



Catholic Approaches to Transitional Justice and Reconciliation Processes

Guidelines for Reflection and Planning

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The [Catholic Peacebuilding Network](#) is a voluntary network of practitioners and academics, clergy and laity, which seeks to enhance the study and practice of Catholic peacebuilding in areas torn by conflict. It is comprised of 23 affiliated organizations, but also works with many other individual and institutional partners worldwide.

The University of Notre Dame's [Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies](#), part of the Keough School of Global Affairs, is one of the world's leading centers for the study of the causes of violent conflict and strategies for sustainable peace. Kroc Institute faculty and fellows conduct interdisciplinary research on a wide range of topics related to peace and justice.

Founded by the Catholic Bishops of the United States, the mission of [Catholic Relief Services \(CRS\)](#) is to assist impoverished and disadvantaged people overseas, working in the spirit of Catholic social teaching to promote the sacredness of human life and the dignity of the human person. CRS is motivated by the example of Jesus Christ to ease suffering, provide development assistance, and foster charity and justice.

[Caritas Internationalis](#) is a confederation of over 160 members who are working at the grass-roots in almost every country of the world. Inspired by Catholic faith, Caritas is the helping hand of the Church – reaching out to the poor, vulnerable and excluded, regardless of race or religion, to build a world based on justice and fraternal love. Caritas Internationalis has its headquarters in Rome – co-ordinating emergency operations, formulating development policy and advocating for a better world for everyone. All national Caritas organisations are members of their own regional Caritas networks and the international confederation.

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I. Foreword and Acknowledgements

The reflections and guidance contained in this document are meant to help orient and encourage a diversity of church actors facing challenging “post-conflict” or post-mass-violence circumstances around the globe. The document is intentionally brief and cannot address the vast array of historical, social, and cultural circumstances that frame and condition concrete transitional justice and reconciliation processes and decisions. The aim is a text that is engaging enough to have a broad audience and long enough to be useful, but short enough to be read.

This document reflects insights gained from the long-standing engagement of the Catholic Peacebuilding Network (CPN) and many of its affiliated institutions with the Catholic community in areas suffering from violent conflict. Thirty leading peacebuilders and scholars from nine countries met at The Catholic University of America in August 2016 and helped consolidate some of the lessons learned from this engagement.

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II. Introduction

One of the most prominent parts of peacebuilding in which Catholic Church actors participate around the world is transitional justice and reconciliation. Sustainable peace requires the careful adjudication of justice when societies transition out of conflict, and communities need to find ways to achieve reconciliation and restoration. This work can take many forms. In Burundi, South Sudan, and Peru, Catholic clergy have served on formal truth and reconciliation commissions. In Colombia, the Catholic Church has initiated major programs to promote and facilitate reconciliation since the country's 2016 peace accord with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia was signed. In Mindanao in the southern Philippines, Catholic Relief Services has pioneered a program of "Binding, Bonding, and Bridging" to resolve local land conflicts and promote reconciliation among Muslims, Christians, and indigenous peoples. Anywhere conflict abates, systems to expedite transitional justice and effect genuine reconciliation are necessary, and the Catholic Church can be a powerful agent for leading and implementing them.

This document offers practical reflection on and guidance for engagement with transitional justice and reconciliation. It is rooted in the concrete, on-the-ground experience of Catholic peacebuilders around the world. Some experiences are older, others relatively recent, and still others ongoing. In some countries, violence has raged for decades, and in others it has been sporadic or relatively short-lived. There are some contexts in which the majority of the population is Catholic and church leadership is widely respected, and many others in which Christians are a minority and speaking out can risk retaliation. There are contexts in which church and state cooperation is relatively smooth, and others where the relationship between them is highly fraught.

The reflections that follow cannot address the vast array of historical, social, and cultural circumstances that frame and condition concrete transitional justice and reconciliation processes and decisions. The document is by no means a set of recipes for action, but is meant to support the wide variety of church actors in post-violence or transitional justice situations with discerning, planning, and evaluating.

The first section of the document focuses on post-violence contexts and the church's call to be a peacemaker, and seeks to clarify the meanings of and essential challenges in pursuing both transitional justice and reconciliation.

The next section, with reflections and lessons from global church engagements, is meant to be highly practical. It reviews four distinct sets of issues: general conditions for effective action; roles appropriate to the Catholic Church and its strengths; the broad range of church actors' approaches, methods, and rationales; and some particular challenges and dilemmas.

This is followed by a section on the monitoring and evaluation of church initiatives and concomitant accountability. It addresses approaches for tracking progress and assessing results, and stresses systematic learning and the application of lessons learned to ongoing endeavors for peace and reconciliation.

At the end of the document is a list of resources for those who wish to explore particular issues more deeply.

III. Transitional Justice and Reconciliation in Catholic Contexts

This section situates peacebuilding, transitional justice, and reconciliation within the mission of the Catholic Church and notes scriptural, theological, and magisterial resources for addressing transitional justice and reconciliation. It then clarifies and expands on the meaning of transitional justice and reconciliation.

Post-Violence Contexts and the Church's Mission

The oft-quoted opening of Vatican Council II's [*Gaudium et Spes*](#) proclaims that the joys and hopes, grief and anguish experienced in our time—especially by the poor or afflicted—are the joys, hopes, grief, and anguish of the followers of Christ. This fundamental Vatican document has called the Catholic Church to continually examine the “signs of the times” and to engage with others in finding solutions to the world’s outstanding problems. Among such problems are mistrust, enmities, and conflicts. Vatican II passionately called believers to cooperate with all, aided by Christ, “in securing among themselves a peace based on justice and love and in setting up the instruments of peace” ([*Gaudium et Spes*](#), #77). And as the U.S. Catholic bishops strikingly affirmed 20 years after the Council in [*The Challenge of Peace*](#), “Peacemaking is not an optional commitment. It is a requirement of our faith” (#333).

Numerous church leaders over time and around the world have called fellow Christians to respond to the Gospel and to be artisans of justice, peace, and reconciliation. And recently, Pope Francis has made a point of journeying to many lands marred by violent conflict: Israel and Palestine, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Central African Republic, Myanmar, and Colombia among them. He has demonstrated by example a commitment to the church’s mission to build peace in conflict-afflicted areas.

In various parts of the world, people have recently experienced or are now living in the aftermath of great violence. In these countries, and others where violence has diminished, there has been and is a need for rebuilding or forging relationships, repairing harm, revealing the truth about what occurred, establishing viable mechanisms of justice, and reconciling people often bitterly divided by conflict. In all such contexts that need **transitional justice and reconciliation**, despite the diversity of circumstances and challenges, the church has important roles to play. The task of fostering and enabling transitional justice and social reconciliation is very much connected to the church’s peacebuilding mission, and it is a task for which the church has a deep well of resources.

The rich biblical texts on reconciliation inspire the church’s work. There is the narrative of reconciliation between Jacob and Esau (Genesis 33:1-20), the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32), and the images of reconciliation between God and Israel throughout the Old Testament prophets. In his [*2017 World Day of Peace Message*](#), Pope Francis called the Sermon on the Mount a “manual” of sorts for peacebuilding (#6), and stated, “Whoever accepts the Good News of Jesus is able to acknowledge the violence within and be healed by God’s mercy, becoming in turn an instrument of reconciliation” (#3). Reconciliation also figures prominently in the writing of Paul (e.g., Romans 8:1-6; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21; Colossians 3:12-15).

