

# MARIDHIANO MASHINANI

(RECONCILIATION AT THE  
GRASSROOTS)

REFLECTIONS ON THE ROLE  
OF THE CHURCH IN BUILDING  
SUSTAINABLE PEACE IN THE  
NORTH RIFT REGION OF KENYA

**Bishop Cornelius Korir,**

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Foreword by Dr. Emily Welty, World Council of Churches.

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Maridhiano Mashinani (Reconciliation at the Grassroots): Reflections on the Role of the Church in Building Sustainable Peace in the North Rift Region of Kenya

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Cover Photo: This road was once seen as the boundary between Pokot and Marakwet communities in Lelan, West Pokot District. It is now a meeting place for those working on a joint cattle dip project in the area.

All photos, including cover, courtesy of the Catholic Diocese of Eldoret or Matthew Bolton.

*To the local peacebuilders,  
who struggle against prejudice,  
seeing the face of God in the Other;  
who call for justice,  
yet yearn for forgiveness;  
who support healing, in their own woundedness,  
and seek a society transformed.*

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# FOREWORD

Too often we hear of religion fueling violence by legitimizing and motivating hatred. But people of faith also serve as peacebuilders, reconcilers and voices of prophetic vision. God calls us to see the divine in all people and so, if we are to be faithful disciples, we must work for peace, provide healing to those broken by war and struggle for a more just society. This requires theological reflection that speaks to particular social contexts. We must consider what Christianity means beyond a cathedral's doors, out in the world. In this book, we hear from practitioners reflecting on ministry in the midst of violence. They offer a theology of reconciliation at the grassroots level, which while rooted in the scripture and doctrine, refuses to be detached from the everyday realities of milking cows, rebuilding houses or living with the pain of loss.

Maridhiano Mashinani raises important questions for peacebuilding practitioners about the difficult dilemmas that contexts of violence pose. How does restorative justice go beyond standard state-centric legal frameworks and offer a path that includes more parties and more opportunities for a chance at wholeness for survivors, perpetrators and their wider communities? How might our desire for reconciliation create tension between our competing desires and need for truth, justice, mercy and peace? What is the role of forgiveness in the process of reconciliation? There are no easy answers here. These

questions are important in any post-conflict setting and the stories here document the ways these questions have been raised in the particular context of Kenya.

I believe that Maridhiano Mashinani will be tremendously useful to practitioners and students of peacebuilding in places far from the book's Kenyan origins.

**Dr. Emily Welty**

*Vice-Moderator, World Council of Churches Commission on  
International Affairs*

*Director of Peace and Justice Studies, Pace University New York City  
Main Representative of the International Peace Research Association  
to the United Nations*



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks be to God, the giver and sustainer of life, who sent us a model of the ministry of reconciliation in Jesus Christ. But God's work also requires human hands and we wish to acknowledge all those people and agencies that have assisted us in our work.

This book was collaboratively written by the Catholic Diocese of Eldoret's Justice and Peace Commission – led by Bishop Cornelius Korir, Samuel Kosgei, James Kimisoi and Florence Njeri. We were supported by Dr. Matthew Bolton of Pace University in New York City, William Kiptoo of the Mennonite Central Committee in Kenya and Professor Ronald Pagnucco of the College of Saint Benedict/St. John's University. However, we must acknowledge that authorship is never individual – our ideas come out of our conversations with the people in the communities with whom we work in the effort to bring about peace and reconciliation. They too are, in a sense, authors of this work, though we accept responsibility for any errors or misunderstandings on our part.

We particularly thank the Peace Committees in Lelan, Yamumbi/Kapteldon, Burnt Forest and Timboroa as well as the psychosocial groups in Kapsoya/Kimumu and Timboroa. We appreciate the time taken to explain the local situation by to David Longoripuo, Kenneth Lomiapong and the other staff of the Lelan

Highland Dairy Plant as well as Principal Abraham Lagat of St. Cecilia Koiluget Mixed Day Secondary School.

Many clergy and staff of the Diocese contributed to this project: Father George A. Okoth, Father Stephen Njure, Sister Alice Chelgo and Hephzybah Luvembe as well as the following parish priests: Father Hillary Kemboi (Timboroa), Father Gilbert Mburu (Burnt Forest), Father Barry Oliver (Kapsoya), Father Mariusy Piotr Kubitsa, (Kimumu) and Father Gideon Nana (Yamumbi).

Finally, we wanted to offer our especial thanks to Professor Ronald Pagnucco, who read our previous book – *Amani Mashinani* – and generously provided funding for us to do this one. This project would not have been possible without his faith in us and the peacebuilding work of Eldoret Diocese.

# 1

## INTRODUCTION

*Jacob said, “O God ... Deliver me, please ... from the hand of Esau, for I am afraid of him.... But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept. ... Jacob said, ... ‘please; if I find favor with you, then accept my present from my hand; for truly to see your face is like seeing the face of God....’*

– Genesis 32:9, 11; 33:4, 10. NRSV.

Reconciliation after violent conflict is a subtle, slow and often difficult process that is not just about ending observable fighting. It also involves communities recognizing the worth of others, atone for injustice, heal wounds of the spirit and commit to building a non-violent, equitable and just society. While external actors can support it, sustainable reconciliation requires an intensive focus at the grassroots by faith institutions and local civil society to build relationships of interdependence.

How do we reconcile after violent conflict? This ancient question is of renewed relevance to us in Kenya, as we struggle to build peace after the post-election clashes of 2007, the cyclical election violence in the 1990s, long years of impunity and extrajudicial violence and a legacy of colonial repression. When Jesus disarmed the Apostle Peter in the Garden of Gethsemane, when he commanded that we love our neighbor as ourselves and turn the other cheek, he challenged us to build a new society rooted in respect and non-violence, rather than the maiming and killing of our rivals. But how do we do this in our context and our time? Particularly since 2007, a multitude of organizations and leaders have proposed one method or another bring healing to Kenya; peacebuilding projects come and go. Some of these efforts have been admirable, even heroic. Some have been problematic, even exacerbating conflict. Reviewing these modest successes and frightening failures suggests that there is no panacea, no simple magic solution. Beware of false prophets who offer a quick, cheap and easy way to the New Jerusalem! But in this country, where there is widespread participation in faith institutions, the church must join with its members in struggling to discern a way out of intractability. For there is an important role for the intensive engagement of the church in seeking *maridhiano mashinani* – reconciliation at the grassroots level.

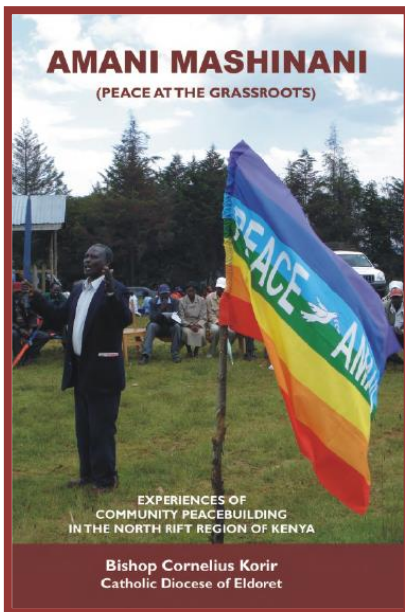
**There is no magic solution to the process of reconciling**

**The church's embrace of the grassroots is not fickle**

The church has a sustained presence in the community. Its embrace of the grassroots is not fickle. It does not come and go with donor fashions or the waxing and waning of great powers' foreign policy interests. As people displaced by the 2007 violence converged on our churches in the Diocese of Eldoret, we learned that we could offer sanctuary, an inclusive refuge. As we brought people together in the aftermath, we learned that clergy and lay leaders can facilitate local dialogue and perform "good offices", providing safe space for discussion and the consecration of agreements. As we reach out the communities in our

diocese that are often seen as “remote” – as one Pokot elder told me “we don’t get many visitors” – we include those excluded by other development and peacebuilding efforts. Indeed, Pope Francis has challenged the church in Africa to “to renew and build up a culture of solidarity.”

