooked advantage of the Catholic Church in its work of building peace.

First, from a sociological standpoint, I am struck over and over again with the extraordinary physical presence of the Catholic Church in reference to places where violent conflict is raging. The structure and reach of the

Church extends to the highest level of national leadership and to the wide, delta like feathering of local parishes located in and on all sides of the human geographies split by violent conflict. In reference to many settings of violent conflict the Catholic Church may have the single greatest existing infrastructure of relationships that bridge and link divided peoples vertically and horizontally of any institution in the world. This represents what I would call the gift of the great sociological *locus* of Catholicism. This locus sits with enormous but not always, perhaps rarely, actualized potential. This is particularly true but not limited to countries and regions where Catholic presence represents one of or the dominant majority of religious believers.

The vertical and horizontal structure of relationships within Catholicism, and the advantage they pose for Catholic peacebuilding efforts, was likewise noted by Scott Appleby: “Catholic peacebuilding cannot be horizontal alone...It has to engage not only at the grassroots, but with the regional, national, and international centers, governments, NGO’s...No level of organized and productive human activity is rejected as a potential partner in the work.”

A resilient feature of the Catholic Church as an institution is its ability to make space within itself for a wide variety of cultural expressions and changing historical circumstances. This quality was described by Appleby as essential in the Church's work for peace: “Any comprehensive, all-encompassing model for Catholic peacebuilding would be developed on the basis of sustained, cross-cultural dialogue and storytelling...the Vatican Council taught Catholics to take history seriously, and to discern and adapt to historical change, so any such model will be provisional, changing, in dialogue with history and particular cultural situations.” Catholic peacebuilding must therefore be culturally sensitive; according to Marie Dennis, “valuing of the other’s way of being, sense of meaning, symbolic life, religious beliefs and customs.” For example, Peter-John Pearson expressed hope that Catholic efforts toward peace based on justice in South Africa would be informed by traditional wisdom: “Be open to the voices of traditional wisdom, told not only through traditional stewards but also captured in civil society who have these keys [sic] and translate them in contemporary context. This offers both context and continuity—a wisdom to help weave peace.”

Bishop Kizito Bahujimihigo of the Diocese of Ruhengeri and Fr. Antoine Kambanda of the Justice and Peace Commission for the Archdiocese of Kigali both voiced support for the use of Rwandan traditional methods of bringing about justice for those who participated in or were victims of the genocide. “Traditional justice is good,” explained Bishop Bahujimihigo, “because it focuses on reconciliation rather than penal outcomes.”

### **Challenges for Catholic Peacebuilding**

Several participants mentioned instances of failure when Catholic individuals and institutions have not sufficiently embodied their vocation to peacebuilding. Areas needing improvement, problems that still confound, and obstacles to peacebuilding were mentioned throughout the course of the consultation. They are included in this brief section.

The first challenge is to maintain and strengthen the moral credibility of Catholic institutions. Not surprisingly, participants from Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) voiced this concern. Where there is a lack of such credibility, Catholic peacebuilding efforts are severely hampered. Bishop Bahujimihigo lamented that “integration of religious values” among some Rwandan Catholics tends to be “superficial.” Paul Rutayisire remarked, “The Church and civil society failed during the genocide.” Likewise, Fr. Ferdinand Muhigirwa of the Central African Social Apostolate emphasized the need for the Church in the DRC to grow in moral credibility if it is to be an effective witness for peace.

A second challenge is that Catholics in general do not regard the vocation to build peace as central to their faith. Msgr. Henao voiced the need of the Catholic Church for “a common idea of peace.” The Rwandan presenters spoke of a lack of adequate initiative on the part of the churches in working for peace, as well as a general lack of awareness among Rwandans of both their duties and their rights.

Amanda Romero pointed out divisions within the Church—for example, at the parish level between rich and poor--and spoke of the need for greater acceptance within the Church of women’s leadership.

Another key challenge faced by many Catholic peacebuilders is a chronic lack of adequate funds or material resources to carry out their work. For example, the Rwandan participants cited “a lack of resources needed to teach a culture of peace in all the villages and in the schools; the urgent need to look after the most vulnerable and the most marginalized of the genocide survivors—the traumatized, the orphans, the widows and widowers, the demobilized soldiers, the refugees and those with AIDS,” and the urgent need for community development projects.

## **VI. Conclusion**

"Look, I am doing something new, now it emerges; can you not see it? Yes, I am making a road in the desert and rivers in wastelands" (Isaiah 43:19). The "new" phenomenon of Catholic peacebuilding is God's own work, in which it is humanity's privilege to participate. Relationship, solidarity, prophetic witness, the sacraments, spirituality, and a wealth of institutional assets are the bricks, beams, and mortar, the saws and the hammers, the drills and the nails of Catholic peacebuilding. A critical eye for flaws and failures can help to ensure that Catholic efforts in the future will build a sound, solid, far-reaching peace with space for everyone. May it nurture life and shelter all who take refuge within.