

# **Building a Culture of Forgiveness and Reconciliation:**

## **A holistic approach to reducing violence in our communities**

### **A Program of Values over Violence**

Values over Violence is a program to foster dignity through a civic culture based on forgiveness and reconciliation. It trains youth and adults to examine their emotions, learn to identify events which trigger anger and revenge, and look at choices about how to handle these events. We focus on the need to address the emotional issues stemming from violence, felt by victims, perpetrators, and the community. Without emotional and spiritual healing, it becomes impossible to step beyond violence and chart a new direction. Participants are trained to help move persons from the onset of violence through possibilities of forgiveness and degrees of reconciliation toward constructive civil engagement. Values over Violence is a Boston-based version of the curriculum developed by ESPERE, the Schools of Forgiveness and Reconciliation, in Bogota, Colombia. The ESPERE materials have a proven track record in reducing violence not only in Latin America, but also in many countries, including the United States.

#### **Cooperative Metropolitan Ministries**

- 1) Liaison with groups seeking training in the ESPERE curriculum in the Greater Boston area, with primary emphasis on suburban Boston.
- 2) Works with Forgiveness International in seeking national strategies for training and implementation of programming.
- 3) Oversees training and credentialing of trainers in the Greater Boston area, comprising culture, content, and capability.
- 4) Supports the Values over Violence Institute with training and strategic planning through an integration of Boards.
- 5) Research and workshop focus on addressing racism and intolerance (e.g., Islamophobia) in American culture.

#### **Values over Violence Institute**

- 1) Liaison with groups seeking training in the ESPERE curriculum in Boston with an urban emphasis.
- 2) Offers Forgiveness International an urban context for developing regional and national strategies.
- 3) Helps to shape the credentialing of trainers in matters of culture, content, and capability.
- 4) Supports such local efforts as:
  - Development of an urban curriculum for youth
  - Fostering appropriate curriculum for urban houses of worship
  - Implement creative means of reaching into the culture (HOOPZ, Bike-a-thons, etc.), radio and media
- 5) Research and workshop focus on addressing “inequality” (e.g., Jobs, Racism) in American culture.

## **Boards of Directors (CMM and VoV)**

Insofar as possible there should be an integration of the Boards of CMM and VoV Institute. Each board is independent, but from the beginning there have been CMM board members who are members of the board of the VOV Institute, and vice versa. This collaboration is important for matters of cooperation and it becomes an example of visible reconciliation or of the failure to exemplify such.

## **Credentials for Trainers**

This is an area of on-going discussion. Currently the general standard is that persons seeking to be authorized as trainers should have completed the following:

- 1) A course in Forgiveness and Reconciliation comprising minimum of c. 30 hours.
- 2) "Shadowing" a trainer in A course in Forgiveness and Reconciliation comprising minimum of c. 30 hours.
- 3) A course in methodology of about 6-7 hours.
- 4) Discussion with a trainer along the lines of cultural sensitivity, mastery of content and suitability of capabilities.

## **Brief history of ESPERE**

- ESPERE stands for Escuelas de Perdón y Reconciliación (School of Forgiveness and Reconciliation)
- It was created by Leonel Narváez Gómez of Fundación para la Reconciliación as a response to his experience of violence in Africa and Colombia.
- ESPERE is being implemented in many Latin American countries. In the USA, ESPERE is implemented Oregon, Texas, Boston and Chicago.
- ESPERE is used with youth, police, prisoners and victims of violence, in schools, houses of worship, jails and other institutions.

## **ESPERE Core Values**

- Adopt forgiveness as a fundamental attitude toward conflict
- Recognize forgiveness as a basic human need
- Transform anger and the desire for revenge into understanding and empathy
- Re-establish trust in others and hope for the future

- Support socialization and re-integration
- Create a culture of compassion

### **Benefits of ESPERE**

- Understand the cycle of violence and conflict
- Decrease anger and resentment caused by trauma
- Increase compassion toward others and ourselves
- Encourage positive relationships
- Promote nonviolence as a way of life

### **Domains of personal transformation in the ESPERE process**

- Cognitive
- Emotional
- Behavioral
- Spiritual

### **Points to consider**

- Importance of “living” the process before implementing it with others (unlike many trainings)
- Focus on “My own journey”
- Get in touch with offenses experienced in the past and in daily life
- Understand that catharsis is part of trauma processing
- Understand that internal conflict may increase during the first sessions
- Importance of confidentiality

### **ESPERE Methodology**

- Popular Education
- Structure of sessions
  - Warm up
  - Review of previous session
  - Introduction to the topic of the day
  - General content and exercises
  - Trust groups and plenary
  - Personal commitment card
  - Homework assignment
  - Ritual