



March 2016

Newsletter of Initiatives of Change

Issue No. 36

Greetings!

"If you want to be a bridge you have to be prepared to be walked on." This was a favorite adage of John Coleman, a great reconciler in Richmond, VA. As trustbuilders we are tasked with building bridges across the "us" and "them" divides and the ruptures that are appearing in our nation and the world. Cricket White writes about what it takes to heal the wounds of society.

Other articles in this issue of Trustbuilders describe efforts in Richmond, VA, and Troup County, GA, to address issues of racial division and social inequity. A group of women in the DC area spent a weekend considering the obstacles to peace and how to strengthen their inner peacebuilding qualities. And to give a global perspective we include articles from team members who have recently spent time in Nigeria and India.

This is the time to consider attending one of the Caux conferences in Switzerland this summer. The program is listed in this issue.

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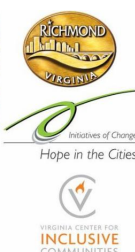
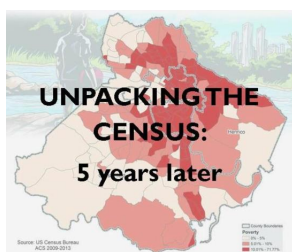
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## Unpacking the Census - 5 years later

### A call for regional action on poverty

By Rob Corcoran



"This is a testament to the difference that citizens working together with policy makers can make," said Richmond Mayor Dwight C. Jones addressing a March 22 forum attended by more than 150 area residents who had

come to assess the impact of five years of sustained efforts to reduce poverty and to discuss next steps. Jones was joined by Tyrone Nelson, chair of Henrico County Board of supervisors, and

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Carrie Conyer, vice chair of the of Chesterfield County School Board, underscoring the reality that poverty is now a regional challenge. The forum was organized by Hope in the Cities (HIC) and the Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities (VCIC) in partnership with the city's Office of Community Wealth Building. It was hosted by the Richmond Times-Dispatch. Tom Silvestri, the president and publisher, welcomed the participants.

Mayor Jones recalled that at a 2011 forum, organized by HIC and VCIC, he had announced the formation of the city's first Anti-Poverty Commission tasked with developing "realistic strategies for serious change." The movement to address poverty was given impetus by HIC and VCIC which used 2010 Census data compiled by Dr. John Moeser of the University of Richmond to create a video and then trained 40 facilitators to conduct community conversations across the region.

The mayor pointed to the creation of the Office of Community Wealth Building, "recognized nationally as a promising model for implementing a holistic approach to poverty reduction, working across all the key sectors - employment, transportation, housing and education." He said, "We need to understand that [systemic poverty] is no accident - it's the result of policy decisions made generations ago to cement in place the patterns of segregation that have defined our city for so long.... You can't undo 400 years of history overnight." The ambitious goal is to move 10,000 families out of poverty by 2030, 1000 a year, one family at a time. Jones invited his audience to "imagine what the Richmond of 2030 would be like if we achieved these goals....We can heal our city and bring real hope to all our citizens."

According to John Moeser, 54 percent of families in Richmond have incomes of less than \$45,000 which means their children are eligible for free or reduced price school lunch. But Moeser said that from 2000 to 2014 poverty grew 59 percent in Chesterfield County and 73 percent in Henrico County and there are now more people living in poverty in the suburban counties than in the city. "This is the reason we can't stop with an anti-poverty campaign within just the city. It won't work that way....The city has taken action. When will the counties join this effort to address poverty? When will the Office of Community Wealth Building become regional?"

Carrie Conyer, who represents the poorest area of Chesterfield County and has children in the local schools, said, "In Chesterfield we don't talk a lot about poverty, we've avoided the topic." She noted that the way neighborhoods are planned can hide the problem. "We've made it convenient. There is poverty but we don't see it." The right kind of development should not push people out, but should make sure there are jobs - not just minimum wage jobs - that enable people to move forward. "My goal is to have elementary schools zoned where people of all income levels can find housing they can afford." Tyrone Nelson emphasized the need to "combat poverty beginning with our school system" and he highlighted Henrico's increased budget for education. He also called for expanding bus lines beyond the county lines.

