

GROWING Together

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LIVING IN PEACE: LESSONS FROM THE SANDBOX

Thwack! Emily's fistful of sand hits the little face of 3 year old Jacob. Even before Jacob has a chance to yell, Emily's father springs into action. Kneeling in front of his daughter, he reminds her about safety and fair play. Following a father-prompted apology by Emily, Jacob's sobbing soon stops. Cautiously play resumes.

Children are trained by vigilant parents to refrain from anti-social behaviour; throwing sand and hogging all of the toys is not allowed in the sandbox. Creative solutions are needed on the spot so that safe play can continue.

Adults don't do so well in the sandbox they inhabit. From committing acts of road rage to running countries, the grown ups of the world quickly forget the sandbox conduct they so zealously teach to children. Century after century, war after war and one cycle of abuse after another – we still don't get it.

Whether in the Middle East, in gang violence on our streets or in our own homes, our solutions are too often destructive. We build bigger prisons, deploy stealth bombers or resort to intimidating and controlling behaviour. Conflict, confusion and anger grow. And fear.

A violent response to a violent response does not stop a violent response!

Do Christians have anything to say? Is our only option to dominate, subdue and hoard? When other countries want our wealth and standard of living (the highest in the world) is there no choice but to bring out our guns? North Americans are becoming ever more protective of a lifestyle that others want too. It appears that sandbox rules no longer apply!

The military budgets of Canada and the United States have greatly

increased since September 11, 2001. For example, according to an American journal, the military expenditure of the United States "is greater than that of the next eight largest military powers combined" and only about 1/10 of 1% of the Gross Domestic Product¹ goes toward foreign aid. This means that 1/1000 of all that the United States produces is given away to countries in need.

Imagine what might happen if governments, **at our insistence**, reversed spending priorities. How different our world would be if we used the budgeted billions to feed and support people instead of bombing them.

Jesus deliberately disturbs the peace of those who live surrounded by excess, unconcerned about the plight of others. His instructions? "Love your neighbour as yourself." There is nothing to hide or keep out of sight when we treat our neighbour as we treat ourselves.

Righteousness, or a right relationship to God, says Kathleen Norris is "consistently defined by the prophets, and in the psalms and gospels, as a willingness to care for the most vulnerable people in a culture." Those who work for peace and contribute to the well-being of others have a unique place in the heart of Jesus: "Blessed are the meek; blessed are the peacemakers." (Matt. 5:5,9)

In our fast-paced world, where individual rights are of ultimate importance, peacemaking is not a popular vocation. In a society that thinks it can have security by buying alarm systems and bigger guns, sharing and peacemaking are not priorities. Sandbox conduct is now a distant memory!

Jesus brings us face to face with the need for getting along in the giant sandbox that is our world. Living together in peace and sharing resources are important not only for Jacob and Emily but for all of us who call this planet home.

¹The total value of everything produced in the country

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Ecumenism

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