

August 30, 2015
Nutana Park Mennonite Church, Saskatoon

The opposite of war is.....

Four people are sitting in a living room asking ourselves, how can we promote peace in our Mennonite Church Saskatchewan churches? We sit in silence.
We've tried various things.

What runs through my head is how conversations begin.
Did you see that..? Did you know that..?
Look at that!!!
Is there something we could add to our churches that would begin a conversation. I look back at my year preparing for a calligraphy exhibition.
Maybe, its time to add ART!!

Here's the background....

In 2003 a professional calligrapher in the USA named Thomas Ingmire was upset about the escalation of violence between America and Iraq. As an artist and peacemaker he decided to bring

attention to this situation by inviting people from around the world to participate in a calligraphic art installation on the subjects of war, fear and peace. 750 people responded to his invitation and the installation was set up in the San Francisco Public Library. They called it "Words for Peace."¹

In 2009 the Genesee Valley Calligraphy Guild in New York took this idea and focussed it on the subject of peace.²

And in 2012 the Red Deer Lettering Arts Guild in Alberta invited calligraphers to submit designs for another "Words for Peace" exhibition. "The goal for this exhibit is to leave you feeling a renewed sense of hope, that indeed we as a human race have the capacity to create peace in our own hearts and in turn influence the hearts of others."³

As a member of the Bow Valley Calligraphy Guild in Calgary I was invited to submit designs.

Here were the rules:
It must be on paper.
It must be 5 inches by 20 inches
and it must be about peace.

¹ <http://www.thomasingmire.com/words-for-peace.html>

² <http://gvcalligraphy.org/uploads/Main/August09.pdf>

³ <https://reddeerartscouncil.wordpress.com/kiwanis-art-gallery/past-exhibits/>

(banners 1)

I began with one idea, and then two and then more ideas kept flowing. In the end I submitted six designs which were hung in the Red Deer Public Library in the month of November for Remembrance Day.

Now four people are sitting in the living room and we decide to take these words for peace and send them around MC Sask churches and call it, "Pass the Peace."

We weren't just passing around art, but passing ideas, hopes, connections, and maybe some inspiration to continue passing the peace.

(banners 2, 3)

So I had the originals copied and put them onto boards, decoupage them, put together a little package and the Peace has been passed to every Mennonite church around the province. Here they are, at the end of their journey.

That's the history. I'd like to tell you about a few of them:

(banners 4)

Love and peace are a constant daily choice. Gordon Allaby

Gord was a pastor here in Osler, Sask and the energy behind the peace committee. I took my

inspiration from Genesis 1..there was evening and there was morning the first day.

(banners 5)

Notice the seven days depicted here--moving from dark to light, night to day.

Here is a challenge... the banner is 20 inches long and there are seven days and six spaces for the words. It would have been much easier for me to just bend the rule to fit my design.

But that is not an option. I had to figure out how to work within the rules.

Many of you know about working within rules. Every discipline, every recipe, every sport has rules. Here's something amazing that I have discovered. Within the rules there are great many opportunities. Football for example. There are Offensive plays, Defensive plays, Running Plays, Passing plays. There is even a passing play called a "Hail Mary". Wikipedia says there are an *unlimited* number of possible formations.

Unlimited...and yet, *all within the rules*.

Each discipline has its own set of rules. We are in a day and age where we don't like rules.

There is a whole new set of books out there on Modern Calligraphy which throws out the rules. Thankfully, the books that I have read insist that one first needs to know the rules before you can break them.

In music, you need to know the rules before you can improvise successfully.

Working within the 5 inch by 20 inch rule taught me to think outside the box. I had more inspiration working within the rules than sitting in front of a blank piece of paper that said... "anything goes."

(banners 6)

"Instrument of your peace"

This one was a huge challenge: you know the song: "Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred let me sow love. Where there is injury pardon. Where there is doubt, faith, where there is despair hope, where there is darkness light, where there is sadness, joy. *(speak rather fast)* O Divine master grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, it is in dying that we are born to eternal life."

That's a lot of words! Of course I could have chosen something different, but this song sums up the theme of peace for me with such beauty and truth.

(banners 7)

Here is what I came up with after many tries: There are lots of doubles in this song: hatred-love, injury-pardon, doubt-faith.... so I set these beside

each other with the negative one in a simple monoline and the positive one, I gave more weight by making it more of a solid letter in order to set it apart.