The church is rooted in a faith that there can be hope for “things unseen”, offering inspiration and vision of the possibility of new life. The church is used to wrestling with difficult ethical dilemmas and thus can provoke inquiry and debate of hard questions. The church has a long prophetic tradition that offers a model of how to call to account those in power. To those victimized by oppression, we can offer healing, consolation and pastoral support. And to those who have perpetrated the violence, the church offers mercy, the possibility of atonement and remission of sins, both for individuals and society as a whole. But at the very least – even if the church has nothing material to give – clergy and laypeople can listen. The church must be a mother, embracing all people and providing them with an empathetic ear.



In 2009, along with the staff of our Justice and Peace Commission, Bishop Korir wrote a book rooted in our experience of peacebuilding in the Diocese of Eldoret called *Amani Mashinani (Peace at the Grassroots): Experiences of Community Peacebuilding in the North Rift Region of Kenya*. We described the work providing relief and sanctuary to those affected by election violence in the 1990s and 2007, as well as our efforts to promote local dialogues for peace. Frustrated by the tendency of peacebuilding efforts to focus on roundtables of elites in urban hotels, we sought to refocus attention on building

peace in at the grassroots. Reflecting on our experience we outlined key principles and a step-by-step process, building from initial

interventions and tentative cross-community contacts to intra-group meetings and joint ‘connector projects’. We provided detailed case studies of our work helping to establish and sustain local “Peace Committees” in the communities of Yamumbi/Kapteldon and Burnt Forest and identified the qualities of values of an effective local peacebuilder, who loves peace, embodies an ethic of public service and is a patient, respected connector of people.

### **Principles of *Amani Mashinani***

- 1. Grassroots Focus**
- 2. Fairness and Neutrality**
- 3. Mediation and Facilitation**
- 4. Inclusivity**
- 5. Trust and Confidence Building**
- 6. Local Ownership and Empowerment**
- 7. Consciousness Raising**
- 8. Spontaneity, Openness and Creativity**
- 9. Accountability and Transparency**
- 10. Long-term Commitment**

Much has happened in the six years since we wrote *Amani Mashinani*. International attention to Kenya, and the donor funds it attracted for peacebuilding programs, has dwindled. As a tentative stability has returned some of the groups profiled in the book have not sustained the intensive cross-community dialogues of the early post-election period. However, we have been impressed by the ongoing resourcefulness, resilience and capacity of the communities in which we work. Many continue to struggle to overcome the legacy of violence and prevent future fighting. We have become increasingly aware of the need to deepen and extend our initial reflections recorded in *Amani Mashinani*, to tell the stories of communities we did not profile in that work, to think theologically about what we are doing and to consider the challenges of long-term reconciliation: *Maridhiano Mashinani*.

***Amani Mashinani's 12 Steps of Community Peacebuilding***

- 1. Analysis, Intervention and Interruption**
- 2. Protection, Sanctuary and Relief**
- 3. One-to-One Meetings**
- 4. Small Group to Small Group Meetings**
- 5. Sharing Food**
- 6. Intra-Ethnic Meetings**
- 7. Airing of Grievances**
- 8. Preparation of Agenda and Inter-Ethnic Meetings**
- 9. Reporting Back and Caucusing with Communities**
- 10. Peace Connector Projects**
- 11. Social Contract**
- 12. Monitoring and Ongoing Development of the Agenda**

But what is reconciliation? Perhaps there can be no simple, all-encompassing definition of this multi-faceted word. Its complexities are what we will explore in this book, intended as a second volume or sequel to *Amani Mashinani*. We believe that reconciliation is an ongoing, never complete process, not an end-state. Reconciliation is also more than an end to observable violence, even more than the establishment of dialogue between formerly warring communities. Reconciliation involves, at a minimum, the struggle:

1. To recognize the value, dignity and inherent worth of 'the Other', those who have been considered enemies, strangers and outside the bounds of our communities' obligations,
2. To seek atonement for injustices perpetrated and suffered, through accountability, confession, restitution, assistance for victims and – most difficultly – forgiveness,
3. To heal the spiritual wounds and psychological trauma wrought by the violence,
4. To build a new, non-violent, equitable and just society – a reordering of the political, economic and cultural structures that generated the violence.

This is challenging work. It is much more subtle and slow than the initial efforts to establish peace and demands much from those involved, whether former combatants, victims or external actors. The four elements listed can even sometimes work at cross purposes. Indeed, the temptation is to declare it all but impossible. But we have found that in its scriptures, tradition and doctrine, the church offers many resources for those committed to the effort. For our faith demands that we believe in the innate goodness and potential of human beings and their societies. We believe in a Holy Spirit that calls us to rise above our broken present to reach for renewal.

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Our reflections in this book are rooted in our specific experience in the North Rift region of Kenya, mostly within the Catholic Diocese of Eldoret, but also in some of the surrounding areas. In this volume, we update the story of the two communities we profiled in *Amani Mashinani* – Yamumbi/Kapteldon and Burnt Forest. But we also wanted to expand our scope and share the good news of the work going on in additional communities: Lelan, Timboroa, Kapsoya and the border region of the Turkana and Pokot communities. We profile the work of the local ‘Peace Committees’ and the ‘Peace Connector Projects’, psycho-social peer support groups, community self-help development efforts and the church itself.

**Our faith  
demands  
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the potential  
of all people**





**Eldoret Diocese Justice and Peace Commission staff member Florence Njeri stands with a local child on the bridge spanning Yamumbi and Kapteeldon communities, a Peace Connector project of the local Peace Committee.**

Lelan is a community spanning the Elgeyo Marakwet/ West Pokot county border in the Cherangani Hills with people of both the Marakwet and Pokot ethnic groups. The area is mainly highlands with large swaths of forested land. Water is plentiful and both communities practicing mixed system of farming mostly they grow potatoes, pyrethrum cabbages and keep wool sheep and cattle. While both Pokot and Marakwet people had long engaged in ritual cattle rustling, the advent of the AK-47 and the commercialization of black market cattle trading, raiding became more frequent and deadly. In 1997 the conflict become very volatile and the Diocese intervened. Bishop Korir met with elders, opinion leaders, women and youth. After facilitating a ceasefire, the Diocese supported small projects, assisting in building shared primary schools, a water project and cattle dips.

Yamumbi/Kapteldon is on the outskirts of Eldoret municipality, in the south-west of Uasin Gishu County, around 8km from the town. It comprises two villages: Yamumbi, population 10,000, which is mainly inhabited by people from the Kikuyu ethnic group and Kapteldon, population 15,000, mostly Kalenjin. The two communities are divided by the River Lemook. The area was part of the so-called “White Highlands” – land formerly alienated and settled by white colonists. The terrain is flat, it receives plenty of rain and is good for agriculture, particularly maize and livestock.

Yamumbi/Kapteldon was badly affected by the 2007 post-election violence, in which political leaders exploited latent ethnic tensions. In this region, violence was mobilized along Kalenjin versus Kikuyu lines. Many houses were burned to the ground, 20 people were killed and many displaced. The conflict has roots going back to the early Independence era, in which there was a struggle over distributing the land vacated by white settlers. Many Kalenjin believed the area was their ancestral land while the government maintained that every citizen had a right to buy the land from the state. The issues remained salient but burst into violence during the agitation for multiparty democracy in 1991/1992, when politicians started inciting communities against each other, using the land question as a wedge. Ensuing elections stirred further violence, coming to a climax in 2007/2008.

