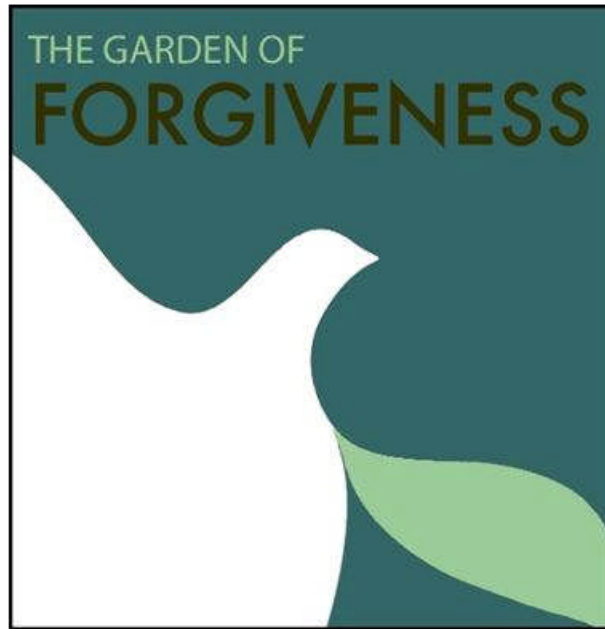


The Garden of Forgiveness

Executive Summary



“Every act of revenge is a time bomb thrown into the future.”

Alexandra Asseily

“There is no future without forgiveness.”

Archbishop Desmond Tutu

April 29, 2007

THE GARDEN OF
FORGIVENESS
COMMON GROUND FOR BUILDING A BETTER WORLD

Nobel Peace Prize winner Archbishop Desmond Tutu declared, “There can be no future without forgiveness.” In so many places around the world we see the devastation and destruction caused by violent conflict. These destructive scenarios emerge as conflict escalates out of control. Too often, the desire for revenge becomes the motivation for individual and political responses to conflict. But there is another way: forgiveness. Forgiveness empowers us to break the cycle of violence and revenge, thereby making a future beyond violence possible. As Gandhi said, “an eye for an eye leaves both eyes blind.” There is too much blindness in the world. Forgiveness is a power through which we create the future. Forgiveness is a trainable life skill and a powerful tool for personal and communal transformation and healing.

Forgiveness is valued by all the world’s religions, *especially* Christianity. Jesus’ teaching about forgiveness was revolutionary; it is a central tenet of our faith. In the Lord’s Prayer, we find that our own forgiveness is contingent upon our willingness to forgive others: “forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” Jesus embodied this forgiveness to the very last, in his dying words crying out, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” As Jurgen Moltmann said, “With [Christ’s prayer of forgiveness from the cross] the universal religion of revenge is overcome and the universal law of retaliation is annulled.”

BUT, unfortunately, in our culture forgiveness has been seen as weakness. Forgiveness has been understood as “letting evil people off the hook.” And even though forgiveness is at the heart of the Christian message, too few churches and Christians are willing to embrace its radical possibilities for personal and communal transformation.

THEREFORE, our mission is to educate faith communities and the world about the power of forgiveness. We will do this through the following ways:

- **Developing educational initiatives on the healing power of forgiveness.** We will develop age-appropriate curricula on forgiveness with biblical and scientific grounding (especially the research of Stanford University’s Dr. Frederic Luskin), as well as exemplary stories from those who have

embraced forgiveness. In addition to curricula, we will also offer symposia, forgiveness workshops and trainings, and resources for raising awareness about forgiveness through special public events such as the International Day of Forgiveness, the Peace through Forgiveness Leadership Summit for high school students, and “Forgiveness Sunday” for churches.

- **Developing a network of Gardens of Forgiveness.** We will encourage churches, faith communities, schools, and community organizations set aside meditative space for people to embrace the healing power of forgiveness and to give up bitterness and the desire for revenge. Nelson Mandela once said that not to forgive is “like drinking a glass of poison and waiting for your enemies to die.” These meditative places will be dedicated as “Gardens of Forgiveness” and will be designated as a part of the Global Gardens of Forgiveness Network©. The Garden of Forgiveness movement began in Beirut, Lebanon, and currently we are in conversation with communities around the world, including Soweto, Sri Lanka, Jerusalem, Belfast, Chicago, Los Angeles, Poughkeepsie, and New York City about creating local Gardens of Forgiveness.

It has been said that forgiveness is “giving up all hope for a better past.” Through forgiveness, the emotional, physical, and spiritual burdens of the past can be relinquished, and new possibilities for a hopeful, constructive future can be embraced. The local Garden of Forgiveness is a venue for conflict transformation and healing, as well as a vehicle through which we raise awareness about the power of forgiveness. Our mission is to heal the past and create the future—one Garden of Forgiveness at a time.