Dr. Thad Williamson, who directs the Office of Community Wealth

## New Executive Director



Jake Hershman

Chair of the Initiatives of Change (IofC) USA Board of Directors, H. Alexander Wise, Jr., today announced the hiring of Jacob J. Hershman as Executive Director of IofC USA, effective April 18, 2016. In making the announcement, Wise issued the following statement on behalf of the Board:

"Jake is a proven leader with sixteen years of management experience with Catholic Relief Services in the Balkans, Southeast Asia, the South Caucasus, the Middle East and the United States. He has led at both the senior level and the grassroots level in conflict and post-conflict environments.

He has experience in strategic planning and development work; program design, execution, and evaluation; and in leading teams, setting goals, and managing and reviewing performance.

We have been impressed with his servant leadership, authenticity, people skills, his ability to communicate and bridge cultures, his decision-making, and his record of raising funds and of developing partnerships with other organizations. We are confident of his ability to translate planning and strategy into effective programs, enduring impact, and sustainable growth.

We also believe Jake embraces IofC's spiritual foundation. He understands our mandate to nurture a new generation of leaders. He is well connected in both Richmond and Washington, DC.

Hershman has a bachelor's degree in

Building (OCWB), said, "Ultimately poverty is about money. So employment is at the center of our strategy. We are pursuing systemic change....What does it take to move a whole family out of poverty?" The OCWB relies on substantial partnerships among nonprofits, city agencies, the philanthropic community, universities, and businesses. Last year, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation made a grant toward early childhood development. "Citizenry has to be informed and take it seriously," said Williamson. "Politics of shame will not get it done. A goal of his office is to "create a culture of collaboration to achieve collective impact."

The participants broke into animated small group conversations and filled out index cards with ideas and commitments. In closing the session Qasarah Spenser, who runs the Micah Initiative that encourages mentoring, tutoring and volunteering involving 130 faith communities in 23 schools, said, "It is easy to forget that structures are created by people like you and me. So we are really talking about changing people, changing us. So if you are looking for a day when 'they' fix what is broken in our community, remember we are the 'they' and that day is always today."

History from Virginia Commonwealth University, in Richmond, VA, and a master's degree in International Affairs, from George Washington University, in Washington, DC.

Long-time IofC National Director Rob Corcoran is pleased to have Jake as the new Executive Director and looks forward to working with him."

Wise added, "Our nation and world are at a critical point in history when peacebuilding, conflict transformation, and building partnerships across the divides of race, class, religion, and politics are much needed. For the future, IofC USA must build on our historical successes and address emerging challenges. Having someone of Jake Hershman's caliber as the new Executive Director will ensure our ability to do both."

## Community Trustbuilding Fellowship

### We all swim in the same river

**Rob Corcoran** talks with two members of the Community Trustbuilding Fellowship class who have traveled from Georgia to participate in the program.



After 22 years as a Georgia state representative, Carl Epps was called to the ministry. For the past 10 years he has pastored a church in the West Georgia area. He resides in LaGrange, a city of 30,000 residents 67

miles southwest of Atlanta, which serves as the county seat of Troup County. Born and bred in LaGrange, Carl, who is African American, co-chairs a county-wide effort for honest conversation and trustbuilding.

Last year, Carl and his colleagues called on Hope in the Cities to lead a series of training sessions for a wide cross-section of Troup County community leaders. In the course of the training he met

Ben and his wife came to LaGrange in 2009 with Mission Year. He now works with DASH (Dependable Affordable Sustainable Housing), a nonprofit that was formed in 2002 to provide a holistic array of housing services ranging from home ownership opportunities to credit repair and community building programs. He also runs a farmers market.