We work in several other communities in the Eldoret region which were similarly affected by the 2007 post-election violence. Burnt Forest is 40km east of Eldoret town, a rural township made up of three locations: Tarakwa, Olare and Oleinguse. Its 30,000 people are mostly of the Kikuyu and Kalenjin ethnic groups, though there are also minorities of Turkana, Kisii, Luo and Luhya descent. The terrain is flat with cool temperatures; most of the people are subsistence farmers growing wheat, maize potatoes and beans and keeping dairy cattle. Timboroa is a rural community 70 km east of Eldoret town, spanning Baringo, Kericho and Uasin Gishu counties. Most of the residents are Kalenjin and Kikuyu. Kapsoya/Kimumu is a peri-urban suburb on the northeastern side of Eldoret town with a mixed population, the majority of whom are Kalenjin, Kikuyu and Luhya. Most of the residents are

**Ethnicity and land have been used as wedges by politicians during elections**



**Local Peace Committee members stand in front of a new Administration Block at St. Cecilia Koiluguet Mixed Day Secondary School, a Peace Connector project in the Burnt Forest region.**

tenants, working in town. Kapsoya is a middle class residential estate while Kimumu is more economically marginalized.

Our most recent area of work is actually in the Lodwar and Kitale Dioceses. Bishop Korir was asked by the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops to mediate between conflicting Pokot and Turkana communities in the area stretching from the Amakuriet/ Lorengipi border point at the North to the Kapedo/Silale point at the East. This includes Kainuk, Loyapat, Kakong, Kaptir, Nakwamoru, Katilu and Kabelbok in Turkana County and Ombolion, Kases, Karoon, Nasolot, Sarmach, Orwa, Lami Nyeusi and Mosol in West Pokot County. The communities are populated mostly by nomadic pastoralists, with a few residents of Turkana County having having embraced irrigated agriculture through the assistance of the government and NGOs. There are more schools in Turkana County than on the West Pokot side. As a result, more Turkana children have gone to school. Indeed, there are no schools at all in Kases, Ombolion and Karoon villages.

This borderland area is now very tense and volatile, with attacks from both communities, leading to loss of life and property,

displacement of population as well as disruption of livelihood. The Pokot and Turkana people have in the past peacefully shared limited resources across their borders without much difficulty. However, the political dynamics have changed and as the two pastoralist communities competed over the resources, the traditional conflict resolution mechanisms are not working. The proliferation of small arms and light weapons through porous international borders has complicated matters once easily handled by elders. Conflicts have become more complex and violent in frequency, fatality and intensity, fueled by competing interests over livestock, watering points, grazing lands and development projects like the Turkwel Gorge Hydro power station.

In preparing this book, we interviewed many of the participants in our local peacebuilding projects. We relate many of their stories and quote them in this text. However, we have anonymized them to prevent potential backlash against those who are doing the risky work of resisting violence. We have tried to relate our experience in the North Rift region to concepts that draw on and will be recognizable to other practitioners and researchers operating in the broader context of peacebuilding. We do not set this book up to be a formal case study in any generalizable, social scientific sense. Nor do we claim that the lessons of our experience will necessarily be transferable to other settings. However, people working in other communities affected by violence may nonetheless find similarities and resonances that enable them to learn from our situation.

The approach described both in *Amani Mashinani* and this book is faith-based, intensive, holistic and sustained. It is focused on the grassroots, rather than the national or international levels. We should be careful to explain that this approach does not supersede national and international peacemaking processes, but is intended to feed into, contribute to and hold these broader efforts accountable. This means we must be careful not to claim as our own successes that depend on wider developments at the national, regional and global levels. Our Diocese exists in a wider context that influences – both positively and negatively – what happens on the ground. Nevertheless, we believe that people at the grassroots are not held entirely hostage to external

**Our approach is faith-based, grassroots-focused, intensive, holistic and sustained**

events and hostile currents beyond their own communities. People can resist ethnic polarization, build resilient links across boundaries and work together for a culture of peace at the local level. We do not

**We can  
resist ethnic  
hostility and  
build a local  
culture of  
peace**

have to accept with passivity the efforts of those with vested interests in discord and impunity. Indeed, as we started working in the long unstable border region of West Pokot and Turkana in 2014, many commentators were skeptical about the possibility of any progress. Many Kenyans in the south have written off their fellow *wananchi* in the arid regions of the north. When fighting has been going on for a long time, people find it hard to believe change is achievable. But as the church we believe that

God loves all people and can transform even the most broken situations.

While there is much written by practitioners and scholars about how external agencies can intervene to stop violence or build capacities for peace, there is less written by Kenyans reflecting in their own context. Much of this existing material is very useful and we aim not to replace it. But rather we articulate here a particular theory of change rooted in the specific setting of the North Rift region. It is driven by the conviction that long-term change in our situation will require: *an intensive focus on the grassroots led by the vibrant involvement of the church and local civil society to bring conflicting people into dialogue and build relationships of interdependence. This requires a sustained effort lasting years, even decades, beyond the rapid cycle of projects and donor timelines.* For example, in our recent effort working in the West Pokot/Turkana border region, we have found that bringing community leaders to discussions in hotels in Eldoret is insufficient. Both the Bishop and our Diocese staff have made many trips to communities – including those very remote – and spoken with a wide range of elders, warriors and women.

**Reconciling  
requires a  
long-term  
focus  
beyond  
donor  
timelines**

This book is intended to reach several different audiences. First and foremost, it is intended to communicate to a Kenyan audience (both at the community and national levels) the challenges and possibilities of reconciliation at the level of the

grassroots. We aim to call the attention of those in the political arena to the potential of alternatives to the entrenched systems of violence and exploitation that too often dominate our country. It is also aimed at those working with churches and other faith-based institutions in communities affected by conflict, both in Kenya and beyond. But it will also be of interest to practitioners of conflict resolution and peacebuilding in secular civil society organizations, UN agencies and international donors.

We have been surprised and humbled to learn that *Amani Mashinani* has been used for teaching in several academic settings. While this is not a scholarly work, we have nevertheless attempted to write this volume with an eye to the interests of those who study conflict. Our reflections may be of relevance to those studying concepts like contact theory, restorative justice, trauma healing, peacebuilding and development. However, informed by exegesis of the Bible, the African tradition and our personal experiences, we avoid academic language, aiming more for understanding than technical precision. This means we may sometimes use terms like “reconciliation” in ways that may seem imprecise to scholars or conflate it with other notions, like restorative justice. However, our goal is not to prescribe or plumb academic concepts in depth, but instead to share the praxis of the Diocese and the communities with which it works. We thus acknowledge there may be internal tensions and contradictions within the book that derive from the complexities of engaging with the conflict itself. We certainly would welcome the input of academics and other intellectuals in engaging with, critiquing and reflecting on this work from their own areas of expertise.

Following this introduction, the book is divided into four parts, each covering the key aspects of reconciliation we identified above. We start with an overview of how communities where we worked came to recognize the inherent worth of those previously seen as enemies. We then narrate stories of atonement, restitution and forgiveness we have witnessed. This is followed by a reflection on the efforts by peer support groups meeting in our churches to seek healing of the psycho-social wounds caused by some two decades of conflict. We then present efforts by community groups in our Diocese to refashion their economy and society in ways that support inclusive and equitable production, rather than corruption and rancor. We conclude with reflections on how our experience may offer lessons for others struggling with legacies of violence, inequality and division.

# 2

## RECOGNITION

*God created humankind in his image,  
in the image of God he created them;  
male and female he created them....*

– Genesis 1:27. NRSV.

**Reconciliation requires mutually recognizing the humanity of people who we have seen as our enemies. This mirrors a kind of conversion process, in which we see the image of God in other people. We have found that formalizing recognition through some kind of covenant enables us to extend to ‘Others’ the value and protection we afford ourselves. Such a ‘social contract’ must be sustained through working together on projects that establish and sustain linkages across divisions and through regular, ritualized renewal.**



In the midst of the 1997 election-related violence, conflict between well-armed Pokot and Marakwet communities in the Kerio Valley spilled over into the ‘highland’ region, where previously there had been less ethnic polarization. The Pokot and Marakwet communities in the highlands were more mixed and less heavily armed. However, this made them more vulnerable to attack and cattle rustling from people displaced from the lowlands. Boundaries between these farming communities, which had previously been permeable and diffuse, hardened and people in these borderlands – mostly from Kamelei down through Kapsangar to Kapsait in Lelan – started to flee, taking their cattle with them. The disruption caused many cattle to die.

