

Newsletter article on Nonviolent Communication
Diamond Bar United Church of Christ, February 2007
Terry LePage

“Am I not destroying my enemies when I make friends of them?” -Abraham Lincoln

As our country becomes more and more polarized and the Iraq war drags on, don't you want to be able to live Jesus' teaching of being peacemakers? For years I have been trying to live Jesus' "Third Way" in the face of violence: not the instinctual ways of 1) fighting or 2) avoiding but 3) engaging the "enemy" from the heart and lovingly challenging them to greater compassion. I know it works. I just haven't known how to do it very well.

Gandhi taught that "passive" violence (meaning emotional violence: unloving speech and thoughts and actions) is more insidious than physical violence. "Passive" violence over time generates anger in the victim, and that is the fuel which ignites into physical violence. It is because we don't appreciate the devastating reality of emotional violence that so many efforts at peacemaking have been fruitless or temporary. How can we extinguish a fire if we don't cut off the fuel source?

Gandhi always emphasized the need for nonviolence in communications. How does a person offer a truly caring presence and speech in hostile situations? I always thought it was a skill only the most saintly people possessed. Then I discovered Nonviolent Communication, created by Marshall Rosenberg.

Nonviolent Communication (NVC) is a simple tool that allows anyone to shift toward a more compassionate view of self and others. It is simple, but it is not easy. It is like learning a new language, and even a new way of thinking. It takes lots of practice, but even "NVC baby talk" can bring rich results. I have been amazed at the shift in my level of empathy for myself and others in the short time I have been practicing. I want to share this wonderful new tool with this church.

NVC is non-sectarian, but its spiritual basis is deep.

1) Change our judgments, diagnoses and interpretations into simple observations, feelings and needs. "Do not judge, so that you may not be judged."

2) When we listen only to feelings and needs, we can connect from the heart with anyone. "Love your neighbor as yourself."

3) Everyone's needs can be met when we connect from the heart. "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."

4) One of our greatest human needs is to give: to contribute to the well-being of others. "Give, and it shall be given to you..."

Now I have hope that we really can be peacemakers in the most trying situations. Along the way, we discover the blessing of connecting from the heart in all aspects of our lives. My son Mark and I were in an NVC practice group together. When I speak to him in NVC, I feel awkward using this new language. Yet his grin of appreciation tells me I am connecting with him in a way that will see us through his teen years.

I hope that this church will become a learning community for Nonviolent Communication, with members supporting each other in practicing this new language, which I believe is Jesus' language. Please join us for the Lenten series, beginning with Ash Wednesday worship Feb. 21 and Wednesday soup suppers through Lent, with a special workshop Saturday March 10.