

PEACEKEEPING, PEACEBUILDING, AND RELIGIOUS LEADER ENGAGEMENT

Steven Moore

Padre (ret'd) S.K. Moore, CD, PhD, completed doctoral studies (2008) in the religious peacebuilding of chaplains, inclusive of field research at the Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team. As the Director of Development of the Integrative Peacebuilding Module Program at Saint Paul University, Ottawa, he is leading a team of subject matter experts in building an on-line program designed to equip civilian and military personnel for today's complex operational environment.

Abstract :

For decades, military chaplains have deployed with their troops to conflict and post-conflict environments around the globe, some still convulsing from the horrific violence that has time and again pitted neighbour against neighbour. The principal role for these clerics in uniform continues to be the provision of support for the troops entrusted to their care. Concomitant with this operational ministry has been an undeniable impulse to engage religious leaders and their faith communities with the view to aiding them in any way possible. This inherent desire of chaplains to make a difference in the lives of others has led to increasing involvement with indigenous populations in theatres of operation. In one manner or another, Religious Leader Engagement (RLE) has been a successful form of civic engagement in active conflict zones, in peace support operations, with its emphasis on stability and reconstruction, and in post-conflict environments, where brokered cease-fires led to mission mandates enforcing fledgling peace agreements between former belligerents. Historically, where conditions were favourable, chaplains have advanced peaceful relation among fractured communities through humanitarian assistance. In more recent times, creating a safe space for dialogue has led to encounters between religious leaders, where conflict, or its residual effects, have left inter-communal relations either strained or non-existent. Shared ritual events and collaborative activities have emerged from such exchanges, engendering trust and renewing cooperation across ruptured ethnic divides. It is this reframing of relation that provides the impetus for beginning the journey of reconciliation. *Networking, partnering*, and in some instances, *peacebuilding*, RLE advances what Brigadier-General Jim Simms, Canadian Army Chief of Staff Land Strategy, identifies as essential to the Comprehensive Approach: It is "... about people, organizations and relationships - building understanding, respect and trust...cultivat[ing] involvement by key non-military actors.

Key Word :

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