In the highland villages of Lelan, local elders were alarmed at the rapid deterioration of cross-community relations. While no one had been killed, there was significant displacement and many in the community were worried about the potential for widespread violence. As a result, they invited our Diocese to work with them in reducing tensions. I began having conversations with local elders. We also appointed James Kimisoi the coordinator of our Diocesan Justice and Peace Commission, who had considerable experience in the area, having worked on a child development project for another organization. Reflecting on that time, community members tell us, “We experienced so much pain” and that the highland Pokot and Marakwet had come to “consider each other enemies.” But because “we saw the loss,” they said, many people determined on an individual level that the violence needed to halt. But how were they to meet similar people on the “other side”?

The Diocese discerned that it could play a contribution in facilitating these cross-community contacts and dialogue. The Bishop met individually with local elders and community leaders who expressed an interest or at least openness to discussions. Bishop Korir then slowly introduced these people to each other, moving on to hold ‘peace meetings’ in the community, in churches and in the town. “At the beginning,” as one elder told us, “there was a lot of suspicion.” Many of our peace meetings were disrupted by people who saw them as a threat. But the conversations continued. Eventually, the leaders in the peace meetings agreed to put pressure on their respective communities to

**Bishop  
Korir  
introduced  
people from  
both sides  
who were  
interested in  
peace**



halt the destructive cycle of cattle raids. While this had some impact, occasional incidents continued and the peace meetings began to consider ways to deepen and sustain their progress.

In conversations facilitated by the Diocese, the community members discussed the ways in which each community's culture had traditions for holding accountable those who commit acts of violence. Both the Marakwet and Pokot cultures have a custom which they call *lapai*. The particulars differ between the two groups. But in both, *lapai* demands that a murderer must publically accept responsibility for their crime, request forgiveness and pay compensation to the victim's family in the form of cattle, livestock and other property. Where the killer is unable to pay the compensation, the killer's family and clan must take on communal responsibility for making sure the victims are given their just deserts. However, in both Marakwet and Pokot custom, *lapai* only applied internally, when the victim and killer were from the same culture. If the victim was from another ethnic group, they were not entitled to the confession and compensation required by *lapai*. In fact, community members told us, at times the violence of young men who raided other communities for cattle was praised and encouraged.

Inspired by similar negotiations in Koloa in which the Diocese and some of the community leaders had been involved, the participants in the peace meetings in Lelan, Kapsait and Kamelei decided to extend

**Both Pokot  
and  
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violence**

to each other the protections of *lapai*. If a Pokot person killed a Marakwet person, then the victim's family would be no less entitled to confession and compensation than if the victim had been Pokot. And vice versa. The peace committees also extended to each other customary norms regarding stolen cattle. In both cultures, stealing a cow from someone within your culture required both the return of the animal, plus additional livestock in compensation. These did not apply to cattle stolen from other communities. However, the members of the peace committee agreed to demand thieves compensate their victims with five cattle for each cow stolen, even if the

livestock was stolen from the 'other' community. But we, and participants in the peace meetings, felt that it was not enough simply to say that the traditional customs of reconciliation like *lapai* now

applied to 'outsiders'. Nice sentiments could easily disappear in future outbreaks of violence. As a result, the peace meetings became long and arduous negotiations over a new 'social contract', formalizing these commitments. This agreement was formalized through a binding oath and the ritual slaughter of an animal to include the ancestors in the pact. As one Peace Committee member told us this symbolized the extension of lapai's protection to all: "We changed our perception. There is no calling each other enemy. We are all one people."

Now when someone steals a cow there is considerable community pressure to give it back, plus compensation. The elders from both the Pokot and Marakwet communities meet to try to resolve the problem and prevent it leading to further violence. This and other efforts in the community, such as the peace connector projects we will discuss in chapter 4, have created conditions for the reestablishment of peace in Lelan. People who had fled during the conflict have now returned. There is now freedom of movement across the 'border' between the Pokot and Marakwet communities, intermarriages and economic exchange.

**'There is no calling each other enemy. We are all one people.'**

In 2006, the social contract was put to test when a Marakwet man killed a Pokot man. The Diocesan Justice and Peace Commission mediated between the families of the perpetrator and victim and facilitated a settlement. The community investigated what happened and found the person responsible. There were cross-community as well as intra-ethnic meetings to discuss the crisis. Finally, the killer was brought to a gathering of both communities where he accepted responsibility for compensating the victim's family. Some of the cattle were paid by the murderer and others by his wider community as an acceptance of shared responsibility.

In recent conversations with the peace committees in Lelan, community members told us that, "The church contributed a lot to this process. They facilitated meetings, brought people to neutral locations when it was not possible to meet locally." They appreciated that the "Bishop came a lot" to the communities and "That process was founded on faith." While they may be simply being gracious to us as their visitors, as we reflect on our experiences in their communities we have seen that people of faith have theological resources, as well as



**Members of the Lelan Peace Committee at a cattle dip constructed as a Peace Connector project on the boundary between Pokot and Marakwet communities.**

an especial responsibility to work in solidarity with those suffering the impact of violent conflict. The experience of the peace meetings in Lelan illustrates one of the most crucial aspects of reconciliation: the recognition that people outside one's own community are human beings of innate worth, dignity and value. One of the most transformative moments in a conflict is when we begin to see other people -- those we view as "Them" -- as deserving of the same respect of those seen as "Us."

This is at the core of Jesus' teaching, when he called us to "do to others as you would have them do to you" (Matthew 6:16 NRSV). Indeed, we are commanded to "show hospitality" to and not underestimate those who seem to us strange and different, "for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it" (Hebrews 13:2 NRSV). The New Testament teaches us that the radical good news is that the covenant of God's grace is not exclusive to one culture, class or ethnicity, but extends to all people. As the Apostle Paul, writes, "There is neither Greek nor Jew" – we might add Pokot nor Marakwet, Kalenjin nor Kikuyu – "for all of you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28 NRSV). As a member of the Yamumbi/Kapteldon Peace Committee told us, in reflection on their experiences of grassroots peacebuilding, "There is no tribe which is

more worthy than another. We are all equal in the eyes of God.” Every person, no matter their background, is made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). A participant in the Timboroa psycho-social group reflecting on her experience sharing her trauma with people from conflicting ethnic groups told us she had learned that “Humanity is one – the language is different, but we are one.”

### Recognition as Conversion

The book of Acts relates a key moment in life of the early Jerusalem church, when the disciples struggled to determine whether to open their community to Gentiles. While the Apostle Peter is praying, he sees a vision in which he is commanded to eat many things forbidden by religious law. When he refuses, a voice tells him, “What God has made clean, you must not call profane” (Acts 10:15 NRSV). In this vision, Peter is challenged to stretch beyond the bounds of his comfort, to accept those who were foreign and taboo as his own people. He is challenged to welcome into the church the centurion Cornelius, who would not only be seen by Peter as unclean, but also as the representative of a violent and repressive occupying force. But when Peter sees the genuine and earnest commitment of Cornelius he remembers his vision and is moved to accept him into the fold, saying, “I truly understand that God shows no partiality” (Acts 10: 34 NRSV).

**In retelling  
stories of  
reconciliation  
we should  
avoid erasing  
its complexity**

It is, perhaps, easy to quote scripture and call people to love one another. But of course it is not an easy thing to do. The book of Acts reports that disciples even as venerable as the Apostle Peter struggled to overcome their prejudices and embrace those who were so different. How much harder it is for us who did not live and walk with the Messiah during his time on earth! We have not had the privilege of watching Jesus extend his embrace to the leper, the Samaritan, the child, the supposedly unclean. We must discern instead inspiration in similar acts of generosity and compassion in the communities that surround us in our place and time.