Building on Scripture, reconciliation is grounded in the theological notion that God's gratuitous forgiveness precedes repentance and actually makes repentance on the part of the sinner a fruit of that forgiveness.¹ Reconciliation requires social and civic strategies in conjunction with personal spirituality and conversion. The church can contribute greatly to the former given its social positioning, while it can empower the latter with its narratives of sin, suffering, mercy, and forgiveness.² Christianity's understanding of reconciliation is richer than those promoted by secular NGOs because its spiritual rootedness can elicit real transformation and conversion in the ways that people see and engage the world.³

Of course, Scripture and theology are the basis for the approach to reconciliation found in official Catholic Social Teaching. Among its core principles are human dignity, a preferential option for the poor, global solidarity, the pursuit of human rights and the common good, and the significance of mercy. Especially since Pope St. John XXIII's *Pacem in Terris*, Catholic Social Teaching has included a strong focus on peace, with connections to reconciliation and justice following naturally. There is Pope St. John Paul II's *Dives in Misericordia*, in which he argues that, "True mercy is...the most profound source of justice," and states: "Thus the fundamental structure of justice always enters into the sphere of mercy. Mercy, however, has the power to confer on justice a new content, which is expressed most simply and fully in forgiveness" (#14). There is also Pope Benedict XVI making reconciliation a cornerstone theme in the 2011 Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the church in Africa, *Africae Munus*. And at the regional and national levels, bishops' conferences have localized teaching on reconciliation. For instance, in 1968 when the Episcopal Council of Latin America (CELAM) made reconciliation in Christ the center of their doctrinal

A common pastoral methodology, affirmed in Pope St. John XXIII's encyclical *Mater et Magistra*, is that of "See-Judge-Act," a reflective examination and response to social issues attributed to Belgian Cardinal Joseph Cardijn. It is a helpful way of putting Christian principles into practice. It has found a prominent place in liberation theology, social ethics, and peacebuilding work in the Catholic tradition. It involves: **1) Seeing** the lived reality of communities and persons in an effort to understand their concerns and identify and name their problems; **2) Judging** or evaluating the situation in light of Christian faith; and **3) Acting** in a way that aims to alleviate the structures, conflicts, and injustices that are causing people to suffer. A good example of this methodology in practice is the *Aparecida Document* that was produced by the Council of Latin American Bishops in 2007 following their 5th General Conference. The document outlines "new evangelization" for Latin America, and makes reconciliation a central tenet of the cultural conversion that it envisions. The document is divided into three parts, following the "See-Judge-Act" approach, beginning with "The Life of Our People Today," moving to "The Life of Jesus Christ in Missionary Disciples" to reflect on the people's situation, and ending with "The Life of Christ for Our Peoples," which provides recommendations and guidelines for action.

¹ Peter Phan, "Peacebuilding and Reconciliation: Interreligious Dialogue and Catholic Spirituality," in *Peacebuilding: Catholic Theology, Ethics, and Praxis*, eds. Robert J. Schreiter, R. Scott Appleby, and Gerard F. Powers (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), 357.

² Robert J. Schreiter, *The Ministry of Reconciliation: Spirituality and Strategies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998). Part I of the book focuses on developing "reconciliation as spirituality," while Part II addresses strategic approaches for reconciliation.

³ Emmanuel Katongole and Chris Rice, *Reconciling All Things* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2008).

reflections on peace,⁴ or in the way the Uganda Episcopal Conference has repeatedly called upon its nation's government and society to promote reconciliation for the good of the country.⁵

The Pursuit of Justice in Times of Transition

Promoting justice is seldom easy. While the “arc of the moral universe” may bend toward justice, as Martin Luther King Jr. famously affirmed, history tends to provide roller coasters more than rainbows. And there is nothing in such a positive notion that endorses Christian passivity in the face of social or legal injustices.

But if pursuing justice is difficult in ordinary times, it is doubly so in those liminal or exceptional moments of history in which a period of violence appears to be receding and initiatives are underway to promote more peaceful coexistence. These are times in which social and political actors, often supported by religious leaders, tend to craft an imperfect but transitional justice.

Periods of transitional justice have provided both great opportunities and grave challenges for church leaders. While there have been many experiences and myriad forms of engagement, they can be as different as Archbishop Desmond Tutu's renowned leadership of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and Bishop Juan José Gerardi Conedera's brutal murder following publication of the report of the church's Recovery of Historical Memory project in Guatemala. The focus in this document is on post-armed-conflict or post-civil-war situations, though transitional justice may also refer to post-dictatorial or post-authoritarian regime realities.

Transitional justice “refers to the ways countries emerging from periods of conflict and repression address large-scale or systematic human rights violations so numerous and so serious that the normal justice system will not be able to provide an adequate response” (ICTJ, “[What is Transitional Justice?](#)”). According to the United Nations, this includes “the full range of processes and mechanisms associated with a society's attempt to come to terms with a legacy of large-scale past abuses, in order to ensure accountability, serve justice and achieve reconciliation.” It consists of both judicial and non-judicial processes and mechanisms, including prosecutions, processes of truth-telling, reparations, institutional reform, and national consultations (“[Guidance Note of the Secretary General: United Nations Approach to Transitional Justice, March 2010](#)”).

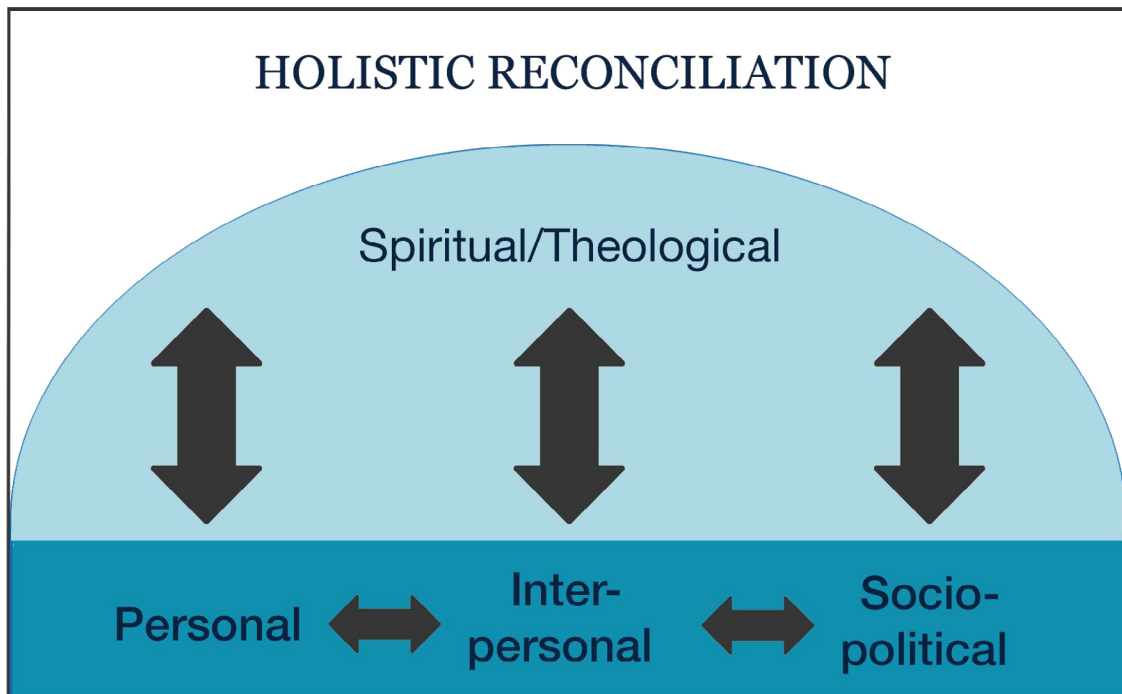
The Pursuit of Reconciliation

Reconciliation has many meanings and many dimensions, and is an important element of transitional justice. After situations of conflict, reconciliation needs to occur: for individual persons to find healing and cope with trauma within themselves; between individuals to restore

