



Peacemaking transforms conflict in South Africa

A message from Stanley W. Green



I grew up in the province of Natal (now KwaZulu-Natal) in South Africa. It was a place of extravagant beauty, gentle rolling hills, warm ocean breezes, abundant fruit, and exquisite flowers and trees. Sadly, all was not beauty and harmony.

For my friends and me, this idyllic milieu was distorted by *apartheid*, enforced segregation that diminished almost every aspect of the lives of people of color. Blatant discrimination, injustice and oppression marred our social experiences. In the period from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s, there was an explosion of hatred and violence. Rivalries and hostility between competing political groups (the African National Congress and the Inkatha Freedom Party) resulted in thousands of deaths. On just one day, Aug. 15, 1990, at least 150 people were killed.

With the end of apartheid in 1994, the ugliness of brutality and terror diminished and it became possible, once again, to appreciate Natal's beauty. Until a few weeks ago, that is. Shifting political alignments have reignited the killings. For now, thankfully, the numbers of those killed are nowhere near the scale of the decade that began in the mid-1980s. But in many communities, fear is rising. As the killings mount, dread is escalating.

In this issue of *Extending*, we share the story of the work of one of our partners, Southern African Development and Reconstruction Agency, which is led by Oscar Siwali. Mennonite Mission Network had the privilege of hosting Oscar at Mennonite Church USA's convention in Orlando where he had numerous opportunities to speak about SADRA's work in reconciliation and peacebuilding. More recently, I had the joy of leading a learning tour group to southern Africa. We met students at a high school who have been trained

Continued on the back page.

Above: The first 31 high-school students received certification in the Peer Mediators program. Photo provided by Dan Smith Derksen.

"All nations will stream toward the mountain of God's house, saying, 'Come, let's learn the way God works, so we can live in God's ways.' God will make things right between many peoples. They'll turn their swords into shovels, their spears into hoes. No more will nation fight nation."

—Isaiah 2:3-4, adapted from The Message



Photo by Kathryn Smith Derksen

Oscar Siwali and Dan Smith Derksen look on as participants role-play a peer mediation training exercise.

Christ's followers: Active peacemakers in a violent world

Despite its majestic beauty, Table Mountain in Cape Town, South Africa, is not the mountain Isaiah sees with people streaming uphill and weapons of death being transformed into food-producing implements—at least not yet. In the shadow of Table Mountain, Oscar Siwali works toward Isaiah's counter-cultural vision where those of different racial and ethnic groups move harmoniously toward a common goal. And Mennonite Mission Network has joined hands with him. For the past two years, Mission Network sent interns to work alongside and learn from Siwali by partnering with the organization he directs, Southern African Development and Reconstruction Agency (SADRA). Last year, Dan and Kathryn Smith Derksen committed to a longer term ministry promoting conflict transformation through SADRA.

Siwali said he founded the organization out of a “deep conviction that followers of Christ need to be active peacemakers in an increasingly violent world.”

20 mediators in 20 communities by 2020

SADRA seeks to create violence-free communities and works toward this goal in multiple ways—through church renewal and leadership development, peace education in schools, active conflict transformation in communities, and election monitoring. They pay special attention to women's contributions in all these areas.

The initiative to train “20 mediators in 20 communities by 2020” celebrated a milestone on May 20, when the first

31 high-school students received certification in the Peer Mediators program. These peer mediators learned about the roots of conflict and were equipped with skills and confidence to resolve intense situations through nonviolent means. Even before receiving certification, peer mediators in one school had already negotiated seven conflicts successfully!

The national and international communities in Cape Town acclaimed the success of the students. The master of ceremonies was Irvin Kinnes, a former advisor to South Africa's police institutions and an expert in dealing with gang issues. The French Consulate provided the cake, and the *Alliance Française* (French Cultural Center) provided the venue.

Peace witnesses limit violence on campuses

In the fall of 2016, years of growing tension and regular protests by South African university students culminated in a series of institutional shut-downs. A university library burned. Buildings and equipment were damaged. Rubber bullets flew. Dissenters were arrested. Students were angry about rising school fees and a continuing curriculum promoting White privilege. Service staff joined the demonstrations after they lost contracts with benefits.

Siwali had seen the unrest coming and SADRA was ready. Dozens of volunteers from churches, civic organizations, and concerned parents had been trained.

“These protests [were] a microcosm of unrest in South

Africa, due to disenfranchisement and distrust across race and class divides,” Kathryn Smith Derksen said, as she and Dan joined others to serve as Peace Justice Witness observers.

The trained volunteers walked campuses and documented acts of violence, as militarized men in full riot gear broke down dorm doors, shot out windows, and otherwise terrorized students. Universities resembled war zones. Arrests were made without fair process. Trash was not collected for two months. Students with no money to return home were stranded on campus.