The retelling of stories such as that of Lelan can erase some of the complexity, false starts and hard work that went into producing the eventual agreement to extend lapai beyond the bounds of the

community to others. Recognition literally means to think in new ways. To recognize the other is to see them – and ourselves – in new light. Saul felt so threatened by the early Christians that he was “breathing threats and murder against the disciples” (Acts 9:1 NRSV). But after his experience of divine challenge on the road to Damascus, he found in their midst the source of his salvation. To honor the profundity of his transformation, he changed his name to Paul. In recognizing the other, he could no longer be the same.

But this conversion came with great pain and trepidation. Saul was struck to the ground, blinded and could not eat for three days. When God told Ananias to go minister to Saul, Ananias was afraid to go near Saul, because of “how much evil he has done” (Acts 9:13 NRSV). Similarly, when Saul tried to join the disciples in Jerusalem, “they were all afraid of him” (Acts 9: 26). It was not enough for Saul to simply see the Christians as good people, he had to make himself vulnerable. Indeed it was only when he had put himself at risk for the disciples, “speaking boldly in the name of the Lord” to skeptical people who attempted to kill him, that the disciples saw his commitment was genuine (Acts 9: 28-29 NRSV). Conversion is thus not complete in a flash, but takes arduous work. His conversion impelled him, as the title of the Book suggests, to Acts. Recognizing the worth of the other requires work and constant renewal. Paul put his life in danger for his new faith, travelled throughout his known world, walking hundreds of miles together with those he had once persecuted.

**In  
recognizing  
the worth of  
others we  
ourselves  
are  
transformed**

### **Walking Together**

As part of our effort to facilitate peacebuilding in West Pokot/Turkana, in July 2015 we partnered with the Aegis Trust which organized a “Champions’ Walk for Peace” through the North Rift Valley, from Lodwar, through seven counties affected by conflict to the shore of Lake Bogoria. Led by a diverse delegation of prominent Kenyan long-distance runners, local activists and civil society carried a “Torch of Humanity” for more than 500 miles (over 800km). Bishop Korir met them at their journey’s end to celebrate their achievement. For the Diocese, we see efforts like this as a kind of symbolic pilgrimage,

showing that formerly conflicting communities can literally walk together in peace. Of course, as former Pokot cattle rustler and now star runner and peace activist Julius Arile said, “Completing the Walk for Peace is just the start of the challenge.” Peacebuilding requires trekking through difficult terrain for many years to see sustainable progress.

Working in Lelan, we learned that recognizing the humanity of people outside one’s in-group required a long process of talking, working and eating together, discovering the local values that bridge differences. It is through being in each other’s presence, engaging in small-talk, sharing meals and experiencing the successes and setbacks of joint projects that we develop empathy for the other. We have learned these lessons again as our Diocese has struggled to

**Being in  
each other’s  
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we develop  
empathy**

help our people reconcile after the horrific post-election violence of 2007. Again, we found it impossible to pretend we as a faith institution could remain outside the conflict, for as one community member in Burnt Forest put it, “Whenever there is conflict people run to the church – people believe they will be safe there.” This meant we had to act. At the most basic level, as one community member recalled, we can help by “praying for peace and preaching peace to the people.” Another person agreed, saying, “The church speaks in a louder voice and the government hears them more than

individuals.” But it is not enough to speak about peace. As we described in our book *Amani Mashinani*, our Diocese began facilitate grassroots peace dialogues. In fact, we took people from conflicted areas like Burnt Forest to speak with the Pokot and Marakwet communities we had worked with in the late 1990s and early 2000s so that they could talk with them about what they had done to reconcile. As one member of a Burnt Forest Peace Committee said, “we copied from them.”

A key element of our work with the village Peace Committees has been helping to organize events, programs and projects that simply exposes people from conflicting communities to each other. For we have found that these repeated nonviolent encounters form the bedrock of more complex conversations. Ongoing, sustained dialogue



**A meeting of the Yamumbi/Kapteldon Peace Committee**

cannot only be our initiative (as external actors), but must be owned by members of the local communities that – though in conflict – trust each other enough to keep struggling together for reconciliation. As one Yamumbi/Kapteldon Peace Committee member told us, “You will never find peace by attacking each other, but only by sitting down and talking to each other.” A fellow participant said, “We have learned to respect each others’ rights.”

For example, in sharing their stories in psychosocial groups (described in more detail in chapter 3), community members realize that people from ‘the other side’ are also suffering. In Yamumbi/Kapteldon, the Peace Committee asked the oldest people in the community to narrate their memories to the youth and many other groups, to build a common story and counteract misinformation and misperceptions of past injustices. In Burnt Forest the church has helped establish groups of mixed ethnic backgrounds who lend small amounts of money to each other and talk about peace at the monthly meetings.

A member of the Yamumbi/Kapteldon Youth Peace Committee told us that Catholic youth exchange programs – in which young people visit each other’s churches – have helped build trust across community boundaries. “Since we believe in one God and share in one Holy Communion, we are Christians and so are not divided,” he



told us. He and his peers have participated in prayer vigils, night prayers and youth missions together, even staying overnight in the homes of families from other communities. Visiting each other's congregations in the joint communities of Yamumbi/Kapteldon, he said that, "We have to walk through their area." While in the recent past, he would have kept to the roads and major pathways, his friends on "the other side" have shown him "shortcuts through the farms", which he now takes. "It means there is a lot of trust," he said, as he now feels safe walking across the property of people outside his ethnic group. "Exposure," he told us, "enabled us to learn from each other." Other members of the Yamumbi/Kapteldon Peace Committee agreed with this young man, saying that repeated interactions across lines meant that "The level of fear went down. If you are going to the borderline, you don't need the company of many others – we can go to the pub on the other side after dark." Another said "We now receive invitations to ceremonies – like weddings and funerals – on both sides."

The members of the Tarakwa Peace Committee in Burnt Forest have seen a change in the behavior of children, who now more readily play with peers from the 'other side', as well as their parents now sharing farm machinery and working together in the marketplace. The Peace Committee, once dismissed by community members as "betrayers" of their respective ethnicities, have now earned respect and legitimacy and people report incidents to them. For example, somebody cut down a tree near the boundary between two house plots, one owned by a Kikuyu and the other by a Kalenjin. It was not clear who was the owner of the tree, because it was on the boundary. Each of the

**'Exposure  
enabled us  
to learn  
from each  
other'**

conflicting partners tried to convince their respective communities that the tree was theirs. Someone let the Peace Committee know that this was happening and had the potential to draw in tensions. The Peace Committee mediated between the two owners, who eventually agreed to split the tree between them. But the Peace Committee also saw the potential to transform this clash into an opportunity for further cross-community interaction, telling the property owners, "if the tree is the source of conflict, you should plant more trees." The Peace Committee organized an event in which members of the Kalenjin community planted two tree on the Kikuyu side and vice versa. This small group now waters the trees in turns and will take care of the



trees till maturity.” By exchanging these gifts and making a solemn agreement for future engagement and interaction, the members of this community have, in effect, committed to the long, hard work of renewing their reconciliation.

It is crucial throughout such efforts that the local community feels that they own the process. For example, in West Pokot and Turkana, we only facilitate dialogue and help move the parties around to meet with each other. Dialogue cannot be forced or be solely on the initiative of outsiders. The dialogue must be driven by their mutual concerns – such as their recent progress on discussing of shared use of the River Turkwel – not those of national and international actors.

### Renewal of the New Covenant

Sustaining the reconciliation process is difficult, particularly when external interest and funding for peacebuilding declines. Efforts that are not sufficiently deeply rooted in the local community – like seed on rocky ground – often wilt and fade (Luke 8: 4-15). As Christians, we know that it is not enough to be baptized, we must continue to struggle to be good disciples. When new incidents arise, it can be easy for people to turn inwards and forget the worth of neighbors they so

**Sustaining  
reconciliation  
is difficult  
when interest  
declines**

readily embraced only months before. One Peace Committee we spoke with recently, formed in the aftermath of the 2007 post-election violence, has struggled to maintain the interest of community members, as the conflict recedes from everyday concern. As money for dialogues and peace connector projects declined, the Peace Committee has struggled to pay for transport and food and the inter-community conversation has

dwindled. Government co-option of some of the peace effort has made it difficult to sustain a parallel civil-society process. A Burnt Forest Peace Committee member told us that they have realized that they cannot “only speak to each other.” To sustain their success, they need to bring in new people. Indeed, following his conversion, the Apostle Paul was not content to keep his new recognition to himself. He was compelled to share the Good News with others and patiently mentor the new congregations he helped start.