## 2016 Caux Conferences



### Celebrating 70 years of Trustbuilding

**June 29-July 3**

Caux Dialogue on Land and Security

**July 5-10**

Trust and Integrity in the Global Economy

**July 12-17**

Just Governance for Human Security

**July 19-23**

Addressing Europe's Unfinished Business

**July 19-23**

International Peace-Builders' Forum

**July 26-August 1**

CATS - Children as Actors for Transforming Society



Carl says the Troup County initiative is important because "race always has a way of seeping into the conversation." He says, "Three mayors and other elected officials have sincerely taken on the dialogue. There is recognition that we are a diverse community." Troup County is 31.4% African American, 62.5% European American, 9.2% Hispanic and 3.7% Asian. (LaGrange itself is 48% black.) Carl's co-chair for the initiative is Ricky Wolfe, a former Troup County Commission chair, who is white. He founded DASH because of his concern at the lack of affordable housing in LaGrange. Carl says Wolfe's commitment to the interracial dialogue is significant. "Anything that Ricky puts his mind to, you give it validity. If it came from a different direction it might not have. Race is a touchy issue."

Ben agrees about the race factor. "We've worked on literacy, we've worked on many things, but we've not addressed the heart of what's going on because no-one wanted to address it." He says that he is looking forward to taking the next step in Troup County to facilitate discussion, "not just on the past but also on the vestiges of history that are still evident." He believes it is important for the whole community. "It's a quality of life issue. We all swim in the same river but we don't realize the river is polluted. We all need to take responsibility."

What is different about the process that Hope in the Cities is facilitating? Ben says, "The difference is the container, the space to encourage the conversation to take place. There needs to be a strong container because without it there would be no sustainability. It takes longevity."

Carl sums up his experience with the Hope in the Cities project: "The most valuable thing that I am learning and observing is the diversities of experiences and emotions that each of us has and brings to the table of discussion. I am saddened from our efforts in LaGrange by some who are in denial and some who are filled with disdain for their fellow man. But in these same efforts to build trust in LaGrange, I am very much encouraged by so many who are committed to making this community a better place to live."

## Capturing our thoughts in one word

**Jacqueline 'Jacquie' Johnson** is Manager of Programmatic Diversity at the National Trust for Historic Preservation in Washington, DC. She reflects on her experience as a Community Trustbuilding Fellow.

Purposeful. At the end of each weekend module during the Community Trustbuilding Fellowship (CTF), participants are asked to share a word or brief phrase that describes their feelings or key takeaways. Depending on the events and content discussed throughout the weekend, this exercise can be more or less challenging at certain times than others. Going into module 4, I think of purposeful as a combination of all the words and phrases I've shared throughout the course of the fellowship: silenced (module 1), flexible (module 2), valuing the question (module 3).

August 4-10

Creators of Peace

Living Peace: Celebrating 25 Years of Creators of Peace

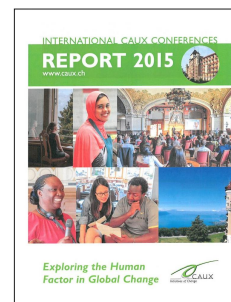
August 12-17

Seeds of Inspiration

[For more information](#)

## 2015 Caux Report

More than 1400 people from all continents attended the eight International Caux Conferences in 2015.



[Download the PDF version](#)

Plan on being there this year!

## Book review

**Beverly Almond - An Ageless Adventurer**



**Michael Henderson** reviews Anne Hamlin's book about her mother, Beverly Almond.



I didn't appreciate the value of the word (or phrase) exercise until module 3, the focus of which was on Dialogue Delivery. We take in a lot of content acting as participant and facilitator in the dialogues - the dual role I recognized only recently. I like to

think of the task of capturing our thoughts in one word as a way of mentally sorting through the many great lessons, from the basics to the deeply profound, in order to not lose sight of why we are taking part in the fellowship or any dialogue for that matter. Hugh O'Doherty, guest faculty for the module and one of the most brilliant minds in facilitation refers to the purpose "as the core of the trustbuilding dialogue." In other words, trustbuilding facilitation is about moving people and helping them to show up and to stay open to transformation.

