

## The Bridge of Peace Project

The Bridge of Peace is a unique, innovative and effective tool for healing wounds of abuse, misunderstanding, intolerance, prejudice and war and can be the beginning of the development of a peaceful life and ongoing and prosperous activities not only for persons participating, but also for their families, communities and societies whom they represent.

The credit for this project goes first and foremost to the Founders of WFWP – to Father and Mother Moon, who have been and still are tirelessly at work to inspire people to becoming peacemakers, to truly live as Ambassadors for Peace.

## Philosophy of the Bridge of Peace

Today we can connect with any country within seconds. However, we still have strong internal barriers which we need to challenge. We are the fruit of the past, of our ancestors, nation, race and culture. We are also, in the present, involved with those who often stand opposed to our identity and culture. Therefore we are quite unconsciously caught in a chain of anger and resentment.

Human conflict begins in our spirit and heart. This area must be touched if we are to witness a permanent eradication of the causes of conflicts.

Stable solutions do not only come from “outside” or through political laws and contracts, but on the basis of personal dedication to the wellbeing of others – from the intimate level within marriage and parenthood through to equal rights and partnership in our communities, nation and world. Based on this perspective it is the central philosophical viewpoint of the Bridge of Peace that every person carries in him/her a powerful potential to achieve change.

Therefore we hold the key to the future in our hands, or even more precise, in our hearts! A woman’s love can achieve reconciliation even in most extreme situations. Dr. Preußner-Franke, the previous president of the German/Jewish Association said at the WFWP friendship meeting for German-Jewish Reconciliation: “To be a woman means to have to carry the heaviest loads at all times, everywhere throughout the world.” Therefore it makes sense that we women must build bridges of peace first, in order to create a movement of sisterhood, a movement of kindred spirits, who encourage and strengthen one another by multiplying actions of kindness, benefitting families and societies at large.

## Pillars of the Bridge of Peace

To achieve conflict resolution through the Bridge of Peace certain components are necessary. These components were defined when WFWP International first began celebrating the friendship meetings; and they are responsibility, respect, repentance and forgiveness and commitment.

### Responsibility:

We can break the chains created by resentment and anger by realizing that these emotions poison and handicap us. Our attitudes, thoughts and mindsets are more essential, than our external circumstances. As we take responsibility for our mindset and determine to begin anew, we can be liberated from the effects of past or present sorrow, (even if our external circumstances do not change.)

### Respect:

By recognizing and respecting the human rights of the other, no matter who they are, we are able to open our minds to the possibility of a solution. Without respect, the perpetuation of the cycle of conflict is inevitable.

### Repentance and forgiveness:

Through repentance and forgiveness we create a personal “cease-fire” in our own lives. As we take more responsibility, we find the strength to see our own shortcomings and our tendency to disregard the needs and situations of others. To end conflict in our own lives, we need an honest assessment of our actions and a willingness to take the other viewpoint, which leads to forgiveness, an act of giving, of loving without making demands, or expecting anything in return. Martin Luther King Jr said: “In the final analysis, love is the only force that can convert enemies into friends. “

### Commitment:

It is in sharing and working together with a new found sister, that we are able to seal the success of the bridge of peace. As we embrace our partner of peace, whether a new sister, spouse, friend or family member, we are sealing our personal commitment to one another and to the task of self-development and peace building.

### First Bridges of Peace

The first BOP ceremonies took place in March 1994 between Korean and Japanese ladies. Many of the 179 000 pairs of sisters felt, that through taking part, the unhappy historical past of both of their nations was eased in a very profound way.

In 1995 on the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the ending of World War II, thousands of Japanese women went to America to take part in a series of deeply moving “Sisters of Peace” ceremonies, and pledged to build a “Bridge of Peace and Reconciliation” and deeper bonds of friendship for the future.

Since then Bridge of Peace or Sisterhood Ceremonies have been celebrated all over the world. They serve not only to heal the wounds of the past but also to prevent conflict and violence occurring in the present and future.

### Examples from European Countries

Building upon WFWPI’s concept that the world is one global family, and upon the innate strength of women for mutual understanding and reconciliation, these “Sisterhood” or *Bridge of Peace Ceremonies* have become a signature activity of WFWP- Europe. For the past two decades they have served as a vehicle for reconciliation and deeper bonds of friendship, with over 210 ceremonies held in more than 40 cities in Europe.

These ceremonies have attracted the attention of many persons who are influential in the fields of politics, diplomacy, advocacy, education and religion. (journalism and the performing arts).

We have convened first of all:

- **Bridges of Peace to heal the wounds of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> World War and other international conflicts.....**

...like in 1995, on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of WWII, in Germany with the Netherlands and Germany with Poland, Russia and Czech Republic. In the same year Austrian and Czech women

crossed a Bridge of Peace, in 1996, Austria invited displaced women from Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina to Vienna, to help them to stop the war on the Balkans through letting them experience the Bridge of Peace. They expressed that they lost their sadness and their sorrow and returned with hope. In the following years, numerous ceremonies were held among the central European countries to heal the animosities of the past. Thousands of women crossed the bridge of peace, offering reconciliation and forgiveness, to begin a new relationship of love and respect.