Several of the local Peace Committees – in Burnt Forest, Yamumbi/Kapteldon and Lelan – have told us that following the reconciliation process they see more intermarriages. They have spoken out in defense of those who have started blended families when community members question the loyalties of those who marry across ethnic boundaries. While this may seem an unusual way of measuring the progress of peace, we find it particularly meaningful. For in the sacrament of marriage, we find the reproduction of God's covenant with us, which two people promise to honor, respect and care for one another – a commitment that, to be honored, requires continual renewal. A breakthrough moment in the peace negotiations in Yamumbi and Kapteldon occurred when an elder in the Peace Committee invited people from “the other side” to attend a family engagement ceremony. The guests brought with them a bag of rice in gratitude and soon this was replicated in the other direction. It seems fitting that weddings have played such an important role in renewing peace in community.

**Renewal,  
ritual and  
celebration  
re-center our  
attention**

Working with a wide range of stakeholders, the Diocese has worked very hard to reduce number of attacks along the main highway in the West Pokot/Turkana border region. We persuaded the West Pokot elders to speak out against the banditry. Showing their commitment, they performed a ceremony “cleansing” the road. This both symbolically atoned for the blood that had been shed along the road but also cursed any future violator of their injunction that the road be safe for all travelers. Since then, until the time of writing, there have been no attacks along the road.

In the Bible, God goes beyond merely communicating divine love to people. God establishes a covenant – a divine contract – to assure them of everlasting, unwavering grace. But the Hebrew people and early Christians understood that such a covenant requires constant reminder and renewal to keep alive in human hearts. The Sabbath, ritual, prayer, holidays and the Holy Eucharist center our attention again on God, when our attention has flagged and we are no longer mindful of God's mercy. Similarly, long-term reconciliation requires consistent remembrance and renewal, an ongoing reminder that we must treat the other with dignity and to warn of the coming tragedy when such respect is lost. In Burnt Forest, the Tarakwa Peace

Committee held ceremonies to celebrate the passage of peaceful elections in 2010 and 2013. A Peace Committee member said that they wanted to remind themselves that they were “happy with what we have achieved.” In Lelan, the Peace Committees have memorialized their commitment to each other by erecting a cross on a hill visible from the surrounding communities. Every year they have a ceremony at the cross and a nearby church to sing, dance and give thanks for peace, re-committing to work for reconciliation in the coming New Year.

## ATONEMENT

*What does the LORD require of you  
but to do justice, and to love kindness,  
and to walk humbly with your God.*

– Micah 6:8. NRSV.

Reconciliation means little if it does not involve a restorative process of atoning for injustice. This includes holding accountable those who have hurt other, encouraging perpetrators to confess and apologize for the harm they caused and engaging in symbolic and material restitution. While often misused to encourage victims to passively accept their oppression, forgiveness can enable victims to demand that they no longer be defined by the harm done to them.

As the village Peace Committee in Tarakwa, Burnt Forest, held public dialogues after the post-election violence in 2007, they were initially dismissed by many people as “betrayers”, threatening the security of their communities. However, some community members – drawn by their curiosity to the meetings – were moved to think about their actions during the clashes in new ways. One Kalenjin man, who had stolen three cows from a Kikuyu farmer during the fighting, “was touched” by the conversations he overheard in the peace meetings. As a result, he decided to return the cattle to the man he had stolen from. To his surprise, the farmer gave back to him one of the cows as a sign of forgiveness and reconciliation. Similarly, a Kikuyu woman told the Peace Committee that she had been so enraged by the violence of the Kalenjin militias against her community that she had been planning to sell all her maize to pay some thugs to attack a man she felt was responsible. However, after attending some of the peace meetings she regretted her plans and sought reconciliation, confessing to her enemy what she had planned to do and apologizing. Peace Committee members told us, “We try to talk to people to soften their hearts to get them to open up” to each other and seek reconciliation. It “requires a lot of patience to get people to gain trust,” they said, but “Most people believe in life after death. They want to do what they can here to seek a better life in the next life.” Many people – even perpetrators of robbery and violence – can recognize their own wrongdoing and when they do, seek ways to make amends and atone for their sins.

**Atonement  
literally  
means  
becoming  
“at-one”**

**Churches  
preach  
peace but  
often  
neglect the  
difficult  
work of  
justice**

In the previous chapter, we discussed how the communities where we worked had established new commitments extending to each other norms respecting the lives and livelihoods of all people, no matter their ethnicity. But how do we respond when these norms are violated? How do we reconcile when someone hurts another person? What do we do to re-enter society when we have sinned grievously against our neighbor? The Judeo-Christian tradition has long wrestled with questions of atonement – literally how we can

become “at-one” after division has torn us apart from us each other and God. We offer here no easy answers for how to bring together those who harm with those who have been hurt. The church often preaches peace but sometimes neglects the difficult work of justice and restoration that is required to make peace more than simply a cessation of fighting. There is no “cheap grace.” And so our reflections in this chapter should not be seen as a last word, but rather an indication of our struggle with the complexities of reconciliation in our context. We would encourage those who are interested in engaging more with these issues to read the academic and practitioner literature on both restorative justice and traditional African justice practices.

### Accountability

Mass violence often produces in its wake a pervasive and corrosive silence, in which those responsible deny their wrongdoing and intimidate those who would name the crimes committed. The church is not and should not be the inquisitor – it is not a judicial body. Indeed, in 2000 Pope John Paul II apologized for the church’s persecutions of other religious groups. The responsibility for formally investigating, trying and punishing criminals lies with the state. We must let the legal process run its course. Even though Pope John Paul II forgave his attempted assassin, the state took judicial action against him. Ultimately, judgment belongs to God.

But the church also has a responsibility to its prophetic witness. Micah called us to “walk humbly”, but nonetheless “do justice” (6:8 NRSV). When the state and people in power fail to hold accountable those who have committed great injustice, the church must be in solidarity with those who identify and call out wrongdoing. Sometimes the state itself is responsible for the violence. Community members have told us that in the 2007 election violence they felt threatened by the very security forces that were supposed to protect them. And so we must voice the corruption in our midst. When King David sent Uriah to his death in battle merely so that he could sleep with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11), the prophet Nathan bravely confronts his King’s hypocrisy. Nathan calls David out specifically – “you are the man!” – and names his crimes: “You have

**The church must be in solidarity with those who call out injustice**

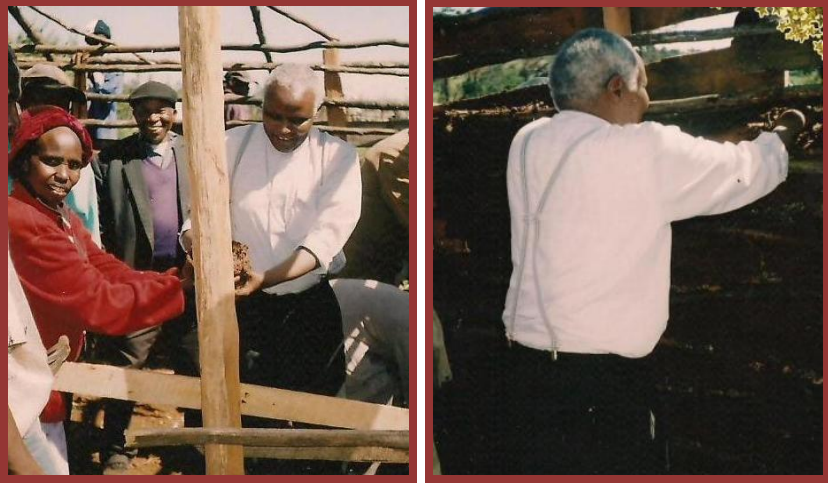
struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife” (2 Samuel 12: 7, 9 NRSV). Working in Lelan following the 1997 election violence, the state often did not support our work, as we were speaking out against the injustices in that region. In the West Pokot/Turkana region, Bishop Korir has not hesitated to tell those responsible for the violence that “God is angry that you have been spilling blood.” In one case, when a key politician tried to avoid participating in talks between Pokot and Turkana leaders, we sent him a text message saying that he was keeping the Bishop waiting and that the Bishop would hold him personally responsible for any deaths that occurred in renewed fighting. The politician soon showed up.