⁴ The Second General Conference of Latin American Bishops, *The Church in the Present-Day Transformation of Latin America in the Light of the Council*, ed. Louis Michael Colonnese (Washington, DC: Latin America Bureau of the United States Catholic Conference, 1968), #14-19.

⁵ See for example from the Uganda Episcopal Conference: *Towards a Democratic and Peaceful Uganda Based on the Common Good* (Kampala: Uganda Catholic Secretariat, 2005); *Building a Peaceful, United, and Prosperous Uganda Through Free and Fair Elections* (Kampala: Uganda Catholic Secretariat, 2010); *Fifty Years of Independence: Celebrating Our Heritage* (Kampala: Uganda Catholic Secretariat, 2012).

relationships and communities, especially between victims and perpetrators; and in the socio-political realm to restore relationships between social, political, ethnic, religious, or other groups. Political reconciliation can be particularly challenging. While it may be hasty and superficial at times, or even a code word for historical amnesias or blanket amnesties, when done properly it can be crucial to overcoming the effects of widespread violence and preventing its return.



But in a Catholic sense of reconciliation, it is important to understand these horizontal forms of reconciliation in light of vertical reconciliation with God. God’s saving initiative, through Jesus Christ, restores right relationship between human beings and their creator, and it is only through that initiative that human beings are capable of true reconciliation among themselves. By making the different facets of horizontal reconciliation connected to God’s vertical reconciliation with creation, this distinct Catholic perspective also makes each of those horizontal dimensions integrally interconnected. So in the Catholic tradition, reconciliation is holistic, multidimensional, and biblically rooted. Reconciliation is God’s work above all, with people participating in the reconciling work of God.

In keeping with this holistic understanding, the pursuit of reconciliation by church actors should be pastoral without ceasing to be practical, and its main focus should be on restoring or strengthening fractured relationships. Reconciliation after violence requires truth-telling and social transformation as well as mercy and forgiveness. It demands time and effort on the part of victims and perpetrators of violence alike. It demands safe spaces—physical, social, and personal—that can help facilitate healing, restored trust, and personal resilience. It demands cultural change, but also individual spiritual growth. In Colombia, following the 2016 peace agreement between the government and the country’s largest armed insurgency, church leaders have referred to two kinds of possible reconciliation: “thick” and “thin.” Their own goal is not achievement of the most superficial form of reconciliation, but one that is deep and robust and represents a genuine conversion to a culture of forgiveness and peace.



According to Daniel Philpott, reconciliation in the social or political realm involves six interrelated practices:

- 1. Building Socially Just Institutions:** Establishing laws and social institutions that can engender public trust and protect and promote human rights, democracy, and the rule of law.
- 2. Acknowledgment:** Truth-telling and naming violations to strip them of power and legitimacy, increase public awareness of what occurred, and establish the will to restore victims.
- 3. Reparations:** Providing public and formal recognition of suffering and duly repairing harm; also strengthening political commitment to human rights and justice.
- 4. Punishment:** Censuring perpetrators, removing the “victory” of injustices and violations, and recognizing the dignity, citizenship, and rights of victims.
- 5. Apology:** Helping convert culture away from the order of injustice and violence and initiating personal conversion for perpetrators; also contributing to the restoration of political community.
- 6. Forgiveness:** Committing to a future where injustices and violations no longer have power and expressing willingness to reconstruct community and mutual respect; also ratifying apologies and enabling restoration.⁶

IV. Reflections and Lessons from Global Church Engagements

This section collects information gleaned from global church actions for transitional justice and reconciliation. It begins with observations about the conditions that can allow for effective church action. It then offers reflections on the distinct strengths that the Catholic Church can bring to transitional justice and reconciliation, followed by examples of different kinds of initiatives that global Catholic actors have undertaken. Finally, it identifies common challenges and dilemmas faced by Catholic leaders and groups engaged in transitional justice and reconciliation.

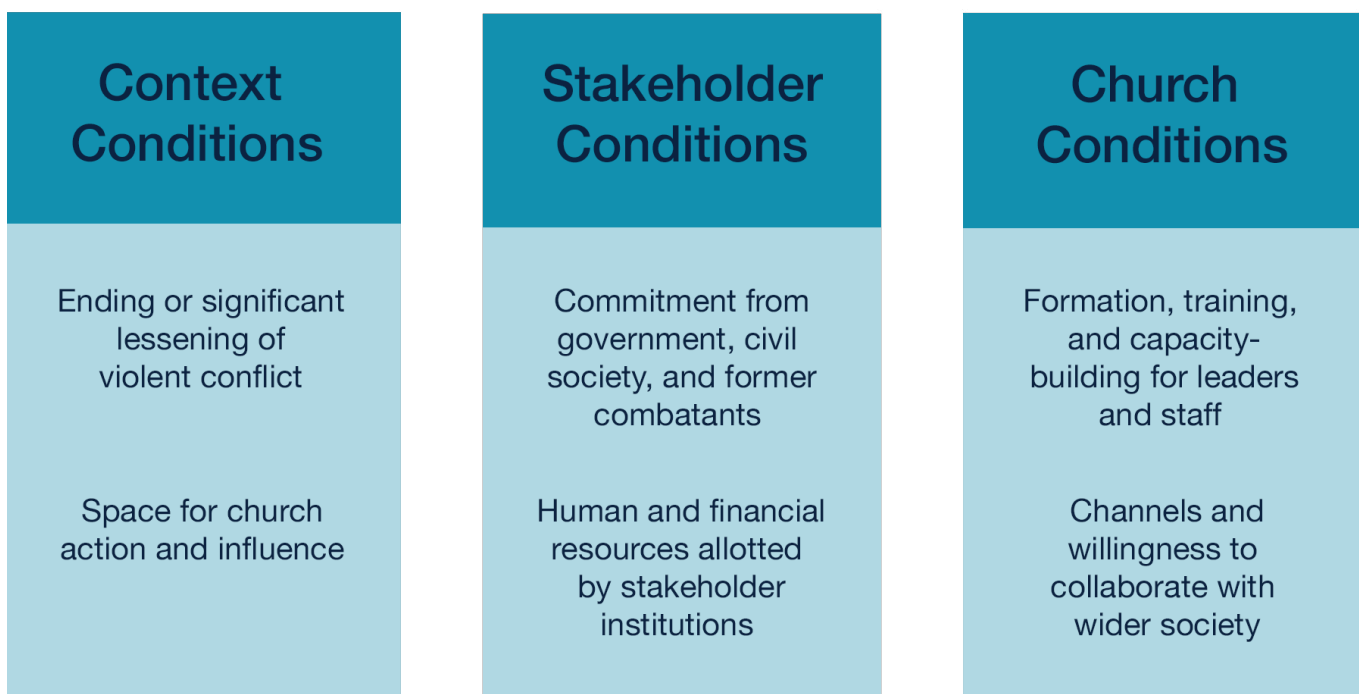
General Conditions for Effective Church Action

Many factors make for productive church action in post-conflict or post-violence environments. Some are contextual, some deal with stakeholders, and some deal with the church itself.