The SADRA volunteers noted that the “security” forces were mostly white-skinned, ex-military men with a history of abusing Black people under the apartheid system.

“The [security forces] seemed eager to intimidate students,” Dan Smith Derksen said.

The Peace Justice Witnesses gave eye-witness reports to the media, organized garbage pick-ups, and invited pastors from Khayelitsha, a nearby Black township, to join the night-patrol teams. Students welcomed the pastors’ presence, and frequently turned to them for counseling. As mediators brought students and administrators together, a sense of calm returned. When the universities saw that the pastors were

better at keeping order than the security forces, they dismissed the armed guards and decided to pay the pastors for ongoing prayer-walk patrols.

“The universities saved money on security while contributing to the livelihoods of their selfless neighbors,” Kathryn Smith Derksen said. “In less than two weeks, the entire situation had turned from a coercive approach to a respectful one, from real fear to actual dialogue, from literal weapons to symbolic ploughshares. The outcome was beyond what we had all thought possible. But it’s not over.”



Kathryn Smith Derksen as Peace Justice Witness during a protest concert in Stellenbosch.

Photo by Jacob Smith Derksen

“Jesus’ peace and love are for this moment in history”

SADRA has been invited to give conflict transformation workshops to student residence leaders in one of the four universities in the Cape Town area, and the Peer Mediators program continues in area schools. Church and community leaders are receiving training.

“As Mennonites, we believe the kingdom of God is now, and that the peace and love of Jesus are for this moment in history. We are called to work for peace, for societal transformation, wherever we are,” Kathryn Smith Derksen said.

Mennonite Mission Network depends on those who share this belief and who generously share their gifts to make such ministries possible. ■



Photo by Dan Smith Derksen

“As Mennonites, we believe the kingdom of God is now, and that the peace and love of Jesus are for this moment in history. We are called to work for peace, for societal transformation, wherever we are.”

—Kathryn Smith Derksen

Gakeema Allie speaks out during peer mediation training, while (clockwise) Chadwin Andrews, Ferlan February, Fareid Jacobs, Kelly Winnaar, and Ryan Caswell practice listening skills.

Peacemaking transforms conflict in South Africa

Continued from page 1.

as mediators by Oscar, and our workers in that region, Dan and Kathryn Smith Derksen. The students told us stories of how they had been equipped and were able to step into tense situations. We heard several vignettes of violence averted and reconciliation made possible through these students' ability to advance the possibilities for peace. I was heartened to hear of this ministry of peacemaking and reconciliation.



Photo by Sue Neeb

The Phoenix Peer Mediation team: Aduciano Ruiters, Nicole Jacobs, Mr. Roger Brown, Mogamed Yusuf Sampson, Diego Manno, Chadwin Andrews, Damian Jegels, Fareed Mogamat Jacobs, and Tashrick Saban.

Later, we met a large group of pastors who are a part of another coalition SADRA works with, The Great Commission. The pastors described to us an intervention for which they were trained that involved them standing between rioting students and the police. Through their public witness of prayer, and their engagement with both sides, they were able to broker peace between the parties and avert unnecessary bloodshed. I was also heartened by this account.

My greatest thrill came, however, when Oscar shared that many of the pastors in this coalition were being further equipped to travel, if needed, from Cape Town to KwaZulu-Natal to stand between the factions and to broker peace. Having observed the massive toll from the earlier political violence, I felt elated that this time there will be agents of peacemaking and reconciliation to bridge the divide and to stem the tide of violence that engulfed my province a quarter-century ago.

I am so grateful for the work of our partners, like SADRA. And I give thanks for you and your sharing that makes possible ministries of reconciliation, peacemaking and rebuilding in troubled places.

Together, we are renewing hope in some very desperate situations by allowing the transforming love and power of Christ's forgiveness to bring healing and beauty instead of fear and despair. Thank you. ■

Stanley W. Green
Executive Director

www.MennoniteMission.net
Toll-free: 1-866-866-2872

Office locations:
Elkhart, Indiana
Newton, Kansas

Meet our workers



Before serving with SADRA, **Dan and Kathryn Smith**

Derksen worked with religious leaders in Uganda dealing with atrocities by the Lord's Resistance Army. They also worked in Chad as peace workers with the Christian-Muslim conflict, and in Northern Ireland. The Smith Derksens have two teenage sons, Jacob and John-Clair.

Meet our partner



Oscar Siwali, founder and executive director of the Southern African Development and Reconstruction Agency, works to reconcile opposing factions in communities, churches and schools before violent conflicts erupt. Before founding SADRA in 2013,

Siwali worked at the Quaker Peace Centre in Cape Town and for the Centre for Conflict Resolution, conducting workshops for audiences across Africa. Oscar and his wife, Zandi, have three sons. Zandi has worked with rape survivors for many years.