At the community level, Peace Committees have in several cases helped community members to identify perpetrators of violence and looting. While it is not the role of the Peace Committee to try suspected criminals, they can support victims in their search for accountability and try to persuade perpetrators to atone and pursue restitution. For example, a couple years ago, youth from Yamumbi stole cattle from Kapteldon, slaughtered them and tried to sell the meat to a butcher. Elders associated with the Peace Committee from both communities, called the perpetrators to appear before the community and apologize. Since “they were only children”, the community leaders decided not to pursue more punitive action. However, Peace Committee members told us that they have dealt with several similar incidents and find that bringing the perpetrator before the elders and having them face their victim can often (though not always) be transformative: “They become remorseful in front of the community.”

**Peace  
Committees  
have  
persuaded  
looters to  
confess and  
return  
stolen  
goods**

### **Confession and Apology**

When King David was confronted by Nathan with his crimes, he recognized the brutality of what he had done: “I have sinned against the LORD” (2 Samuel 12: 13), fasted in penance and pleaded with God for mercy. When we asked members of the Yamumbi/Kapteldon Peace Committee what they thought was critical to their local reconciliation process, they told us the following:



**Bishop Korir helps a family rebuild their house after the post-election violence of 2007/2008.**

*I have to ask what I have done or what my people have done.*

*The most important thing is to name the exact problem, to know exactly what the issue is.*

*You first have to accept what was done.*

This takes tremendous courage. But reconciliation is not possible unless those who have participated in the violence acknowledge the harm that they have caused and confess this publically, or at least to those who were harmed. In one of the most moving moments of our work after the 2007 clashes, a young man attending a Peace Committee meeting in Burnt Forest stood up, publically admitted that he had burned down people's houses and asked for forgiveness.

It is important to stress here that to apologize requires more than a specific confession of what was done. An apology must also acknowledge the harm that resulted from one's actions, commit to act differently in the future and work toward repairing the injury caused.

Elders working with the Burnt Forest Peace Committee facilitated the return of property – including window frames, water tanks, chairs, televisions – by people who had looted it during the 2007 post-election violence and later recognized that they had done wrong. One young



man admitted that he had stolen a bed but that he had had many restless nights, unable to sleep on it. He began to understand how guilty he felt about it and feared he was cursed not to sleep. He returned the bed and admitted to his wrongdoing.

## Restitution

Though it makes us modern readers feel uncomfortable, God takes revenge upon King David's family for his sin against Uriah. The Old Testament writers believed strongly that there must be reckoning for wrongs committed and sacrifices offered to God to atone for one's sins. As noted above, it is not the role of the church to seek retribution and punishment for crimes. This is the role of the state. But sometimes state judicial processes do not give victims the sense that justice has truly been done. In the aftermath of mass violence like the 2007 post-election clashes, there is widespread impunity – few of the most responsible perpetrators have been tried for their crimes. Moreover, even if criminals are convicted, jailing them does nothing to pay for the victim's hospital bills, rebuild a destroyed house or restock a stolen herd.

As a result, state judicial processes often need to be supplemented. This cannot be a glorified vigilantism and should not subject perpetrators to 'double jeopardy.' Rather, it should be a communal discernment – drawing on custom and wisdom – about how destruction can be repaired. Just as the Old Testament laws required sacrifice – payment of animals to God to acknowledge sins committed – local peacebuilding in the North Rift region often draws on traditional norms calling for compensation in the form of livestock or the ritual slaughter animals and sharing of food. Such compensation can be misinterpreted by outsider as a kind of crass "blood money" but this is a misunderstanding. Rather, it is an acknowledgement of harm and a symbolic restitution that will rarely be sufficient to pay for the damage done.

Indeed, the Sacrament of Reconciliation requires both words and actions to achieve absolution. It is not enough only to confess ones sins and feel contrite, one must also perform some kind of penance.

**State  
judicial  
process do  
not always  
give victims  
the  
restitution  
they need**

For example, when a cow and several goats went missing from Yamumbi, the Peace Committee met and members of the Kapteldon community took up the matter. They managed to recover and return the missing livestock. Without the return of this property – or compensation for it – it would have been much more likely that this incident would have become more disruptive. Similarly, a key breakthrough in our new work in West Pokot/Turkana came when Turkana elders arranged for goats stole by youth in their community to be returned to their Pokot owner.

Following the 2007 post-election violence in Timboroa, a Kikuyu man who had been displaced returned to the area and set up a tent to live in temporarily. Some Kalenjin youths destroyed the tent and the Peace Committee called on the Bishop to help. The Diocese provided iron sheets to help with rebuilding the houses of the returning displaced people and the Peace Committee persuaded people from both the Kikuyu and Kalenjin communities – including the youth who had destroyed the tent – to come help. At first the youth responsible for the damage did not want to participate, but the Bishop took off his cassock and began aiding in the construction, which shamed the young people into helping and soon everyone joined in. Some of the young people then began to confess that during the violence they had stolen things from people's homes, including beds, chairs, cutlery and household items. They began to return these things and the Bishop blessed them to symbolically formalize their reconciliation.

**Moral  
responsibility  
for mass  
violence also  
lies with  
bystanders**

Even when the state justice system works well, it is better attuned to holding individuals responsible, rather than the broader social responsibility that we all bear for the violence perpetrated in our name. The responsibility for mass violence lies beyond those individuals who committed acts of maiming or killing. The church can play a role in the encouraging the broader community to examine their consciences, spurring them to make amends for 'social sins' like complicity, quiescence, incitement and bystanding. When the Burnt Forest Peace Committee began a 'peace connector' project to build a bridge in the community, local elders felt moved to give goats to those working on the project as a symbol of their support. Community members also came together across ethnic lines to rebuild houses that had been

burned down in the violence. In Yamumbi/Kapteldon too, the Peace Committee help coordinate people from both communities work together in the government's "Operation *Rudi Nyumbani*" ("Operation Return Home") to build houses for people returning from the displacement camps. This communal reparation – repairing and restoring the harm – shows us that while reconciliation is a symbolic effort, it is also practical.

## Forgiveness

Pope Benedict XVI has said, "If peace is the fruit of justice, it is even more so of forgiveness, which truly seals the reconciliation between those who are divided and allows them to walk together." Among Jesus' most challenging commandments are that we love our enemies (Matthew 5: 44) and continue to forgive those who sin against us (Matthew 18:21-22). Unfortunately, these verses are often quoted to persuade victims of violence to accept their oppression with passivity. A particularly pernicious misuse of these scriptures tells women they should not resist domestic abuse. But nothing in the life of Jesus – his confrontations with the authorities, his challenge to religious leaders, his uncomfortable parables – suggests that he wants us to be passive or accept injustice. And as we have discussed in this chapter, forgiveness does not preclude a perpetrator from facing accountability, retribution and restitution.

Indeed, forgiveness is not primarily for the perpetrator. It is a radical act of release by which the victim reclaims themselves, demanding that they are no longer defined by the harm done to them. Rather than passivity it is an astonishing choice to act with mercy, rejecting the perpetrator's definition of the relationship as a violent one. Treating the perpetrator as a human being is a statement of moral superiority, refusing to stoop to the shameful level of those who treat people like objects. But the decision to forgive cannot be made by an outsider who was unaffected by the violence. True forgiveness is not coerced, manipulated or exchanged. It is entirely the prerogative of the victim alone. As one

**'Forgiveness  
has no  
conditions.'  
It is an act of  
grace**

participant in our Diocese's psychosocial support group in Kapsoya told us, "Forgiveness has no conditions." It is a gift of grace to a person whose past actions suggest that they may not deserve it.