This module particularly spoke to me because I saw the interconnectedness of all the different modules and exactly how the trustbuilding process might help strengthen my purpose - to advance diversity and inclusion efforts in the field of historic preservation (i.e., place saving) through authentic and honest dialogue. Hugh's tough questions, that dug for purpose and moved me to a space of deeper personal reflection after the module, helped me to see more clearly and better grasp the various CTF group dynamics and my internal struggles as a natural part of the trustbuilding process. Each experience served as way of getting me a step closer to my purpose, from module 1 where I believed that certain voices were valued more than others (silenced), to module 2 where I was somewhat judgmental of some of the different responses and reactions or lack thereof to painful histories (flexible) and module 3 where I more clearly defined my purpose as a result of thoughtful inquiry (valuing the question).

Lately, whether during one-on-ones, small or large groups, I have been more mindful of recognizing the meaning of the interaction. I listen differently in conversations and find they are more productive and there's a stronger sense of clarity and resolve. My intention going forward as I continue the lifelong journey of trustbuilding is to keep purpose at the fore of my dialogues - I can only grow and effectively transform communities from doing that.

As befits a long and bold life Beverly Almond - *An Ageless Adventurer* covers a wide canvas. Her memory is still prodigious and so her daughter, Anne Hamlin, has had a fascinating amount of detail to draw on in fashioning her biography. This includes her growing up and her secret service in World War II as well as her struggles with faith and her devotion to the countries of the Middle East. Sixty one of those tumultuous years she shared with her husband, Rev Harry Almond.

Bev comes from a background of privilege and deep roots in American history. Forbears on both sides of the family, Kitchens and Rodmans, were White Anglo-Saxon Protestants, true WASPS. Ancestors on the Rodman side were descended from two Mayflower pilgrims and several from both sides fought in the American Revolution so she qualifies as a DAR, Daughter of the American Revolution.

Her parents were early adherents of the Oxford Group, now Initiatives of Change. Her father, Vic Kitchen, wrote a popular book about its effect on his Life, *I was a Pagan*. He was an early pioneer of Alcoholics Anonymous. In 1934 her parents decided to work full time with the Oxford Group. Her father was in advertising and used to publish pithy sayings and good advice which he called "Time Bombs", one of which is reproduced in the book: "If your children turn out to be bad eggs, maybe it's because you sat on them too long."

In 1941, after the United States was attacked, Beverly sought adventure and went to Washington, DC, wanting to do something for the war effort. She tried the Red Cross but found it boring. Knowing this, an uncle in military intelligence asked if she would like to come and work at the Pentagon. He spoke to the colonel in charge of the special branch of Military Intelligence and vouched for her. Thus Beverly began a life which nobody knew about until long after the war was over.

Anne describes how her mother did not hesitate when she was invited in 1943 to go across the Atlantic at the time of the

## Creators of Peace Circle

### Restoring peace one relationship at time

**Anjum Ali** is a professor of Islamic Studies and has more than 10 years experience in cross-cultural training and speaking on Islam. Born in the US of Pakistani descent, she grew up in Saudi Arabia

and has traveled widely. She serves on the board of Initiatives of Change USA.



Who could have imagined that sixty-nine years after the partition of India, two women, whose parents were on opposite sides within the Punjab region, would come together in the United States to facilitate a Creators of Peace (CoP) Circle. My own mother was from the same city as Kavita Kapur's family, Lahore. But my father was from Jalandhar, India and became one of the millions of refugees having to migrate across the border. His family walked all the way from Jalandhar to Lahore to resettle in the new nation of Pakistan. However, Kavita's family was forced to migrate in the opposite direction, leaving their home in Lahore and moving to Amritsar, India. The tragedies, the massacres and the heartache are historical wounds still often found unhealed. But it was through a CoP Circle in 2015 that Kavita and I met. The significance of both a Hindu and Muslim woman coming together to explore peace and help themselves and others further peacebuilding in their own communities should not be lost upon our readers.

With her determination and assistance, we were brought together in Kathy Aquilina's home in northern Virginia to help facilitate a weekend with a new circle of women. The group was very diverse with women of various faiths and some who had barely or rarely interacted with those of other faiths. Our group had women of all ages and a variety of ethnic and racial backgrounds. Indeed, some had been living in conflict zones for most of their lives while others had much less personal experience of community conflict.