- 1. An end to, or a significant lessening of, armed violence:** By definition, systems of transitional justice are forged and exercised after the signing of a peace agreement between warring parties. Reconciliation on a broad regional or national scale, or even in a local community, is virtually inconceivable in the midst of ongoing hostilities. Nevertheless, even amidst violence, the church can plant the seeds of peace by offering a long-term vision of socio-political reconciliation while supporting near-term initiatives for individual, interpersonal, and cross-community reconciliation.
- 2. Sufficient space in which to act:** Religious leaders must have the freedom politically, culturally, and legally to take on peace initiatives. Likewise, there must be concrete channels through which they can be heard and can influence post-violence developments. Where spaces are restricted and channels for action are blocked or extremely narrow, the church may promote dialogue and reconciliation at small local levels or where occasional opportunities are present. It may also collaborate with others nationally and internationally to advocate privately or publicly for more open and inclusive implementation policies.
- 3. Commitment to peace and reconciliation on the part of key stakeholders:** Government officials and former insurgents must truly desire peace and effectively carry out the measures included in a signed agreement. There should also be significant support for peace within civil society. If there is effective resistance or organized opposition to a peace process, or a new government adamantly opposed to the process undertaken by its predecessor comes into power, effective church action for justice and reconciliation can be readily frustrated. In such circumstances, church leaders, alone or in alliance with others, may call on key stakeholders to honor commitments made or to more vigorously pursue a just peace.
- 4. Adequate human and financial resources for peace and reconciliation:** Actual amounts will depend on the context and circumstances, as well as established objectives, but transitional justice and reconciliation processes require dedicated resources appropriate to the scale and specific types of action undertaken.

5. **Relevant formation and capacity:** Goodwill is a necessary but insufficient condition. Experience among church leaders and staff, and professional training in the elements of transitional justice and reconciliation, are supremely important.
6. **Collaboration with other key actors:** Effective engagement requires the church to work with other religious leaders, non-governmental organizations, the media, and the private sector. Such collaboration helps ensure the broad range of experience, expertise, and relationships needed to address the complexities involved and to make an impact.

CONDITIONS FOR EFFECTIVE CHURCH ACTION FOR TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE AND RECONCILIATION



Church Roles for Church Actors

In peacebuilding work generally, including the periods in which large-scale violence has abated or ended, different entities and institutions play very different roles. It is the parties to a violent conflict who come to formal peace agreements. Only governments pass laws or constitutional reforms or enact new policies for peace. Only specialized international bodies such as the United Nations tend to provide services such as disarmament monitoring. Only specialized professional organizations lead efforts such as land mine clearance or the monitoring of peace accord implementation. In this regard, in post-violence contexts it is important that church actors—both individuals and church-affiliated organizations—take on church-specific roles and contribute from their strengths in ways consistent with their Christian mission.

Church actors have a faith-based mission rooted in Gospel values and social teachings on justice, peace, and reconciliation, and possess numerous assets that are particular to them.

Church leaders also enjoy considerable moral authority, and often are considered credible and even-handed advocates for the common good.

CATHOLIC ASSETS FOR PEACE, TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE, AND RECONCILIATION

Ritual and Spirituality

- Tying work to a sense of vocation that gives it greater depth and commitment
- Language, symbols, and practices that can activate the moral imagination and encourage and enable metanoia
- Sacraments that heal, reconcile, and unite

Theology and Ethics

- Human-centric as opposed to a state-centric ethic
- Built-in conception of positive peace and common good
- Focus on solidarity and cooperative approaches instead of zero-sum approaches

People Power

- Wide array of exemplars for peacebuilding, justice, and reconciliation that can be presented for people to model
- Ability to mobilize and motivate people by appealing to core values and spiritual identity
- Extensive network of people, from the grassroots to the international, to support initiatives and share wisdom

Institutional Presence

- Leaders at all levels with religious and moral credibility
- Rooted, indigenous presence that can yield trust and staying power exceeding international agencies or actors
- Capability to integrate initiatives both vertically and horizontally to maximize impact and improve strategic coordination

In addition to spiritual, theological, ethical, and pastoral principles, in some contexts the church has widespread geographical presence through a variety of institutions, as well as access to people across a broad range of social strata, structures, and circumstances. John Paul Lederach has described this as a “ubiquitous presence” with both horizontal (geographic) and vertical (structural) reach.⁷ For Lederach, this reach can present challenges in that the church may have links to all the constituents involved in conflict and will have to

⁷ John Paul Lederach, “The Long Journey Back to Humanity: Catholic Peacebuilding with Armed Actors,” in *Peacebuilding: Catholic Theology, Ethics, and Praxis*, 29-32.

find ways to balance these connections. However, it also gives the church a distinctive capacity for peacebuilding because few other institutions or groups have relationships that cut across so many social divisions and structures with built-in potential for integrating vertical and horizontal dimensions of reconciliation and peacebuilding.

Diverse Initiatives, Methods, and Rationales

There are a wide variety of church initiatives and actors that have functioned or will function in post-violence situations around the world. It is impossible to consider every kind of initiative here, but it is important to recognize the diversity. Ideally, each project or action should be undertaken consistent with the mission and capacities of the church actors in question, and should be carefully designed with regard to specific objectives, strategies, methods, resources, and rationales. Each initiative should also be evaluated, both in the course of implementation and, upon completion, in terms of processes, results, and learnings.

Church work in the fields of transitional justice and reconciliation can operate on different levels and with different goals. For example:

1. It can be part of or contribute to **political institutions and processes**, such as with the significant role played by Catholic leaders on the official Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Burundi.
2. Other efforts focus on **building the capacity of civil society**. The [Fortaleciendo](#) program of Cáritas Colombiana targets regions where armed conflict prevented functional structures of interaction between citizens and government. It strengthens the internal and external capacity of civil society organizations to contribute to good governance, reconciliation, and peace.
3. A crucial challenge in many situations is **strengthening ecumenical and interreligious dialogue and action**. While this is especially true in cases where religion is a dimension of the conflict, it can even be a factor where that is not the case. In Mindanao, in the southern Philippines, where long-standing divisions among Christians, Muslims, and indigenous peoples have contributed to violent conflict, the church's work for peace and reconciliation has centered on interreligious dialogue. The [Bishops-Ulama Conference](#), formed to support a peace accord in 1996 in collaboration with the government, has been an important mechanism of engagement for Christian, Muslim, and indigenous leaders. In northern Uganda, where religion was not central to conflict, very effective ecumenical and interreligious engagement has taken place. The ecumenical [Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative](#) (ARLPI) played an instrumental role in facilitating official peace talks between the Ugandan government and the Lord's Resistance Army in the mid-2000s. Since violence in the area has waned, the ARLPI has continued its work fostering conflict resolution, reconciliation, and social cohesion.
4. Many initiatives focus on **working with one sector of society such as women, youth, internally displaced persons, or refugees**. An example is Sr. Rosemary Nyirumbe's St. Monica's Girls Tailoring School in Northern Uganda, along with its [Sewing Hope initiative](#). The school offers psychosocial support, training, and employment for women who were abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army. These programs help them overcome trauma and stigmatization so they can integrate back into their communities and become agents of reconciliation and peace.

