

“Hospitality, Dialogue, Peacebuilding and Witness” – a framework for building mutual relationships

Over the last two months, fifteen participants from Mennonite church communities across Alberta met on Saturday mornings to explore the “Peacemakers Confessing Christ International” (<https://www.pcci.team/>), discussion series. This is an initiative rooted in the work of David Shenk, Jonathan Bornman, and Peter Sensenig.

Participants were invited to share the impact of this series on their understanding of the value and importance of dialogue, but more importantly, how dialogue ultimately enriches our own faith understanding, even as we learn about and celebrate the best of each others’ faith traditions.

Below are excerpts on the impact these discussions have had on them.

Karen Janz: For me, in my experience, Dialogue, Hospitality and Peacemaking have come naturally in my relationship with our Muslim refugee family but I need to work on being a better Witness. I've struggled with bearing Witness ... as I've been afraid as coming off as trying to push our religion on [our Muslim refugee families].

I have a different perspective on Witness now and with the learnings from this course and scripture like 1 Peter 3:15, I feel more confident in sharing more of my faith with them.

I'm excited to continue learning more using the resources that Donna provided. My next task is to read the book I just bought, "In The Footsteps Of The Prophet".

Jake Froese: I so appreciated the simple easy to follow stories as told by David and Grace Shenk, and very respectfully absorbed by members of the team. I have already taken a number of courses in “Learning to Understand Islam” and I have benefited immensely from some knowledge gained, but this latest course somehow touched a deeper essence, and that is to claim what is at the heart of my faith. In fact, I am assured that if I nurture my relationship with Jesus mindful of the four course themes: **dialogue, witness, peacemaking, and hospitality** it becomes a way of living that facilitates rich relationship - even friendship - with Muslims and possibly also with people of other faiths.

I appreciated the simple modeling [of respectful dialogue]; We pray, we sing, we read some scriptures, and answer a few questions, somehow gathering up in us participants the desire to hear and learn the very best of topic at hand.

Beth Moyer: liked the way the four interactions are interwoven, continuously circling to each other. It makes the idea of sharing my faith less daunting because it is not just about worrying "how to witness", per se; rather a collaboration of all four dynamic interactions.

And these dynamic interactions entwine with the Peter principles:

- *dialogue* is required to understand the faith of another
- and *witness* - by putting our own faith into words, it is vital that the other is able to understand the language one uses.

Elizabeth Wall: One thing I was surprised by was how negative and fearful Christians' perceptions of other faith groups are sometimes, and likewise others' perception of Christians, and also how many

misconceptions we can have about another faith or its adherents. So being a part of this series has helped me see the value in fostering intentional relationships with people of other faiths so that these misunderstandings and negative perceptions can be ameliorated. I appreciated the holistic approach of the four core values: dialogue, witness, peacemaking, and hospitality. I saw that fostering interfaith relationships was not only a form of dialogue or witness or hospitality, but also peacemaking, and that it can make a profound difference in people's lives.

Valerie Proudfoot: This concept of relationship building using these four areas of hospitality, dialogue, witness, and peacemaking, gives me tools that follow Jesus' way of hope and caring for a friend of a different faith. It was great to talk with Peter Sensenig and feel the joy of seeing this course come together. He liked the addition of songs, e.g. "Help us to Help Each Other" [VT #722]; "I will sing with you" [VT #389].

This course taught a gentle and respectful way of living! So refreshing!

The discussions were often profound and meaningful and fear is replaced with hope.

Robert Proudfoot: Peace Makers Confessing Christ International (PCCI) workshops made me feel positive about being a Christian and professing my faith to others, particularly to my Muslim brothers and sisters. ...We must learn about Islam in order to discuss our own faith with Muslims.

[Some of the videos showed us how] Christians living in Muslim-dominated countries (e.g. Indonesia) or in countries with comparable Muslim or Christian populations (Ethiopia), can teach us how to faithfully interact. In Indonesia, there are armed Muslim brigades who attack Christians. A Christian pastor persistently requested for opportunity to visit the commander of such an enemy brigade over tea, where they got to know one another as fellow human beings, and found common ground, that ended the violence.

We are encouraged to listen as well as speak, to give as well as to receive hospitality, and to be respectful of Islam and those who follow its Godly teachings. Muslims want to know why Christians believe as they do, but don't expect us to be apologists or avoiders.

Louisa Adria: For me, one of the biggest takeaways from PCCI was the way none of the four dynamics can stand without the others and that each of them served the other three and was served and supported by the other three. It does not feel like a transaction or a marketing scheme where the only reason I do hospitality, peacemaking and dialogue is so that I can eventually bear witness to Christ. In the wisdom of PCCI, I bear witness to Christ from the start and bearing witness actually allows me to be a better and more authentic peacemaker, host and conversation partner in dialogue. There is nothing sneaky or hidden about their four core dynamics and there is no hierarchy among the four dynamics. It is not as though everything we do leads to witness or to dialogue or to peacemaking or to hospitality; none of them is the highest achievement. Because there is no final endpoint ... This is more a way of being than a "Four Steps to a Healthy Faith Community". It is relational because we keep shifting our weight on the four core dynamics as we get to *know* people better rather than a progress-oriented program that leaves the people behind once the steps are completed. This is a Jesus-way of being rather than a good thing to do or to tell people to do. I am so grateful to have been a part of this study group.