As a facilitator, I was fascinated to note the eagerness to listen to others and their stories, yet also to see a certain amount of caution and care in voicing strong differences of opinion. For those coming from conflict zones, it is hard to grasp a notion of peace, in one's community or even in oneself, without first restoring justice. Yet for many of those who have had less turbulent lives or serious national and societal conflict, there is a sincere belief that peace within must be attained to a certain degree before it can be expanded into one's community. This tension of which must come first is an ongoing debate for humankind. However, by the end of our very short two days together, each of us had at least discovered in the bonds of friendship, new and old, that powerful seeds of peace can be planted that will always be there as we continue our journey into life's difficult terrain.

worst Allied maritime losses and the bombing blitz on Britain. She was to become secretary to a senior officer at a place we have learned about through films and many books - Bletchley Park - but can even now get a different perspective through this new one. The truth came out only when son-in-law Bryan was reading a book about it. On a visit to her home I could see the proof of her achievement in the testimonial which she received from the British government. Her name is also on the role of honor at Bletchley Park.

It was on that journey to England that another unusual strand of her life began. On the neutral ship was a young Harry Almond, going out as a missionary to the Middle East. As she was playing ping pong this stranger asked if he could join a doubles game. Before they reached Europe the two were engaged. Separating in Portugal, she continued to England and he went round the Horn and up to Basra. They didn't meet again for three years. That was wartime, after all, but then they were married for 61 years. They celebrated their golden wedding by staging a ping pong match.

I won't take more of your time describing the family's adventures in the Middle East where their children grew up, their work at and through the conference centre in Caux (the Initiatives of Change conference centre in Switzerland), the pride she has in her children, grandchildren and great grandchild and the pace she sets in the high nineties and her involvement in her rural Massachusetts village. She is often teased about her correspondence around the world, that she singlehandedly keeps the US Postal Service in operation due to the volume of her writing.

She is still bold. She phoned up her family to say, "I have just had one of the most wonderful experiences of my life." She told son-in-law Bryan that she had just been having tea outside when a black bear walked onto the patio right by her and walked round her chair and to her annoyance attacked the humming bird feeder. As they talked, Bev exclaimed, "Oh, he's coming back!" Bryan quickly made sure she was safely inside. But what struck him most about the conversation



## The truth of any place is in the people

**Cricket White**, a member of the International Council of Initiatives of Change, recently returned from their annual face-to-face meeting held in Lagos, Nigeria. She writes about what she discovered on her journey and from the people she met.

As I left the United States and headed to Nigeria, my thoughts bounced from images that our media has hyped of burned out villages and crying children, to the picture of enormous ships carrying millions of gallons of oil, to the faces of my Nigerian friends, individuals committed to values in their personal and corporate lives. What would prove to be the "true" story?

I am a member of the International Council of Initiatives of Change (IofC) and our one annual meeting was held in Lagos, Nigeria, January 9 - February 10, 2016. The local Initiatives of Change team invited us to meet there to help us know more about their work and to view the world from their perspective.



Lagos is the most populous city on the continent of Africa, at 21 million people. With no governmental social services provided, and the poverty and pollution that is a natural byproduct of such density and neglect, it is a place of extreme polarization. The oil industry makes a few people extraordinarily rich and the rest live in modest means or in relative or extreme poverty.

What has emerged is an entrepreneurial spirit that permeates the atmosphere; small retail stalls and stands proliferate across the city, selling everything from fruit to funeral services to fried meats. It is a vibrant, energetic city, with comfort and abject poverty absolutely cheek-to-jowl.

But the truth of any place is in the people, not the cars or the markets. Nigerians that I met and talked to were genuinely, ubiquitously warm, gracious and extraordinarily generous.

The Nigerian IofC team exemplifies these values. It is led by a president and 7 board members. They count about 250 people as "members". Their success in engaging elders and young adults alike is built on acceptance and accompaniment. The guiding principle of the Nigerian programs is that anyone with an idea of how to impact an area in a positive way can propose it to the Nigerian team and they will assist in any way that is possible. Thus the programs are varied and reach out and touch many different people. They range from teen and parent retreats to mentoring volunteers, they offer a program focused on "Living differently" and Creators of Peace Circles, and in the future they hope to develop a drama program to share IofC values.

was that "her reaction to this event was pure delight and wonder, and no fear at all."