Among the countries participating were Austria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Albania, Slovenia, Italy, France, UK, the Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland, Finland, Sweden, Norway and Denmark. Women from Japan also visited the major countries in Europe to participate and heal the sorrow of the past.

A special event held in 2002, was the bridge of peace between Jewish and German Ladies. From this initial Sisterhood event, several friendship meetings followed which lead to whole families crossing the bridge of peace.

- **Next we have held Sisterhood ceremonies with women of different religious traditions and racial backgrounds and also for welcoming different nationalities to our countries:**

Misunderstandings, intolerance and religious wars of the past and present have created deep wounds and separation. WFWP chapters in many countries across Europe have invested their heart, soul and energy into building bridges of love and friendship across all major religious traditions and racial backgrounds!

In this regard I would like to mention in particular bridge of peace events in Holland, Spain, Ireland and the UK. A wonderful example is Birmingham in the UK. It is one of the most unique cities in Europe. With a population of less than 1 million, it has around 200 Islamic mosques, 16 Sikh gurudwaras, 12 Hindu temples, several hundred Christian churches, 3 Jewish synagogues, 12 Buddhist temples, including a golden pagoda and 3 Jain ashrams.

Through years of WFWP 'Prayers for Peace' meetings at the Earle's family home, a foundation for peace and friendship was laid among all these communities and different nationalities

In 2008 and 2009 over the course of 2 beautiful BOP ceremonies each time 300 ladies representing 36 different nationalities and all faith traditions, became sisters of peace and promised to support each other, and actively strengthen community cohesion in Birmingham. Ever since then about 100 ladies are meeting regularly, and working in smaller groups on various community projects.

In 2003 in Watford, a town to the North of London, a BOP ceremony brought together Christian and Muslim women at a time of heightened tension, due to the 9/11 atrocity and the 7/7 bombings in London. The sisterhood relationships created, were the seed for close friendship and cooperation which was noticed by the Mayor of this town and later, by the Home Office in London. As a result a grant from the "Preventing Violent Extremism Pathfinder Fund" was offered to Watford, and in particular to the Bridge of Peace project.

Another wonderful outcome of the BOP was the cooperation with members of the Watford Muslim Women Organization, the Watford Interfaith Association and the Watford Chaplaincy to organize, what they called the "Watford Celebration"; an event that celebrates the rich diversities of cultures and faiths in that town. In 2010 over 4000 people attended the celebration. Next year, in 2015, Watford Celebration will celebrate their 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.

The Scottish WFWP chapter also was recognized by the Edinburgh city council for their BOP reconciliation project, with a monetary award.

## Bridges of Peace in Middle East

In 2004 many countries in Europe earnestly provided support for the Peace Rallies in Israel, which were organized by WFWP International. The motto of the rallies was: "Heart to Heart for Peace in the Middle East". It provided an opportunity for Palestinian and Israeli women to embrace each other and pledge, to find ways of achieving reconciliation and cooperation.

## Development of Bridge of Peace Concept and Sisterhood

So, dear sisters and friends, where do we go from here? We have experienced the power of the Bridge of Peace in conflict resolution as just described before between sisters, as well as between generations, for example mothers and daughters, and also between husbands and wives. A core point, that must be mentioned is, that we all need to cross the bridge of peace within ourselves, myself and my creator, and appreciate our value, so as to be a dedicated 'bridge of peace builder' in daily life.

2015 will see the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the End of WW II, and as such, mark the beginning of a new period of growth in regards to our peace projects which have taken root over the past 20 years, and which, as you know, have grown and blossomed to reveal creativity, joy and beauty.

This is a good time to further invest for the future!

- Together with our "Partners for Peace" we will serve our communities by initiating Projects that support the youth, offering character education and other personality building programs.
- Establish "Mothers' Prayer Groups", and continue our European wide "Prayer for Peace Meetings",  
Support the programs aimed to reaching the UN MDG #3 -  
with regular group activities promoting the "Dignity of Women", and other meetings on the topic of "Benevolence not Violence" or "Food for Thought" and "ABC for World Peace".
- Let us note that, the 'Beyond 2015 targets' of the UN, the proposed target Number16, to "achieve peaceful and inclusive societies", is the thought to reduce violence and illicit trafficking, letting grievances be peacefully resolved and let country decisions be accountable and responsive to peoples' needs.
- The development of the Global Women's Peace Network (GWPN) in Europe is continuing with the ever growing community of 'Ambassadors of Peace.'

The Bridge of Peace offers great hope, as we can build heart to heart from woman to woman, man to man, family to family a sisterhood and brotherhood community, which we base on the legacy of true love, TL being Father and Mother Moon's lifestyle motto, where people do not only seek their own comfort and advantage, but also the well being of the global human family.

I would like to thank you for your attention and invite you now to experience the beauty of reconciliation and friendship built here in Europe, by watching a short presentation of some of the Bridge of Peace Ceremonies that have been held. This ppt has been prepared by Mrs.Lindemann, former WFWP President of Germany, demonstrating the fruit of the labour of love of WFWP members all across our beloved continent - Europe!

Please enjoy