



From the Director—Maartje Nolan

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"Peacemakers"

Our center has been very busy. As we enter the 4th Quarter, I am pleased to report that Northern Community Mediation leads the other centers across Michigan in the number of cases processed per 10,000 population. Our center has process 22 cases per 10, 000 population. The next closest center has processed 12 cases, and the remainder of the centers have processed ten cases or less per 10,000. I am also pleased to report that we continue to mediate or conciliate 80% of the cases we open, and 77% of the cases mediated or conciliated reached agreement. ***Kudos to the hard work of the intake staff and all of the mediators!***

In this issue we are pleased to share with you the thoughts of two of our board members, the Rev. Tom Rellinger, minister of the Church of Christ, and the Rev. Tom Cook, minister of the First Presbyterian Church of Harbor Springs. Both Reverands Cook and Rellinger have looked at peace making in the community. Their insight is welcome food for thought.

In keeping with our peace keeping theme, Northern Community Mediation has two outreach activities to share. First, our annual meeting dinner. On November 3rd we will be hosting Prof. Harry Mika of Central Michigan University as our guest speaker. Prof Mika has long been involved in alternative dispute resolution. (He was one of the founding architects of the Community Dispute Resolution Program). Prof. Mika has been applying alternative dispute resolution and restorative justice principles to Northern Ireland. In Prof. Mika's words; "Real social healing, percolates up from the bottom. It is a slow, long-term process that changes people's attitudes and actions, not just their government." Prof. Mika worked with many different parts of the system, including the courts, government and volunteer organizations. Prof. Mika will focus on two community based organizations with whom he

works, which use alternative dispute resolution.

In Northern Ireland community policing is done mainly by paramilitary organizations rather than the police. This has given rise to a parallel system of street justice. Paramilitary policing in Loyalist and Republican areas of Northern Ireland often includes use of punishment violence and threats in response to crime and delinquency. Alternative responses, largely prompted by ex-combatants, seek to reduce such violence through the use of community mediation that is based upon principles of restorative justice. Prof. Mika has been extensively involved in the implementation and evaluation of such initiatives. This presentation will review the origins of punishment violence, basic restorative justice values, and the contours and impact of new community-based responses. Anyone wishing to attend the dinner please contact Northern Community Mediation for ticket information at: 231-547-1771. As space is limited, seats will be available on a first come, first served basis.

Our second initiative is a Peace Banner. The focus of the banner is the simple tasks which children and adults can do to make their families, schools, and communities better places. At the North Central Michigan College picnic in September, children had the opportunity to write out their task on a strip of fabric which was attached to the banner. The strip represented their commitment to making a small change which would lead to larger changes. It is our goal to have the banner travel to area schools and have each school add their 'peace tasks'.

As our next issue will not come out until January 2001, I would like to take this opportunity to wish you and yours a peaceful and blessed New Year.

-Maartje Nolan

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2000 Annual Meeting and Dinner

Friday, November 3, 2000

6:00-9:00 p.m.

Guest Speaker: Professor Harry Mika, PhD

RSVP by October 25 to 547-1771

Peacemaking Needs In The Church

By Rev. Tom Cook

Among the most heartbreaking problems a clergy person must live with in any given congregation is unresolved conflict between parishioners. Let me paint a real life picture to help you understand. It is Sunday morning and communion is about to be served. I stand behind the communion table and as I preside over the holy elements of bread and wine I am reminded that the scripture advises us that before approaching this table we must be sure that we don't have a conflict with any of our brothers or sisters in the faith. If such a conflict exists we are instructed to do the best we can to make peace with our adversary before we partake of this holy food.

I look out over the congregation and prepare to serve the bread and wine, which are set apart from their common to a holy, significant use. I also look into the faces of conflicted people. I am disheartened to realize that among those I invited to share in this meal there are a number of folks who are living with conflict in their lives for whom the act of passing the peace is a sham.

Specifically there are two families sitting on opposite sides of the sanctuary who have long been locked in a feud over a failed business and haven't talked to each other in two years. The business went bankrupt and both families have been tangibly hurt and they are striking out at each other.