5. An important way to impact reconciliation can be through **schools, universities, and other educational institutions**. They can engage in social research, promote mutual understanding among youth, provide consultation to government and civil society organizations, and form new advocates for reconciliation. In 2010, leaders from eight national and regional bishops' conferences in the Great Lakes Region of Africa agreed upon [a common strategic plan for peacebuilding and reconciliation](#). It included a prominent university engagement component that led to the formation of a peace studies institute at the Catholic University of Bukavu in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The plan also received concrete follow up in 2014 when the Association of Catholic Universities and Higher Institutes of Africa and Madagascar approved a plan to institutionalize education, research, and training for peace studies. This plan led to [a convening in 2017 in Entebbe, Uganda](#), for peace studies program development that included representatives from 18 institutions in 12 different countries.
6. Other projects may involve **contributing to truth-telling, including by giving the victims of violence a voice**. Guatemala's [Recovery of Historical Memory \(REMHI\) project](#), an initiative of the Catholic Church begun in 1995, documented human rights violations during the country's 36-year-long civil war. Bishop Juan José Gerardi Conedera, who headed the effort, was assassinated just after the final report was issued in 1998.
7. The church's ordinary **sacramental ministry** can be valuable for justice and reconciliation. The sacraments, including penance and Eucharist, are instruments of forgiveness and healing.⁸ Colombian priest Fr. Dario Echeverri has relayed stories of the sacraments being powerful means through which armed combatants from opposite sides can be brought together to foster trust and dialogue as precursors to reconciliation.⁹

Those undertaking a church initiative or initiatives should be able to articulate their expected contribution to transitional justice and reconciliation. Explicit or implicit in each kind of church response—large or small, official or unofficial, multifaceted or highly focused—is a particular mission or charism and related organizational capacity, as well as a “theory of change.” The latter, a rational calculation of specific outcomes expected to follow the actions undertaken as a means to a proposed end, is further addressed in the section below on evaluations and accountability.

A major challenge for the church is to truly reflect the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12) in its reconciliation work. That entails overcoming competing visions, priorities, and bureaucratic silos to collaborate where necessary and to ensure that the many charisms and activities of reconciliation complement each other. No particular program or action is superior to any other. Each depends on the church actors in question, their vision, their social location, their resources, and the knowledge and abilities of members. In the best of worlds, such diverse church actions should be complementary. This is more likely to be the case if the local church has institutional mechanisms in place for good communication, planning, and coordination across initiatives.

⁸ See Robert J. Schreier, “The Catholic Social Imaginary and Peacebuilding: Ritual, Sacrament, and Spirituality,” in *Peacebuilding: Catholic Theology, Ethics, and Praxis*, 229-234.

⁹ John Paul Lederach, “The Long Journey Back to Humanity: Catholic Peacebuilding with Armed Actors,” 34-35.

Challenges and Dilemmas

Effective church action in transitional justice and reconciliation processes can be extremely challenging. This section addresses several challenges and practical dilemmas that often arise.

Promoting Peace While Ensuring Justice

How can church actors promote peace and unity on the one hand, and champion justice on the other? Pope St. Paul VI famously urged those who want peace to work for justice. But prophetic advocacy for holding perpetrators accountable for human rights violations and addressing the persistence of structural sin may collide with the important need to achieve a peace agreement or to forge social and political unity. The dilemma is that “naming and shaming” and holding human rights violators accountable is important, but can lead some to take hardened positions and resist efforts to end violence.

To achieve peace in periods following widespread violence, the parties to a conflict frequently make concessions that are reflected in peace agreements. The originating root causes of a particular armed conflict, such as ethnic discrimination or grave social inequalities, may be ignored or addressed only superficially in the interest of ending the fighting. Violent acts that in ordinary circumstances might lead to the imprisonment of their perpetrators may be treated more leniently in systems of transitional justice. In the well-known case of South Africa, for example, the emphasis was on truth-telling, with no punishment imposed on those who willingly revealed the truth about the atrocities committed. In other cases, such as Bosnia-Herzegovina and Sierra Leone, international or hybrid national-international tribunals have held some leaders accountable for their crimes.

Church actors in these contexts need wisdom as well as courage. They need to carefully take local cultures and values into account and consider traditional mechanisms of conflict resolution and accountability. In Uganda, the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative opposed the International Criminal Court’s indictments against the leaders of the Lord’s Resistance Army because they accurately predicted that it would impede prospects for a peace agreement. As an alternative, they proposed using traditional Acholi practices of accountability and reconciliation. In Rwanda, the government revived traditional community-based gacaca trials to complement the international tribunal’s trials of leaders, although the fairness and effectiveness of these trials is much disputed.

Whatever the mechanism, church actors must try to hold together the sometimes competing elements required for holistic reconciliation. An engaging exercise presented in [*Peacebuilding: A Caritas Training Manual*](#), based on Psalm 85 (Exercise 2.5 in Module 2), promotes deeper understanding of the very important but very different demands involved for achieving truth, mercy, justice, and peace. Truth and mercy may not automatically embrace, nor justice and peace readily kiss. Deliberate and culturally appropriate processes are often needed to help forge such interaction.

Standing With Victims While Standing for All

Closely related to the challenge of promoting peace without sacrificing justice is the **challenge of defending the dignity and rights of victims without neglecting perpetrators.**

Accompanying and working with victims is crucial. But as experience demonstrates, the defense of victims cannot entail ignoring perpetrators of violence or the reintegration of former combatants into communities. All are human beings. Nor should a focus on victims come without a recognition that perpetrators of violence may themselves have been victims at an earlier point in their lives. Consider for example a child kidnapped, isolated from family, and forced to kill by the Lord's Resistance Army in northern Uganda. Or situations with retaliatory attacks occurring back and forth between contending ethnic communities, as in South Sudan. The lines between victims and perpetrators are often blurred.

Furthermore, attention to victims should not promote the status of "victimhood," but rather personal and collective strength and the surmounting of trauma and loss. Narratives should focus on resilience and shared futures. Many victims of violence around the world, such as war survivors from Bosnia-Herzegovina's three main ethnic groups, have become champions of dialogue, peace, and reconciliation.¹⁰

Fostering Unity Within the Church While Respecting Legitimate Diversity

Before, during, and after violent conflict, the church is called to be a force for peace and reconciliation in the wider society. But in order to fulfill this mission, **the church itself must be a sign of peace and reconciliation, which means finding a way to forge and maintain unity.** Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, the Catholic community often suffers from the same racial, ethnic, tribal, class, and political divisions that fuel violent conflict and hinder genuine reconciliation once the violence ends. Moreover, Catholics, like others of goodwill, may differ over how best to pursue transitional justice and reconciliation in a particular context.