I set the words around the edge and if I did it again I would set the words looking outward - to the world, as it were. Originally I was thinking about the reality that the whole of our lives are surrounded by these choices and we strive to choose the positives...love pardon faith light joy....

(banners 8)

Another one with a lot of words which took me a long time was "War is easy it is peace that is hard." Jack Suderman was in Sask quite a few years ago and told of the story of the Cuban General. Jack along with Janet Plenert and others were in a meeting with General Ferrar when he received a phone call. After the phone call the General remarked, "War is easy. It is peace that is hard." I found these words powerful.

I set these words alone but I felt they needed something else. What is it that makes peace hard? And what would make it accessible for someone like me.

Awhile later I was at the Summit meeting in Winnipeg when Tom Yoder Neufeld gave us his

translation of Romans 12. As he offered it to us I thought... this was a good match of these two texts.
(banners 9)

Tom's translation said the same old things in a new and surprising way. It made me think about new ways to do this hard work of peace... chase after strangers with love....surprise your tormentors with subversive kindness...exercise mercy with hilarity.

I used tape to section off where the words would be and created roads or paths through the colours. One path came out looking more like a cross than a path and I thought, yes.... it is only through the strength of Christ that I can truly make peace.

(banners 10)

The Generals' words are free and easy with lots of flourishes to reflect the flippancy of his remark. Just press a button... start a war.

I put the Roman's passage at the bottom as a way to say this is the foundation of peace.

I looked for quotes that made you think and ones that asked for a response.

(banners 11)

Problem: one cookie. two kids.

What is your solution?

I wanted to offer a wide variety of quotes:

theological ideas
songs
questions
and personal.

(banners 12)

This one: Warrior definition

is a quote I have had on my bulletin board for decades. I'm not sure what made me cut it out of the *Mennonite Reporter* - now the *Canadian Mennonite*. Behind the words written faintly is my story of how I have tried to carry peace into my most difficult situation - conflict with a brother.

(banners 13)

Behind every mad

Janet Boldt is a friend from Vancouver who teaches conflict resolution at Columbia Bible College.

This is something she said to me after a particularly difficult encounter with my brother. I used the traditional red for anger and blue for sadness. In the middle, when they meet, they are transformed into a new colour - purple.

This has been the most practical advice and I have used it in many situations with people who have displayed anger. I used to work in the Complaint Department at Federal Express - so I came across lots of angry people. If I could figure out and name the loss the anger usually dissipated.

Each banner is hung with a ribbon and a gold thread to say - the Spirit of the Lord is present.

Here are a couple things I learned:

1. I need rules and boundaries in order to be creative. I can't deal with anything goes. I need to know the parameters. Traditional calligraphy has rules and knowing them helps me find the unlimited potential.

2. War is destruction. I was in Warsaw, Poland this summer and saw photos of Warsaw just after the second world war with the stuffing bombed out of it. War is DEstruction.

Calligraphy is about CONstruction.

(Show how to construct a letter (flip chart))

Art takes different things and puts them together.

sugar, butter and eggs make anything yummy.

wood, nails, and drywall

notes, strings and voice

thread, fabric and conversation

When you put these things together you are

constructing something useful, or beautiful or

yummy or all three.

That's art. Art is construction. We are all artists.

So if war is DEstruction

maybe the opposite of War is art - CONstruction.

war....art

Imagine - If we were all busy constructing something useful or beautiful or yummy who would have time for war?

(banners 14)

But here's the thing.....

It doesn't matter how beautifully I write the word peace, or how many times I say it... this word requires something from us. It only comes to life when we act.

end with words that are a prayer from Ann Porter⁴

A short testament:

Whatever harm I may have done

In all my life in all your wide creation

If I cannot repair it

I beg you to repair it,

And then there are all the wounded

The poor the deaf the lonely and the old

Whom I have roughly dismissed

As if I were not one of them.

⁴ <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/anne-porter>

Where I have wronged them by it
And cannot make amends
I ask you
To comfort them to overflowing,

And where there are lives I may have withered
around me,
Or lives of strangers far or near
That I've destroyed in blind complicity,
And if I cannot find them
Or have no way to serve them,

Remember them.
I beg you to remember them

When winter is over
And all your unimaginable promises
Burst into song on death's bare branches.

*from " Living Things: Collected Poems. Zoland
Books, 2006. p 94*