

THE JOURNEY OUT

TRANSFORMATION

I'm always struck by the tremendous transformation that happens throughout our Healing and Reconciliation Retreats. I've seen this in the U.S., Africa, and Mexico. Without fail there's a change that takes place, not only in the atmosphere of the room and the group dynamics, but in the countenances of individual participants.

I remember being part of a retreat with couples in Uganda where everyone seemed to enter the retreat tired and discouraged and ended the retreat dancing with joy. Earlier this year we were in Nebraska with a group of South Sudanese leaders from various tribes and denominations who came with the expectations of a seminar and were all sitting in rows with those they came with. When we switched to a circle the group dynamic remained the same – a bit distant and disengaged, but by the end of the retreat people were sitting together for meals and hugging each other as they left.

Our last retreats in the state of Oaxaca, Mexico, were no different. In each one we saw the group dynamic transform throughout the retreat. More than that, I got to watch several people's very countenance be transformed throughout the days we had together. There was one high school student in particular whom we found out later would not make eye



Passing the Peace in Oaxaca, Mexico.

contact with people and could not even participate in school classes without shutting down in tears. Yet she *volunteered* to present the results of her group's scripture study to the entire high school group, and she did it with boldness and a lightness that had not been there before!

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This doesn't only happen when people are coming exhausted from a hurried pace of life, or guarded and burdened because of hurts that need healing; I've seen it happen when people are seemingly healthy and not sure why they're at a Healing Retreat. It turns out that many people are carrying burdens, blockages, and baggage that they may not even realize, but whenever we take time to walk through the core message of the Gospel in these retreats, we are all transformed: *even the facilitators!*

We had a group who took on the intensive challenge of going through a retreat, then the facilitator training, and then helped lead another retreat all in the course of the 11 days we were in Oaxaca. Several shared how they thought they were

fine and were just going through this process in order to help others. God surprised them by bringing up things He wanted to heal and free them from; they felt released and able to step into what God has for them. Most of them had gone through various healing ministries which had already given them healing experiences and a passion for this ministry, but even they came away from each of those times with deeper healing, hope, wholeness, and joy. You could see it on the faces of those going through the training, and even those helping to teach and translate!



PCR Ambassador encourages Oaxaca retreatants

In Romans 12:2 Paul tells God's people: "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."

All of the priorities, pressures, problems, and pain of the world are working to conform us to a pattern that is not what God designed for us! It is normal in the world and the church to be carrying around burdens, blockages, and baggage, but God wants us to be transformed, healed, and free! In the Greek, the word used here for "*transformed*" comes from the same word that we use to describe the "*metamorphosis*" that a caterpillar goes through to become a butterfly. That's a significant transformation! It was already within its DNA, its destiny, but it had to go through a process to become what it was meant to be.

It is a tremendous privilege to be part of the process of transformation through this ministry of reconciliation!

Sam Snyder
International Ministry Director

FROM THANKS TO BLESSING

I have been contemplating “thankfulness” recently. What drives me toward gratitude? How is my life shaped by habits of appreciation? Perhaps more importantly, where does a spirit of gratitude lead me? What is the fruit of a thankful heart and how does it impact the world around me?

The United States, Canada, and a handful of other countries celebrate Thanksgiving in the late fall months, typically marking the start to the cultural “Holiday Season”. While it doesn’t directly grow from a scriptural model, I find this rhythm can be helpful in forming my heart.

Thanksgiving encourages us to celebrate the big and small ways we are blessed. Looking back over 2023, Pilgrim Center has experienced blessing in numerous ways: the addition of new staff to our PCR-US team; visiting our partners in Africa; witnessing many people experiencing healing and hope through retreats in various countries; planting and harvesting crops in Uganda; walking with churches in their journeys toward healing... Truly, we have much to be grateful for!

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If Thanksgiving is about *gratitude*, we could say Christmas is about *giving*. Christmas re-enacts the birth of Jesus and invites us to respond by giving to others. As we receive blessing with gratitude, we seek, in turn, to bless the world around us. Of course, Christmas is about much more than gift-giving, and blessing is more than material benefit.

But the model is clear: as we receive, we are invited to give.