Consequently, major challenges for the church are to work to overcome the divisions over identity and class that should not be permitted to divide the Body of Christ while respecting the legitimate diversity of views on how to achieve transitional justice and political and social reconciliation.

These challenges can be met by focused efforts for evangelization and formation. Clergy and laity alike require formation in the church's rich social doctrine, including teachings on maintaining unity while respecting diversity. They also require a revival of the lay vocation. The laity have the principal responsibility for transforming the social order in light of the Gospel. Working for peace and reconciliation is not optional for Christians, and this sense of vocation gives faith-based reconciliation a depth and texture that is distinct from most secular approaches. It should also be able to keep Catholic leaders and lay people focused on a common mission.

Such common cause is facilitated by reflection and dialogue. Spaces must be provided for bishops, priests, and the laity to engage in sincere and honest dialogue about the religious and moral dimensions of transitional justice and reconciliation processes. Annual meetings and retreats of bishops and clergy can be devoted to serious reflection on the church's proper role in addressing these issues, and pastoral outreach to lay people must do the same. In both cases the effort should be founded on dialogue. The character and personal styles of church

¹⁰ Nell Bolton and Edita Ćolo Zahirović, "Bosnia-Herzegovina: Choosing Peace Together (CPT)," in *Interreligious Action for Peace: Studies in Muslim-Christian Cooperation*, eds. Tom Bamat, Nell Bolton, Myla Leguro, and Atalia Omer (Baltimore: Catholic Relief Services, 2017), 21-32.

leaders at all levels can be key. The promotion of active listening and facilitation of a basic consensus on fundamental principles are vital strategies for nourishing unity.

Maintaining unity amid diversity is also a key principle in the church's sacramental and liturgical life. Peace and reconciliation work should remain anchored in these practices to nourish the mystical bonds of union among the People of God, to reinforce the shared focus on Christ, and to open those engaging in transitional justice and reconciliation to God's grace and the ongoing call to conversion given to all Christians.

Building Coalitions Without Compromising Identity

An important dilemma is **how to engage the wider society through effective dialogue and collaborative networks without losing what is distinctive about Catholic approaches.**

Generally speaking, work for justice, peace, and reconciliation will be more effective if it is carried out with other faith-based and/or secular organizations, and not by churches acting entirely on their own. In contexts where Catholics are a tiny minority, networking and cooperation with others can greatly enhance impact. However, when Catholics are a large majority, there may be temptations to "go it alone." Going it alone makes it easier to speak and act in a distinctively Catholic way and avoids the time-consuming effort of forming alliances. It also prevents the least-common-denominator approach that can arise when acting in concert with others of different faiths or secular backgrounds. But many activities will be more effective if undertaken with those who share common goals with respect to a particular issue, even if they differ on other important issues.

A fear among church actors in some cases is that they will be manipulated or "used," or that they will be tainted by association with actors whose values or objectives may differ from theirs. Wisdom dictates careful discernment of the best ecumenical, inter-religious, or secular partners for specific initiatives. Church actors must be aware that there are risks in any association, but also aware that transitional justice and reconciliation are not possible without serious efforts to build unity across social, ethnic, racial, economic, and ideological divisions. [*Gaudium et Spes*](#) calls the church to cooperate broadly with other people in securing peace, while [*Nostra Aetate*](#) highlights the special importance of interreligious dialogue and engagement.

It is important to be clear about the purposes and expected change sought through engagement with broader society.

Reconciliation between religious groups in Mindanao is an ongoing need after decades of tensions and conflicts between Christians and Muslims. Fr. Sebastiano D'Ambra, a priest of the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions, began the Silsilah Dialogue Movement in 1984. Fr. D'Ambra partnered with leaders from the Muslim community and from other Christian churches and identified common ideals in their traditions that contribute to a "spirituality of life-in-dialogue," which celebrates plurality and fosters reconciliation and peace. The organization's advisory board is formed by representatives from the Episcopal Commission for Interreligious Dialogue of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines and the Bishops-Ulama Conference. The [Silsilah Dialogue Movement](#) is rooted in a theology that recognizes God's presence in dialogue with diverse cultures and religions, which leads to spiritual growth and conversion. The cooperative makeup of Silsilah and its ability to focus on common values and goals between its partners have been major keys to its success.

For example, interreligious reconciliation work typically involves one or more of the following purposes and theories of change:

1. **Deepening relationships (dialogue of life)** is tied to an affective theory of change that builds strong relationships as a way to overcome sectarian and ideological divisions.
2. **Improving understanding (dialogue of words)** relates to another affective theory that seeks peace by changing the hearts and minds of participants about the conflict and each other.
3. **Finding common ground on beliefs and issues (dialogue of spirituality/faith)** can be tied to affective theories of change, but is most often associated with promoting broader social and cultural change by overcoming sectarian stereotypes and building a culture of peace and reconciliation.
4. **Promoting common or complementary action (dialogue of action)**, too, can be part of affective theories of change through the relationship-building and improved understanding that come with working together to meet common needs. But dialogue of action is often about promoting structural or policy changes by, for example, advocating for structural reforms needed as a condition for reconciliation.¹¹

Pursuing ecumenical and interreligious initiatives and seeking ways to engage a wide variety of civil society actors is always a critically important dimension of effective reconciliation work, but it should not be at the expense of working within the Catholic community. Effective engagement with other faiths and the wider society depends on effective engagement of the Catholic community at large. In many cases, such engagement is important not because of the common action it produces, but because it contributes to the understanding and coordination needed for effective complementary action.

For example, in Northern Ireland, one purpose of interreligious dialogue was to strengthen relationships and improve understanding among Catholic and Protestant leaders, and also to address sectarianism more effectively by encouraging and empowering those leaders to work within their own ecclesial communities on acceptance and understanding of other groups.

Engaging Governments Without Being Politicized

Another dilemma has to do with the relationship between church and governments in these contexts. **Should the church align itself with governments and government initiatives for peace and reconciliation? Should it cooperate with governments, but only under conditions that avoid the likelihood of co-optation? Or should it opt to act independently?** At stake are matters of ecclesiology, church integrity, public perceptions of partisanship, and church influence and impact.

In the face of such questions, one response Pope Benedict XVI warned against in [*Africae munus*](#) is “the potential for withdrawal or evasion present in a theological and spiritual

¹¹ See Reina Neufeldt, "Interfaith Dialogue: Assessing Theories of Change," *Peace and Change* 36 (2011): 344-372.

speculation which could serve as an escape from concrete historical responsibility.” At the same time, except in exceptional circumstances, the clergy and institutional church should avoid “direct engagement in politics” in a way that could politicize religion or clericalize peacebuilding and reconciliation (#17). Daniel Philpott argues persuasively from a study of 15 national experiences of political transition out of dictatorship or widespread violence that religious actors who have been able to exercise a strong influence on their countries’ transitional justice approaches are precisely those who had independence from the state, or “institutional autonomy.”¹² This gave them moral authority and positioned them to most effectively exercise their distinct strengths.