This story is an enjoyable read that also gives some of the history and scope of Initiatives of Change with personal stories and humor.

Beverly Almond - an Ageless Adventurer is published through Create Space and can be ordered directly from their website.

The book is also available via Amazon.com or can be ordered from our office.

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### IofC Film Archive

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Remember to check out some of the outstanding films of IofC, and before that MRA, in the film archives on [Vimeo](https://www.vimeo.com/iocf). These films are available for free personal viewing. Licenses are required for non-profit, educational, government or commercial use. Please contact [film.archives@us.iofc.org](mailto:film.archives@us.iofc.org)

Most recently uploaded is:



Walking Buffalo - 1960 World Journey

This color film depicts the 1960 world journey undertaken by 88-year-old Chief Walking Buffalo of the Stoney Nakoda Nation, of Alberta, Canada and Chief David Crowchild of the Tsuut'ina Nation. They traveled, together with their families, to meet the indigenous peoples of Hawaii, New Zealand, Australia, South Africa and Uganda where they were welcomed at the highest level by the leaders of those countries.

The film was photographed by Canadian Robert Fleming of Kingston, Ontario, and narrated by Edward Devlin of Ottawa, Ontario, formerly a producer with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

We had the pleasure and honor of spending several hours with Imam Ashafa and Pastor James Wuye as they shared their work today and the direction they are moving. While a small "organization" has evolved around them, their methodology of building trust is still anchored in their own narrative of how they met, how they fought against each other and the story of their reconciliation and personal relationship. They pair their narrative with a carefully crafted dialogue process which is then provided to and used in polarized villages and towns to begin the process of healing and trust building.

My leaving thoughts were about the extreme polarization of this nation, and Lagos, but the enormous potential that exists in its people.

## Connecting just governance with inner governance

**Charles Aquilina** attended the Dialogue on Just Governance in India. Here he captures some of the conference highlights.



Seven Americans joined others from twenty-five countries at a [Dialogue on Just Governance](#) in the breathtakingly beautiful Initiatives of Change Center at Panchgani, India. This diverse group included a Cabinet Secretary to the Government of South

Sudan, twenty-two from Sri Lanka, a Dean from Michigan State University, a British journalist writing on the Kurdish question, as well as environmental activists and senior civil servants. Together they grappled with some of the major global issues. They also quickly became one community - through sharing practical tasks and by spending times of quiet reflection in the exquisite outdoor surroundings.

Highlights of the conference include:

The President of Sri Lanka sent a message through the Venerable Banagala Upatissa Thero, President of Mahabodhi Society. Several Sri Lankans shared painful stories, giving hope that a country with a history of war and violence is moving towards reconciliation.

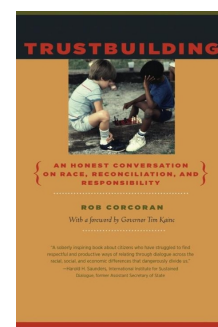
Sharada Pawar, the first woman to be elected as the headperson in her village, spoke of the acute and decades-long water shortage. She managed to get governmental funding to bring in piped water from the mountains. She overcame a lot of opposition from men who did not want a woman to succeed. After her term ended she started training future village leaders in the IofC Grampari Rural Ecological Centre.

His Excellency Yeah Samake, Mali Ambassador to India, explained

Check out other titles at:

<https://vimeo.com/initiativesofchange>

## Trustbuilding



**Trustbuilding**  
by Rob Corcoran

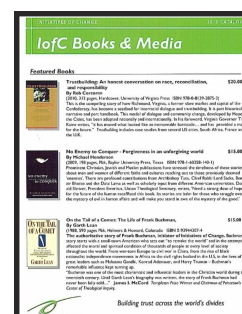


Read Rob Corcoran's latest blog  
[Building a container](#)



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how as mayor he had brought about effective change with transparency and accountability. "To serve is to lead. Change starts at the community level and with self. Your worth is not in money but in how many people you impact. The community knows better what is needed, and then you can even get people to pay taxes without coercion!"

