

CALLED TO CREATE A CULTURE OF FORGIVENESS

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In recent times, much has been written about the need for us to live as forgiving and forgiven people. It is a means to address the violent so rampant in our homes, street, nation and world. The goal of forgiveness is to restore broken relationships with God, with each other and with all of creation. It is also a gift we give to ourselves, that heals body, mind and spirit. It brings us freedom and peace when we release the anger that wants revenge. Over the years, I have listened to many people who are imprisoned in their grudges from the past and from a lack of forgiveness. It can be found in the lives of individuals, families, communities, and between nations, races and cultures

Some have concerns about forgiveness. It does not mean that we condone wrong or evil or that we are excusing the wrongdoing or taking away the responsibility for justice to be done. Neither is it about forgetting the injury that one has experienced. It is remembering and then making a conscious decision to forgive. It is a process, a journey to healing and hope. It calls us to let go of the hurt on the way to healing. This may be a painful process, and it cannot be rushed or glossed over.

Many religions consider forgiving an import part of their belief system. Some time ago, we heard the story of the Amish community choosing to forgive and murderer of their children and reaching out in support of the families of both the victims and the perpetrators. One of their leaders said: "The acid of hatred only destroys the container."

Along the same line, Dag Hammarskjold, former Secretary General of the United Nations said: "forgiveness may be the only credible option to address the continuing escalation of violence. Jesus was the supreme example of forgiveness as he hung on the cross, praying for his murderers: "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing." In the Lord's prayer, we ask: "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us."

Forgiveness is central to the life of a believer. What is involved in the act of forgiving?

- ❖ First of all, forgiveness is a choice of the heart, the opposite of "an eye for an eye approach. This means letting go of negative judgments and

resentments and any desire for revenge. Then one must seek to replace them with thoughts of reconciliation and peace. Identify and name the hurt you are dealing with.

- ❖ Acknowledge past hurts and draw on spiritual resources to move beyond the hurt toward reconciliation and peace. Name the feelings you need to let go of.. Move toward a higher moral ground than that of the person who has injured us. Forgiveness is a spiritual gift offered to us.
- ❖ We need a sense of our own worth in order to forgive. By claiming our own God-given dignity and worth, we will have a foundation from which to reach out in the process of forgiveness. Often our lack of forgiveness may have something to do with our wounded pride or our inability to get our own way.
- ❖ Be grateful for God's generous forgiveness of us. This will enable us to practice forgiveness in our daily living.
- ❖ Think of the value of forgiveness in our own wellbeing. And for the forming of health community and a peaceful world.
- ❖ Find a way to move forward, knowing we cannot change what has happened to us, but we can change the way we view and respond to what has happened. Think of a way you can use the experience to help others.
- ❖ We can only offer forgiveness. We cannot control how the person we want to forgive will respond.
- ❖ Perhaps we can learn some truth about ourselves and possible role in the conflict experienced.

Corporate forgiveness can change the world. I saw it in my homeland, Ireland, a few years ago. After centuries of conflict, the warring groups decided to get together and lay down their arms and leave a legacy of peace, not of war for generations still to come. It took a long time to arrive at that point. Several groups and individuals were involved in the journey toward forgiveness. They sat down and worked on a peace agreement and now they use their resources to build up the community rather than destroy it by weapons of war. They are now enjoying a newfound peace and are learning to live together in more trusting and caring relationships.

As people of faith, we must continue to strive to create a better and safer future for all people. On a personal level, we will have little peace unless we allow the gift of the forgiving heart to govern our daily actions and choices.

We can ask ourselves: What role might forgiveness play in breaking the cycle of violence in families, on the streets, in the workplace, halls of government and in our nation and world. Where have you seen forgiveness at work in recent times, that has produced healing and hope? Is there any action that you consider unforgiveable?