In all cases, context and culture matter very much and faith-based discernment is sorely needed. In post-violence situations, it is common for the government in power to have been a major party to the armed conflict and to be a signatory of the peace accord. There may be deep divisions in society and the actions and interests of the government and its allies may be regarded as highly suspect by significant sectors of society. Government actors may not be perceived as promoting peace with justice or working for the common good. Church actors might therefore choose to pursue justice and reconciliation through advocacy for significant social change, and initiatives such as people-to-people peacemaking, under entirely church or non-governmental auspices. Government actors may in turn accuse the church of obstructing peace and stability, seek to intimidate it, or even engage in repression.

In other contexts, social divisions may be less pronounced and church cooperation with government-sponsored peace and reconciliation work is welcomed by most of the population, including former armed opposition groups. Goals in such cases tend to be broadly overlapping. Here, cooperation is less problematic, but it is wise for the church to retain some clear independence and the ability to critique policies and phenomena such as the lack of adequate implementation of a peace accord.

One particularly thorny issue in this area is appointments of church leaders to transitional justice mechanisms such as government truth and reconciliation commissions. In deciding whether a bishop or priest should assume this substitute political role, it is important to consider whether a qualified lay person might be more suitable; how the person would be appointed and by whom; the person’s ability to maintain his or her integrity and independence from the state, political parties, or sectarian politics; and the degree to which he or she enjoys broad church and public support for the exercise of such functions. In Rwanda, for example, after the 1994 genocide, there was much controversy about the role played by some Catholic leaders in assisting the violence. It was not appropriate, nor possible, in that context for bishops or priests to work on government commissions. However, the Rwandan Catholic Church has since engaged in several of its own ministries and initiatives to aid reconciliation in the country.¹³

Choosing the Right Words and Actions

Another important challenge has to do with **choosing the most effective language, images, and rituals for the promotion of justice and reconciliation.** A religious focus

¹² Daniel Philpott, “What Religion Brings to the Politics of Transitional Justice,” *Journal of International Affairs* 61 (2007): 100-106.

¹³ See J.J. Carney, “A Generation After Genocide: Catholic Reconciliation in Rwanda,” *Theological Studies* 76 (2015): 785-812.

including terms such as forgiveness, pardon, or conversion may resonate more with people—especially people of faith—than secular, bureaucratic, or ideological language. And a trauma-healing program in a country such as Rwanda or the Democratic Republic of the Congo with large Catholic populations ought to be firmly rooted in the church’s sacramental tradition, especially reconciliation and the Eucharist, and employ pastoral counseling and other pastoral resources. Catholic rituals, sacraments, and spiritualities can play key roles in reconciliation and peacebuilding. Prayers and religious practices and language can create a space of encounter and hope and serve as a bridge between antagonists who share the same faith, signifying and inviting the sort of deep conversion and thick reconciliation for which peacebuilders strive.¹⁴

On the other hand, religious language or language closely associated with only one religious tradition may alienate people in certain contexts and lead to pushback. The situation is similar with the use of public ritual and sacrament. It is important for church actors to take their own identities and roles into account, and to assess the cultural and religious environment in order to determine what language and public action may best foster social cohesion. Bishops and members of the clergy may legitimately make different choices than lay leaders. Church actors in largely Catholic countries may make different choices than those in countries where Christians are a small minority of the population. Again, culture and context matter.

Navigating Long and Winding Roads

A final challenge worth noting here is the dimension of time. **Church actors must be willing to accompany transitional justice and reconciliation processes for a very long time.** Violent conflicts often last many years, or even many decades. Peace and reconciliation do not emerge overnight. But churches have a staying power unlike that of many NGOs or international organizations such as the United Nations—and staying power is crucial. A commitment must be made for the long term. In Burundi, church programs have taken a gradual post-violence approach, beginning with restoring people’s sense of humanity, then addressing trauma, working on leadership, social networks, and income generation. Reconciliation is not even mentioned at first, because it is too distant a reality.

In Burundi, [Centre Ubuntu](#) is an excellent example of long-term, sustained, structured church commitment to reconciliation. Founded by Fr. Emmanuel Ntakarutimana, the center describes itself as a “laboratory of analysis and action focused on values.” Its work covers multiple areas in an attempt to establish social cohesion and sustainable reconciliation. Conflict resolution, trauma healing, values formation, leadership training, and economic development are all subjects of the center’s initiatives. It also produces a great deal of multimedia material to communicate and spread its message, and its website includes academic research and analysis.

The Southern African Catholic Bishops’ Conference disseminated the pastoral letter “[A Call to Overcome Racism](#)” in 2016. It recognized that 22 years into democracy, the longed-for miracle of

¹⁴ On the importance and value of Catholic ritual, spirituality, and language in transitional justice and reconciliation processes see: Robert J. Schreiter, *The Ministry of Reconciliation* and “The Catholic Social Imaginary”; Emmauel Katongole and Chris Rice, *Reconciling All Things*; and Daniel Philpott, “What Religion Brings to the Politics of Transitional Justice.”

a reconciled and healed nation remains elusive. The bishops pointed to an enduring need to address the social trauma produced by centuries of colonialism and decades of apartheid; a need to acknowledge the strong links between race, power, and privilege; and the need to urgently redress economic inequalities, allay unfounded fears, and promote social justice. Their pastoral letter concluded that reconciliation, despite the dedicated work and achievements of many, largely remains a work in progress.

CHALLENGES AND DILEMMAS FOR CATHOLIC ACTION FOR TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE AND RECONCILIATION

- 1 How do we balance the promotion of peace with the implementation of justice?
- 2 How do we support the dignity of victims without neglecting the dignity of perpetrators?
- 3 How do we maintain unity within the church while respecting diverse opinions and experiences?
- 4 How do we build coalitions of partners without compromising Catholic identity and uniqueness?
- 5 How do we engage with governments and maintain integrity and avoid politicization?
- 6 How do we choose the most effective and appropriate religious language, symbols, and actions?
- 7 How do we sustain long-term commitment and accompaniment?

V. Evaluation and Accountability

Church actors, like others pursuing justice and reconciliation, have a responsibility to examine the results of whatever initiatives they take. It is not enough to rely on a sense of divine calling or direction, or to trust in the worth of actions simply because they are or were undertaken in good faith. Accountability to themselves and others, and ultimately to God, demand that church actors take a careful look at what has been done, how it has been done, what the outcomes have been, and what can be learned to improve such efforts in the future. Such evaluation can also offer lessons for others in the Catholic world trying to develop their own initiatives for transitional justice and reconciliation.

There are many kinds of evaluations, including internal or self-evaluations, external evaluations by outside professionals, and hybrid forms that combine the two. There are **developmental evaluations** that follow initiatives from the start, especially in situations of great complexity and uncertain goals. There are **formative evaluations** in the midst of initiatives to gauge progress toward objectives and suggest adaptations or corrections. There are **summative evaluations** at a project's or program's end to measure outcomes, assess worth, and possibly make recommendations about similar kinds of initiatives in the future. All these kinds of evaluations, however, should have practical ends. They should provide useful learning, and their findings should be put into practice rather than filed away.

TYPES OF EVALUATIONS

DEVELOPMENTAL

An evaluation that follows an initiative from start to end. Appropriate in complex situations with uncertain goals.

FORMATIVE

An evaluation done in the midst of an initiative. Done to gauge progress and suggest adaptations or corrections.