A senior Indian civil servant described how his biases about Islam were removed by the way Prof. Mohammad Khalil from the USA spoke of helping his students, Muslims and non-Muslims, to engage with the religion and challenge media stereotypes. The Professor said, "There will be no peace and harmony if one does not recognize the humanity in the other."

The entrepreneurs Suresh and Mala Vazirani shared their experience of India-Pakistan reconciliation initiatives, remarking "we are the same people." Having experienced displacement himself as a child during partition, Suresh encouraged the participants to help empower others through implementing positive initiatives.

Despite India's economic growth, the disparities between wealth and poverty are enormous. Many villagers migrate to the cities in search of work and end up begging on the streets. South Indian bank manager J S Parthiban set out to do something to help their economic circumstances. He encouraged beggars to open bank accounts in New Delhi, and pioneered micro-loans to villagers in his home state of Tamil Nadu.

Dean Sherman W. Garnett of Michigan State University commented, "I was impressed by the beauty of Asia Plateau Center, by the great diversity of serious and committed people from so many countries - and each one was eager both to learn about others and share their own perspectives. There was a feeling of fellowship that united participants, whether in formal sessions, informal conversations, meals, or other activities. I was so glad to find a group of people dedicated to new ideas and betterment, yet also never forgetting that such large steps may in fact have their origin in the way individuals treat one another. It was a chance to be inspired about what is still possible in life."



### Initiatives of Change, USA

is part of a diverse global network with an 80-year track record of peacebuilding, conflict transformation and forging partnerships across divides of race, class, religion and politics.

#### Our vision

We inspire a vision of community where a commitment to reconciliation and justice transcends competing identities and interests.

#### Our mission

We equip leaders to build trust in diverse communities through a process of personal change, inclusive dialogue, healing historical conflict and teambuilding

#### Our focus

We connect core values with personal and public action with a focus on racial reconciliation, economic inclusion and interfaith understanding.

For more information  
<http://us.iofc.org>

### Follow-up Links

[Initiatives of Change](#)

[Hope in the Cities \(HIC\)](#)

[Caux Scholars Program](#)

[IofC on Facebook](#)

[Trustbuilding on Facebook](#)

[HIC on Facebook](#)

## Healing the wounds of history

### The power of sacred stories

**Cricket White**, Director of Education & Training for Hope in the Cities/Initiatives of Change, reflects on the power of sacred stories in the process of healing history.

We all have history. Some of it inspires us, and some of it



causes wounds. The wounds of history are embedded in memory. And memory frames our understanding of the world, of relationships, of experiences.

Memory is the blackboard of our lives where "don't touch the wood stove" and "I love you" are both written in indelible ink.

Unacknowledged historical wounds remain within the individual and within the community. The wound still exists and can infect. The incidents in our memories are repeated for the benefit of the next generation, for their safety, for their identity. If your people hurt or harmed or humiliated my people, that shame/anger/confusion remains buried deep inside.

Some say, "Why go back? It's over, it's done and WE didn't do it!" Others say, "I am waiting for an apology to heal - I want you to grovel, to cringe when you apologize. I need to know you MEAN it!"

Hope in the Cities' take on history and memory is founded on our belief in and commitment to reconciliation. We cannot move to a new level of understanding if we haven't acknowledged the wounds that were perpetrated on some by others. It doesn't mean that we are responsible for what others did years, or centuries ago. But it means we have to be honest enough and humble enough to acknowledge that these things did indeed happen. And that there may be legacies emanating from such events that we all suffer from today.

We are all the recipients of history, of stories, the stories that give us identity and values. These memories passed on to us become what we in Hope in the Cities call our sacred stories.

Communities are the same: they have stories of survival and oppression, undeserved pain and transcendent triumph. If we are to build new communities where every individual is respected for who he or she is, then who we are and how we respect the sacred stories of others will be foundational in creating that environment.

We examine history as a tool for building, not battering, a way to connect not condemn. We all commit to a different future for each of us and our responsibility to making it happen.

It isn't the "easy" way. But we believe it is the way to authentic relationship building which ultimately leads to healing.

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