



SEEDS

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GOOD NEWS *Associates*

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QUAKER RECONCILIATION PROJECT

The middle aged Japanese scholar stood to speak in our college convocation. As we settled in for the usual attentiveness to his topic, he began asking our forgiveness. Not for being late or for less than perfect English. He began earnestly asking forgiveness for his people's aggression against us in World War II.

As he was naming the sins of the Japanese against the American people, my mind was racing. He was too young to have participated in the war. Almost all of us in the room were too young to have been direct victims of the horror. Here he was asking our forgiveness on behalf of his nation.

One man. One short act in a small Midwest college. My students had long since replaced fear of Japanese aggression with the desire to own a Japanese car. My head said that in this odd act nothing had happened. But my heart and spirit felt jolted and freed. *Something had happened.* Some sort of liberating power had been released in that room that day.

In the intervening years, I have discovered this gentleman had given me an amazing gift. Asking forgiveness ends the eternal ripples of strife of every brand and size. We do not have to be victims to the eternal "civil war reenactments" that we live out in our families, communities and churches. There *is* a STOP button. It is asking forgiveness on behalf of those who have gone before us. We *can* reset and start again.

This feels foreign to us. We are used to the power of forgiveness and reconciliation for our own wrong doing. But in the case of our histories, we have no culpability. Usually we didn't have anything to do with it. Yet, amazingly, we have the power to step into the breach caused by our "people" —be it national, theological, family—by asking forgiveness on behalf of the wrong that was done before.



Photo by Jan Wood

Reconciliation is a reordering of our heart and attitudes.

It is putting an end to our own Quaker-splits-reenactments to find how God is working among us now.

It is loving as Christ loves—friends, strangers and enemies.

Everyone deserves our open hearted respect and care because *everyone is someone God loves dearly.*

We can do this without disrespecting those who made the error or committed the sin. We do this as an act of love to mend that which has been painfully broken.

Last September Lon Fendall and Jan Wood carried a concern for reconciliation to the gathering of Friends superintendents and executive secretaries of the various Friends Yearly Meetings and Quaker organizations. They gather as they carry the burden of leadership and bear the wounds of strife within and among their organizations. As the conversation flowed, it was clear that many of the present difficulties rise from splits of years past. And so the group began to follow the lead of that Japanese speaker and began to ask forgiveness for the wounds their group had and has inflicted. Friends from Northwest Yearly Meeting asked forgiveness for the fear, mistrust and arrogance that were among the causes of the split from Five Years Meeting in 1926. They asked forgiveness for the pattern of splitting that has given permission for the separations around the world that cause so much pain and dysfunction. Bruce Birchard, General Secretary of Friends General Conference, melted the group's heart with his asking forgiveness on behalf of liberal Friends that have disrespected orthodox and evangelical Friends. Others also asked forgiveness for issues that rose for them in those tender moments.

From these few hours together, there are visible ripples of God's work among us. A tender account from Bruce Birchard, found in this link to the [Friends General Conference newsletter](#), has rippled around the world and found resonance with what God is calling us all to. Each of us has the blessed opportunity to stop the destruction of the disrespectful look, the raised eyebrow that demolishes a reputation, the generic mistrust of those who talk about their experiences of God differently. Each of us can say "I'm sorry" we wounded you and did not live out God's love for you. It is this care we show in the small print of our lives that reflects the glory of our holy and loving God.

May the ripples of reconciling goodness enlarge in all our lives this year.
May this be a world changing new year!



Jan Wood is the Executive Director of GOOD NEWS *Associates*. She is also an Associate with a ministry of speaking, writing, consulting and spiritual direction. She joins Lon Fendall and David Niyonzima in some of the Quaker Reconciliation Projects. She can be reached at janwood@goodnewsassoc.org.

Conflict is not bad; it is a normal part of life. But conflict becomes harmful when it undermines love and mutual caring. It becomes destructive when it is an occasion for divisiveness, broken relationships and trust, and ultimately a form of violence that motivates us to act harmfully toward another.

Quaker Reconciliation Project

Can I help?

*If you feel a tug to help underwrite the ministry of reconciliation,
you can donate by writing a check to
Good News Associates
with "Reconciliation Project" in the memo line.*

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