The pattern is repeated throughout the story of the Bible: blessing is intended to be shared. In Genesis 1, God created the world, blessed fish and birds and humans, then invited us to imitate Him by creating new life, populating and blessing the earth.

The beautiful poem in Genesis 12 is both promise and instruction to Abram:

**“I will make you into a great nation,
and I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.**

**I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth
will be blessed through you.”**

This cycle continues, even to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, blessing us with the promise of a world reconciled and renewed into a heavenly Kingdom, marked by His shalom. He then commissions us to carry that same gospel message of blessing throughout the world as we go.

Perhaps it’s not too much of a stretch to carry the pattern into the New Year. Many people embrace the change of the year as an opportunity for new beginnings, a clear calendar ready to capture the next chapter. That certainly reflects the heart of PCR: the shared blessing of reconciliation creates spaces to invite others in; it allows us to set a fresh table where many more may know the blessing of peace.

In 2023, PCR experienced a *Year to Expand*, watching as God spread the message of reconciliation wider and deeper. Retreats and



Celebrating 20 years of PCR Rwanda

courses were held, new staff was added to our team, new ministry opportunities are being explored, and we witnessed growth in unanticipated ways. We have been blessed in and through this ministry of reconciliation!

So we enter 2024 with a deep sense that this is to be a *Year of Blessing*. As God has blessed PCR and the movements of reconciliation in profound ways over the years, our deep desire is to respond so that *nations may be blessed through us*. This will mark the 30th year since God started the ministry of Pilgrim Center through Arthur & Molly Rouner, and we are excited to celebrate by continuing to pour blessing into our bent and bruised world!

I find encouragement in Paul’s words to the Corinthian church: *God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.* (2 Corinthians 9:8) PCR has experienced years of plenty and years where the accounts ran thin; but in every season, God has provided abundantly for the work He calls us to. May the truth of God’s blessing move us to abound in good work so that *our generosity results in thanksgiving to God*.

Tim Uthmann
Executive Director

CIRCLE OF FRIENDS

“How much does it cost?” Whenever we facilitate a retreat or a conversation or a course, someone asks the question: the hosting church or group, or individuals eager to seek renewed hope at one of our events. People long for healing, for hope, for refreshed hearts—but we all know there is a cost to running an international ministry.

One practice of Pilgrim Center is to prepare a table—marked by a candle representing the presence of the Holy Spirit, a cross, and a Bible—where people freely come to meet the healing heart of Jesus. Our deep desire is that financial barriers will never block a person, church, or community from coming to the table to experience the work of reconciliation. This looks different in every country and situation, but the heart is the same: *we minister freely while inviting generosity*.

God’s provision, shared through His people, makes this possible. PCR relies on the gifts of people like you to keep our ministry open to everyone. When you share a financial gift with PCR, you are part of our *Circle of Friends*: folks committed to advancing the message of reconciliation throughout the

world. Many give because they have experienced healing, seen relationships restored, done the hard work of untangling conflict, or witnessed the fruit of reconciliation in people they love. If you’ve been impacted by this ministry, perhaps you’d like to help us bless others?

Would you consider joining our Circle of Friends and be part of the team that keeps this ministry flowing? *Sustaining Partners*, who commit to giving recurring monthly gifts, provide a consistent flow of financial resources. Perhaps you are already part of the *Circle*; could you make an extra contribution this holiday season to help us freely share the gift of hope and healing through reconciliation? Your generosity results in thanksgiving to God!

To support Pilgrim Center with a special gift and/or join our growing team of Sustaining Partners, use the included giving envelope, visit us online at www.pilgrimcenter.org/donate or scan the QR code below..

Thank you for helping us share blessings together.

The Pilgrim Center for Reconciliation Team



2023 IN PICTURES



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1. SAM TEACHING AT OAXACA RETREAT
2. YOUNG MOTHERS' RETREAT, RWANDA
3. GENERATIONS IN PRAYER AT THE PCR SUMMER CELEBRATION
4. PRAYING OVER CONGOLESE SISTERS
5. RWAMAGANA, RWANDA YOUTH RETREAT.
6. PCR CO-FOUNDER MOLLY ROUNER PRAYS FOR INCOMING STAFF
7. CONGOLESE FACILITATOR TRAINING
8. COFFEE CROP AT THE SUSTAINABILITY VILLAGE FARM, UGANDA.
9. AMAZING PCR UGANDA TEAM
10. DRC RETREAT

THE PILGRIM CENTER is called to bring hope and healing by renewing individuals, restoring relationships, and revitalizing communities through the ministry of reconciliation.