SUMMATIVE

An evaluation after an initiative is completed. Measures outcomes, assesses the worth of the initiative, and yields future recommendations.

Submitting to the evaluation of projects and programs can be anxiety-producing, especially if the evaluations are carried out by outsiders. There can be fears that external evaluators do not understand the work of church actors or their own criteria for success. There can be attitudes attributing outcomes to God's will rather than the efficacy of any human intervention. There can also be fears that findings will reflect poorly on the action or on those who undertook it. Most faith-based actors, however, appreciate the importance of evaluation. They want to learn what is working and how they might improve their labors.¹⁵

Tracking Progress

Some church initiatives are funded projects with average lifespans of three years. Others are even shorter. But in many cases, church programs in post-violence contexts are multi-faceted and endure much longer, despite ups and downs in terms of available resources. This is extremely important because periods of transitional justice can last a decade or more, and thick reconciliation after armed conflict can take even longer. Churches can and should commit to the long haul, and part of that commitment is tracking the evolution and progress of work.

Tracking progress can take the form of mid-term evaluations. These can provide evidence of effectiveness or a lack thereof, as well as insights about how to design next steps. Tracking can and does also take the form of regular *monitoring* of actions and their effects, carried out by those who are actually managing the work. **Unlike evaluations, monitoring is a process of gathering and analyzing data in real time during the implementation of an initiative so that adaptations can be made as needed.**

A simple but significant example of the positive effects that project monitoring can have is adjustments that Guatemalan church actors made in the early stages of the Archdiocese of Guatemala Human Rights Office's Recovery of Historical Memory project in the 1990s. The principal aim was to learn the truth about largely hidden violence carried out by armed actors, including individuals within the Guatemalan army. As researchers went out into indigenous communities to collect people's stories, however, they encountered extreme emotional and psychological reactions—reactions for which the project should have been, but was not, adequately prepared. In response, key psychosocial support was added to support the many traumatized individuals and groups who came forward to explain the atrocities they had endured.

In addition to a focus on actions and their effects—both intended and unintended, positive and negative—monitoring needs to pay attention to context. Violence may be flaring up once again, ongoing discrimination being ignored, or social attitudes significantly changing. There may be new public policies. Governments and others may be making strides toward truth and reconciliation, or may be dragging their feet. What is happening in a country or regional context can have important implications for church actors and their work in these volatile situations. For example, in South Sudan, the ambitious bottom-up reconciliation project of the ecumenical South Sudan Council of Churches has suffered numerous setbacks and adjustments because intense fighting has continued in key regions destined for grassroots community dialogues.

¹⁵ See Peter Woodrow, Nick Oatley, and Michelle Garred, *Faith Matters: A Guide to the Design, Monitoring & Evaluation of Inter-Religious Action for Peacebuilding* (CDA Collaborative Learning Projects and the Alliance for Peacebuilding, September 2017).

In implementing initiatives and monitoring them, all actors in post-violence and reconciliation processes must be *conflict sensitive*. **This means the ability of an organization to (a) understand the context in which it is operating, (b) understand the interaction between a given intervention and that context, and (c) act upon the understanding of this interaction among the served population in order to avoid negative impacts and maximize the positive.** A lack of conflict sensitivity can lead to ineffective peace and reconciliation initiatives or, much worse, to renewed or increased levels of death and destruction.

Several different resources and tools are available to offer technical guidance in designing, tracking, monitoring, and evaluating various kinds of projects for transitional justice and reconciliation. The [bibliography](#) at the end of this document includes several such resources to guide this important aspect of transitional justice and reconciliation work, including resources specific to religious actors.

Reviewing Not Just Results, but Also Rationales

As noted above, there are various types of evaluations for initiatives and interventions. They focus on results and generally review issues such as relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability.

One practice evaluators are doing more frequently is assessing the validity of the *theories of change* behind initiatives. **These theories of change are the explicit or implicit major assumptions, or working hypotheses, guiding the logic behind an initiative and its proposed objectives.** They are arguably expressed most clearly in terms of means and ends in the form of IF...THEN... and BECAUSE statements. Large church organizations may be capable of multifaceted strategies with far more complex and varied chains of logic than those of smaller groups of actors.

“THEORIES OF CHANGE” EXAMPLES



It is inappropriate in this short document to elaborate further on evaluations, monitoring, and theories of change, much less the production of strong indicators, but it is important for church actors across the wide diversity of initiatives undertaken in transitional justice and reconciliation processes to carefully consider the implicit or explicit theories of change that are driving their work. Church actors themselves should reflect on the sense and validity of their theories of change and examine these “working hypotheses” when monitoring and evaluating their work.

Learning and Its Applications

As suggested above, monitoring and evaluating church initiatives serves little purpose if what is learned in both real time and *ex post facto* assessments is not subsequently put to practical use. Accountability to the people that church actors seek to serve requires committed efforts to make transitional justice and reconciliation initiatives increasingly relevant, effective, and sustainable.

Even very positive evaluations can provide incentives for improvement. A good example comes from the evaluation of a 2010-2014 Catholic Relief Services and Caritas-supported project called Choosing Peace Together, which addressed deep ethnic divisions and postwar trauma in Bosnia-Herzegovina. An external evaluation concluded that the project had included “very strong reconciliation effects,” and had “helped to transform some hardline nationalists into vocal, self-identified peacemakers, and...allowed them to publicly and jointly communicate their experiences in a format that amplified the reconciliation impact outwards on a much larger scale.” But evaluation also found shortcomings and produced recommendations. Based on these, a follow-on project called PRO-Future added more intentional and targeted media strategies to enhance national impact, strengthened outreach to small rural communities that had been marginal to Choosing Peace Together, and enlisted more women from the war victims’ groups to provide better gender balance among key speakers in public reconciliation forums.¹⁶

¹⁶ Nell Bolton and Edita Čolo Zahirović, “Bosnia-Herzegovina: Choosing Peace Together (CPT),” 25, 28-30.

VI. A Brief Summary

This document began by reviewing the church's peacebuilding vocation in transitional justice and reconciliation processes, a vocation rooted in Scripture and illuminated by Catholic Social Teaching. It emphasized that in addition to core Gospel values and fundamental principles, church actors can be aided by practical reflections and guidance grounded in the experiences of active fellow believers around the world.

It then noted the general conditions that tend to allow for church activities to be impactful, and described the importance of church actors assuming the kinds of specific roles in which they can be most effective. The document noted the immense diversity of initiatives taken by church actors based on context and charism, status and skills, invitation and organizational initiative.

Moving on to practical dilemmas and challenges, the document touched on the potential difficulties of balancing peace and justice; standing with victims while not neglecting perpetrators; promoting unity in the church while respecting diversity; building coalitions without compromising Catholic values and identity; engaging governments prudentially; choosing words and rituals wisely, carefully considering their potential impact; and committing to justice and reconciliation over the long haul.

A final section looked at assessing church initiatives and their rationales, tracking progress, evaluating results, learning lessons, and applying learnings to improve future peace and reconciliation work.

The section below lists resources used to inform this brief document, and additional resources that may be of interest to readers who wish to read more on church teaching on transitional justice and reconciliation; avail themselves of resources and tools; explore research on transitional justice and reconciliation, practical theology, or particular cases; or learn more about monitoring, evaluation, or project design.

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