

Communicating for Peace Day Every Day



This year's celebration of International Peace Day on September 21st finds me focusing on communications between real or potential

enemies in ways that foster amity, not enmity. From global to local, structuring relationships to enhance understanding makes it harder to hate and hurt the "thems" in our lives and more likely

for peaceful interactions to prevail, especially for young people.

Recently, I was introduced to a peace-promoting project involving communications in the form of language training. *Oasis for Peace* is a five minute documentary about a school in Israel that teaches Hebrew and Arabic to small children in hopes of promoting understanding and peace between the divided groups in the area.

As the film's introduction states, "Problems arise when people simply do not understand one another. At the community school in Neve Shalom-Wahat al-Salam -- named in both Hebrew and Arabic -- children learn both languages at a very young age, thus cultivating a spirit of communication and mutual understanding. The village is a true rarity, as Jews and Palestinian Arabs live together in cooperation and respect."

Oasis for Peace was sponsored by the Annenberg Foundation's explore.org, "a philanthropic multimedia organization that makes documentary films and photographs to showcase extraordinary nonprofit efforts and leaders around the world." Their stated mission is, "To champion the selfless acts of others." Not surprisingly, amongst a number of fascinating films about various good works around the globe, I discovered one that featured Father Greg Boyle's Homeboy Industries.

In 2004, as a part of my Pentagon-sponsored research project called "[Best Practices for Inspiring Pro-American Sentiment](#)," I interviewed Father Boyle and a number of participants in his Los Angeles gang redirection program. Father Boyle is a Jesuit priest credited with facilitating the longest held ceasefire of gangs in Los Angeles. He is the founder and director of Homeboy Industries, a program that every month enables 1000 at-risk youth and former gang members to walk away from gang life and meaningfully contribute to their communities.

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Whether the focus is upon rival street gangs in the U.S. or conflicting religious groups in the Middle East, Father Boyle's methods represent a form of best practices for dealing with hostile groups. The motto of Homeboy Industries is "Nothing stops a bullet like a job" and the idea is to help these former gang members to plan for their futures instead of their all too common funerals. While participating on the various work teams sponsored by the program, the young men are not required to talk to one another, but they must work together. In the process, they discover that they cannot so easily demonize an enemy in the community who has become a teammate at work.

While not so dramatic, I had a personal experience in 1968 that paralleled this concept of structuring activities to enhance communication and understanding. I was chosen as one of two students to represent my high school at a Los Angeles Unified School District weekend leadership forum. The district's schools were highly segregated, as bussing had not yet been instituted, and I grew up and went to school in the predominately white neighborhood of Pacific Palisades on the Westside.

The experience of meeting so many accomplished student leaders from different racial and ethnic groups was an eye-opener for me. Our candid discussions of prejudice changed my life forever, and it dispelled many of the stereotypic beliefs my family had attempted to instill within me. I became inspired to find ways to honor my new found awareness and friends, and when I finished college, I volunteered to serve as a race relations officer in the U.S Air Force.

Whether the message is delivered through the study of language, non-verbally while involved in teamwork, or with dialogue and amplified by media, these communications for peace efforts contribute towards expanding International Peace Day into an everyday way of life for many. To all of those who have been willing to sponsor and support projects like *Oasis for Peace*, Homeboy Industries, or my high school leadership forum, you are making an important difference towards developing future peacemakers. Thank you for your service!