

## ***Building Peace***

Our human frailties and shortcomings may make it difficult understand one another and communicate fairly and sincerely; different experiences and ideas may be obstacles in respecting one another when searching for a consensus. However, love can always bring healing.

Some practical and consistent forms of behaviour are needed if we are to succeed in contributing to universal fraternity as true brothers and sisters. These include putting our abilities into circulation, caring for one another, sharing our deepest aspirations, welcoming one another without judgment, offering and receiving mercy and forgiveness, nurturing trust and listening. These choices can be freely undertaken but sometimes courage is needed if we are to be a 'sign of contradiction' and behave in a way that stands at odds with the current mentality.

That is why it is important to encourage each other in this commitment, so that we do not waver and are always able to safeguard and joyfully witness to the inestimable value of unity and peace.

Chiara Lubich said, *"Peace-building demands a strong love from us, a love that is able to reach even those who do not reciprocate, a love that is able to forgive, a love that does not see people as enemies and the capacity to love their country as our own...It even asks us to have new hearts and eyes to love and see everyone as candidates for universal fraternity. ... "Evil arises in the human heart,"* wrote Iginio Giordani, and *"to remove the danger of war it is necessary to eliminate the spirit of aggression, exploitation and selfishness from which war comes: it is necessary to rebuild a conscience."*

How can we do this? How can we rebuild a love-oriented consciousness?

Bonita Park is a neighbourhood in Hartswater, an agricultural town in South Africa. As in the rest of the country, the effects inherited from the Apartheid regime persist, especially in the educational sphere: the education of young people belonging to the black and mestizo groups are far inferior to those of other ethnic groups, with the consequent risk of social marginalization. 'The Bridge' project aims at creating a form of mediation between the different ethnic groups in the neighbourhood by bridging distances and cultural differences among them. This consists of an after-school programme and a small communal meeting space where people of different cultures and generations come together.

It was a surprise to see the community showed a great desire to work together. Charles offered his old truck to fetch the timber with which the desks were made and the principal of the nearest elementary school donated shelves, notepads and textbooks, while the Dutch Reformed Church provided fifty chairs. Everyone has done their part to make this bridge between cultures and ethnicities grow stronger each day.

What happened in Hartswater, could happen anywhere, if we manage to create "new spaces of encounter" in our neighbourhoods where there can be constructive dialogue among all, the possibility to work together, to offer positive answers to humanity that still suffers from inequalities, prejudices, and still cannot overcome "the category of the enemy" or remove "a spirit of aggression."

In this way, we will create workshops of peace where "that strong love" lies at the basis of every concrete action.