There in another pew is what's left of a family. Their son is gone. He'd made some bad decisions and showed immaturity in his actions and hurt his parents and sister badly. Evicted from his house, it is as though he were dead, disappeared, or never existed.

There is a husband and wife just reunited after he spent a year in prison for defrauding a business downstate. No one even knew that he was gone. His children thought he was working out of the country for the whole year. I know that they are a broken family that needs healing but the healing won't start until they deal with the past.

In the front pew is a divorced mother with her young children. The ex-husband and father is bitter, left the church, and has harassed the mother with lack of child support payments. The children's experience with a father figure is not positive. When they hear the word "father" they think of late night telephone calls that make their mother weep during bedtime prayers.

As I look around the rest of the sanctuary I see faces looking for meaning in what I am about to do with the bread and wine. As pastor of this church for thirteen years, I have been involved with the life stories of every member gathered there. Among those stories are tales of unresolved conflict and lives shattered by the unwillingness to let go of pride and take up the banner of peace. I am reminded of

Jesus on the lakeshore of Galilee and of the "Beatitudes" verse that says: "Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called sons of God."

In so many ways I feel ill equipped to intervene and help, but I do anyway. Being a peacemaker is a tough role to fill, requiring more energy than just about anything in the ministry. However, if I am to take grace seriously, then I must extend myself honestly and work earnestly toward peace. I am grateful that five members of my congregation have completed the excellent forty-hour training course offered through Northern Community Mediation. It does my heart good to know that there are people in the midst of my congregation who can reach out to those who are hurting and divided by conflict and who need reconciliation. This is what Northern Community Mediation can do. I am grateful for what they provide to our communities in northern Michigan. They are committed to serving all the people who find themselves locked in the impasse of conflict by helping them find some direction toward resolution and reconciliation. If you are not familiar with Northern Community Mediation, make an effort to learn about these partners in peacemaking.

Tom Cook has been the pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in Harbor Springs for thirteen years and has served on the board of Northern Community Mediation for four years. He is married and has a teenage son and daughter.

A Special "Thank You" to Our Peacemakers...

We would like to thank all of the volunteer mediators who donate their time and talent to help resolve conflicts in our communities. Their dedication and generosity is greatly appreciated.

<i>Nancy Carey</i>	<i>Leah Green</i>	<i>Kirsten Cochran</i>	<i>Fran Pletz</i>	<i>Kim Swidorski</i>
<i>Lou Fantini</i>	<i>Pam Hagel</i>	<i>Murray Kilgour</i>	<i>Maartje Nolan</i>	<i>Karen Tank</i>
<i>Ron Fornshell</i>	<i>Marihyn Hall</i>	<i>Kathy Lame</i>	<i>Ron Plocki</i>	<i>Gayle VanPatten</i>
<i>Larry Funk</i>	<i>Dick Hendrian</i>	<i>Keith Lamkin</i>	<i>Maureen Radke</i>	<i>Doug VanPatten</i>
<i>Holly Furgeson</i>	<i>Edward Johnson</i>	<i>John Laney</i>	<i>Ed Serwach</i>	<i>Diana Walls</i>

Lines in the Sand

By Rev. Tom Rellinger

Controversy! We seem to be a people that at times thrive on our perceived differences. One person says *white* the opposite response may be *black*. Someone says *Democrat* the next person says *Republican*. It's the *economy* that is most important; no it's the *environment!* There needs to be *more* accountability within education; the opposing argument may be *less* government intervention. One writer suggests that there should be *no limits* on Freedom of Speech; another advocates *limited censorship*. If there is a line that can be drawn in the sand we expect people to clearly stand on one side or the other. Our freedoms have allowed us to choose. What a great country to live in. I have the right to choose. I have the right to stand on one side of the line or the other. However, I also have the right to *stand on the line* and look towards both solutions to find the best alternative for both sides of an argument or discussion.

Freedom comes with responsibility. Freedom to choose can be one sided. The Lord knows that there have been times in my life that I have selfishly made decisions that were of benefit to very few people but myself. As I look back on these decisions I realize that the benefits were most often short-lived. It's time that we as a people learn to *stand on the line* with open hearts and minds and try to understand someone else's point of view or concerns. This doesn't mean that from time to time there won't be issues that you find yourself firm in your conviction. I do, however, question whether most of the problems today are these types of deep philosophical issues. I tend to think many of the problems that we see today are issues of pride, selfishness, and a reluctance to be genuinely concerned about someone else's welfare above our own.