Journey Out Contributors:

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WE STILL NEED RECONCILIATION

In 1994, the world looked on in horror at what had happened in Rwanda: the genocide. Years of ethnic division (some of it intentionally planted) had infected the economic, political and social life of the country, and led finally to the disaster that very nearly destroyed the country.

Sound familiar? Now, years later, do we see division in our own country and world? Every day there seems to be cause to hate someone else: some



Molly Rouner with Jim & Annette Olson

**WITH EVERY EXPRESSED HATRED, DIVISION, AND FEAR, WE CAN PRAY FOR “THOSE PEOPLE”
AS “OUR PEOPLE” – CHILDREN OF THE HEAVENLY FATHER.**

group, some party, some country, some faith.... The “I’m right, you’re wrong” mentality tears us apart, right down to family gatherings around a table of thanksgiving.

Some thoughts have surfaced in the midst of my fear in our present situation and in my days moving through Advent:

- 1) **Do we recognize the danger? Do we see our need?** The first of Jesus’ teaching in the Beatitudes has been variously translated as:
- “Blessed are the poor in spirit...”
 - “You are blessed when you’re at the end of your rope...”
 - “Blessed are those who know their need of God...”

That turning to God out of awareness of our need is the first step on the pathway to the healing of the nations—ours and all others.

Helping the wounded and traumatized people of Rwanda to see their need ultimately brought them to the point where they could meet, talk, work, respect, forgive—love!—“those people.”

The Pilgrim Center for Reconciliation has continued to open this pathway to thousands over the years and is responding now to our desperate need.

- 2) **Jesus’ question: “How many loaves do you have?”** When the response of the disciples was a paltry “five loaves of bread and two fish,” it seemed discouraging, until Jesus said, “Bring them to me.” The Pilgrim Center does not have millions for strategic studies and grand plans, but what we have is given to Jesus, then given in abundance to our wounded world.... And from them, to others: love let loose in this divided world.
- 3) **“Children of the heavenly Father...”** The words of this beloved old Swedish hymn have been playing in my mind for days as we move toward Advent. With every expressed hatred, division, and fear, we can pray for “those people” as “our people”—children of the heavenly Father. Aren’t we all?!

Blessings,
Molly

WELCOME NEW BOARD CHAIR



Ben, Sara and Jeremiah

I am honored to begin my term as the chair of the Pilgrim Center's Board. I remember receiving a call over two decades ago: *Arthur Rouner would like to meet with you...* and I guess we just kept meeting. I began going north to Cass Lake and Red Lake with our motley crew on the Journey Out and met new friends along the way. Jim Olson says Arthur and Molly are his heroes; they are mine, too. This latest call was an easy “Yes.”

In the retreats, we are reminded that Jesus operated in a distinctive and wonderful way: He didn't cry aloud or lift up his voice; He didn't break a bruised reed or quench a faintly burning wick. Taking on His ways honors people's dignity and makes room for the Holy Spirit to heal. It allows people to own their choice to repent, forgive, and be reconciled. In the quiet tender moments between scheduled times, we see God heal and transform. **Repentance and forgiveness lead to healing and wholeness and the reconciled become reconcilers.**

Today's world is full of new challenges. Reconciliation seems as elusive as ever. **Conflicts and divisions abound at home and abroad, but the way of reconciliation remains the same.** The power of Christ to heal and restore is as potent now as in those early years after the Rwandan genocide. PCR creates a unique context for individuals to experience the life changing power of the gospel. The vision of restoration and hope is as needed as ever.

In Tim Uthmann and Sam Snyder, God has provided dedicated servants to help implement this vision. Kim Foss is a faithful, skilled administrator. Our board is full of wise, experienced leaders, and Jim Olson has shifted into his role as PCR Ambassador. **PCR is poised to have an impact today: the mission is noble, the need is great, and the task is valuable.** I speak for the board when I say we are inspired to help guide the Pilgrim Center into its next chapter. Please join as we labor, pray, and give towards this end.

In Christ, Benjamin Tucker