Compromise is becoming a character trait of the past. Reconciliation can't find it's way through the scar tissue of our hearts. Proverbs 10:12 says "*Hatred (bitterness) stirs up*

strife, but love covers all transgressions." Love is a softness of the heart. An openness to hear another's point of view. A willingness to take someone else's input and give it substance within our own thought process. We must learn to be a people that can *mediate* our differences. Mediation builds an environment where two individuals or groups of people can stand on the line in a genuine effort to find a solution that is beneficial to both parties. Thus, each party is left with the absence of bitterness and a genuine concern (i.e. love) for each other prevails.

The words of Jesus ring all too true in Matthew 5:23-24: "*If therefore you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.*" Jesus is reminding us that reconciliation with God requires that we reconcile with those around us. We sometimes, because of the pride in our hearts, ask God to do for us what we won't even do towards others. It's interesting to me that the next words from the lips of Jesus are "*Make friends quickly with your opponent at law while you are with him on the way, in order that your opponent may not deliver you to the judge, and the judge to the officer and you be thrown into prison. Truly I say to you, you shall not come out of there, until you have paid up the last cent (Matthew 5:25-26).*"

Our society has become so quick to take things to the judge. Frankly, most situations that are decided in court don't end up in a win-win scenario. People draw lines, stand on one side or the other, and then ask the judge to make a decision based on the line *that they have drawn*. Once the courts make a decision the appeals process kicks into gear and another court or judge decides which side of the line to uphold. This is not a flaw within our judicial system. It's just how it works. One side wins and the other loses. One side leaves feeling good and the other bad. One side leaves with bit-

terness and the cycle continues. The scar tissue builds up thicker and thicker and people dig their heels in deeper and deeper. Each new problem creates a desire to define the line more clearly, thus giving the false impression that this will somehow help ensure victory the next time around.

The principle of mediation is biblical. It is also true that sometimes we're not able to mediate our differences by ourselves. There are times that we need the help of an unbiased third party to help us see and understand what the other side of line "really" looks like. We're fortunate in our community to have an organization that can help. Northern Community Mediation offers trained mediation specialists to assist us in those tough situations where we can't seem to find the win-win scenario. I learned long ago, prior to becoming a minister while working in the business world, the only deal worth signing was the one where both parties had a vested interest. A deal where both parties felt like they were gaining something from the relationship. It was these types of agreements that were long lasting. The concept works in the business world, in churches, in community relationships, and in marriages.

Find the line. Don't be afraid to look at the other side of the line. If you're struggling to see the other side from a positive point of view then this is probably a good hint that you may need some additional help. Don't be afraid to ask for help. Don't let pride get in the way of finding a solution. Remember, "*Pride falls before the man (Proverbs 16:18)*" and "*Pride only breeds quarrels, but wisdom is found in those who take advice (Proverbs 13:10).*" The bottom line is to do it God's way. Let's show some wisdom here and seek reconciliation.

Tom Rellinger has been the Minister of the Petoskey Church of Christ for four years and has served on the board of Northern Community Mediation for two years. He is married and has three children.

Northern Community Mediation
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“Where the solution is up to you.”

Calendar of Events

November 3
Northern Community Mediation
Annual Meeting and Dinner
Charlevoix

November 9-10
Michigan Mediation Conference
Ypsilanti, MI

November 16
Workplace Conflict Management
Training Program
Petoskey, MI

January 14-15
Adult Guardianship Mediation Training
Ann Arbor, MI

April 19, 20, 21, 26, 27, 28
40 hour Mediator Training
Petoskey, MI

For more information please call 547-1771

Workplace Conflict Management Training Program

November 16, 2000
8:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

Register by November 2, 2000
For more information see insert brochure
or call 547-1771

Interested in becoming a trained mediator?

Attend our upcoming

Forty-hour Mediator Training
April 19-21, 26-28

For more information call 547-1771