One group member told us that she had been surprised to learn that the person who had hurt her was afraid of reprisal. Seeing the fear in one's enemy can engender empathy and undercut the image of invincibility they seek to project. Another participant told us that

**'You must  
forgive  
yourself, so  
that you can  
give that gift  
to your  
neighbor'**

reaching out to her enemies enabled them to see her humanity and "how they had wronged."

In deciding to forgive, the group members told us, they had reclaimed their initiative – "It is you who can start" – learning that, "You must first forgive yourself so that you can give that gift to your neighbor." Sometimes this neighbor is very close. Families of mixed marriages were often put under particular strain in the ethnic polarization of the 2007 post-election violence. Members of the Timboroa psycho-social support group told us that they had worked to reunite several families that had been torn by the conflict. Re-establishing relationships pulled apart by displacement enabled children to return to school, as they were able to pool resources from both parents.

The testimony of these survivors reminds us that efforts to establish justice after mass violence too often focuses on perpetrators: identifying them, establishing their guilt, punishing them. This can reproduce a system that sees them as the most important characters in the story. But as one of the members of the Kapsoya group told us, it was "only through forgiveness that I was healed" – forgiving her enemy was for her, not for the welfare of the person who had hurt her. Instead, in the Beatitudes, Jesus reminds us to focus on the poor, the hungry, the mournful, those who hunger for justice – the victims who are hated, excluded, defamed and reviled by the self-satisfied and well-regarded elite (Luke 6:20 & Matthew 5:1-12 NRSV). In Mary's *Magnificat*, she envisages a world where the "the proud" who ignore the plight of others are "scattered" and "brought down...from their thrones", while "the lowly" are "lifted up" (Luke 1:46-55 NRSV). As such, the church has an especial obligation to give comfort to those wounded and marginalized by the world's too often violent and uncaring political and socio-economic systems (Matthew 25: 31-46).

# 4

## HEALING

*Blessed are those who mourn  
for they will be comforted.*

– Matthew 5:4. NRSV.

Experiencing violence leaves people with a deep psychological pain and spiritual fatigue which does not disappear when the fighting is over. The church must be a pastoral presence and can establish connections between people in pain to help them support each other as 'wounded healers'. Psycho-social peer support groups enable survivors to narrate their stories in a safe environment and find commonalities across social divides. But in addressing the psychological needs, we must also understand their links to people's material situation – such as poverty, displacement or homelessness – which may exacerbate their distress. The focus of psycho-social healing should not only be individual but on re-establishing healthy relationships within and between communities.

"I was one of the displaced," a member of the psycho-social support group told us in Timboroa, a community in our Diocese which was badly affected by the 2007 violence as well as clashes in previous election cycles. "When I came back, people were looking at me like I was a photo – like a stranger, not someone who belongs. I had a lot of problems."

Our initial efforts in 2007 focused on immediate sanctuary and relief for those affected by the conflict. Then, as narrated in *Amani Mashinani*, we facilitated local dialogues and community development projects. But in our work we continually encountered those who were suffering deep psychic pain and spiritual fatigue as a result of the disruptions of 2007. This tremendous emotional burden did not go away when the fighting stopped, nor when Peace Committees reestablished links across ethnic lines. The church is called to be a pastoral presence to its flock, a consolation to those who mourn and weep. "Come to me," Jesus invites us, "all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28-30 NRSV). We could not ignore the plight of those in our community and so in 2012, with technical support from Caritas Australia, we began facilitating psycho-social peer support groups of 15-20 participants in two parishes: Timboroa and Kapsoya/Kimumu.

**'It was not only me.' The pain was more bearable 'because I found others.'**

The first day, the group member in Timboroa told us, was very difficult. "We were fearing each other and as I looked around the room I was thinking, 'What will they think of me?'" Others were reluctant too. But she told her story of what she had lost and then listened as the others opened up as well. Initially, it felt overwhelming: "We were feeling pain and thinking 'What can we do together?'" But slowly, she realized during that session and the following meetings in local churches and schools, that she was not alone in her anguish: "It was not only me." She found that the pain was a little more bearable, "because we found others who had similar problems."

She was particularly surprised to discover that people from the ethnic group she held responsible for her sorrow were also suffering: "you, who think I am responsible for your pain can see I also lost things." Looking at a group member from another community, "I can see she has more problems than me." And so, she told us, "even

though I know someone took my property, we have to start to forgive each other.” She has found unexpected solidarity in this group: “Now we help each other.” This experience has also attuned her to the needs of others around her: “When I see someone who has pain in their heart I now listen very carefully. I start looking for ways to heal the person.” Where she sees a need, she coordinates with her newfound friends from the support group and they go together. She has discovered, in reaching out to her neighbors, that “When you carry food it is a way to open them to help.”

**Reconciliation is not the same as ‘reconstruction’; it involves more than rebuilding infrastructure**

When government leader and international donors speak of Kenya’s recovery from conflict they often speak in the language of “rebuilding” or “reconstructing.” This would suggest that peace is simply about rearranging material infrastructure. And yet, as a member of the Yamumbi/Kapteldon Peace Committee put it, “There are wounds that need to be addressed.” And many of these wounds are not physical; as it says in Proverbs, “The human spirit will endure sickness; but a broken spirit – who can bear? (NRSV). A man in the Kapsoya psychosocial group told us: “Our country is traumatized.”

This chapter is not a technical description of how to facilitate and run a psycho-social support. For that there are many excellent training programs and how-to manuals. Rather this is a reflection – from a particular faith perspective – on some of the ways support groups have been meaningful in our context. It describes how our Diocese has tried to stand in solidarity with our community members as they try to heal each other’s burdened souls.

## Wounds of the Spirit

When conflicts are reported in the media they often depict on the external manifestations of violence. Statistics on “casualties” usually only report those who have physical wounds. It is difficult to take an arresting photograph of people’s psychological trauma, demoralization and anxiety. But the impact of this legacy lasts long after the guns fall silent, even beyond the return of social ‘normalcy.’ A woman in the



**Members of the Kapsoya psycho-social support group.**

Kapsoya psycho-social group told us she joined because, "I have had a wounded heart since my husband died in the violence of 1991-1992." She told us that while now she is "overjoyed" to report that she "feels healed", before she participated in the meetings, she felt so depleted that, "if the wind blew it would be like I would blow away." As we interviewed members of the Kapsoya/Kimumu and Timboroa psycho-social groups, we heard again and again the sense of utter spiritual exhaustion that drove them to seek healing:

*I would just sit and wait for the day to be over.*

*I would ask God, 'Why is it me that is going through this? Can you not hear my prayer?'*

*I couldn't look at neighbors. I gave up hope. I could even kill myself.*

A member of the Kapsoya group said that during the clashes he escaped to the church to seek sanctuary. When he went back to his house, "they had taken everything." He returned to the church to get relief food, but he said food was not enough to make him feel well. His needs were much deeper. "I had ulcers from thinking. I became very



afraid and my mind was stunted,” he said. It took him some time in the support group to learn what he really needed help with: “At first we couldn’t understand what these wounds we were healing.” This man, and other participants of the support groups, told us that it was in sharing their stories with others who had been affected by the conflict that they began to discern more clearly their psychological pain. As a Timboroa participant said, “When we talked about the pain in our hearts we started to change.” Another, from Kapsoya, said that before participating in the group “we felt we could die at any time”; sharing with the “group has given me a chance to live.”

**‘When we talked about the pain in our hearts we started to change**

But overcoming such spiritual wounds can be a challenge for, as one Kapsoya group member put it, “What the group healed could not be helped in the hospital.” This means that there is sometimes stigma or lack of understanding in the community. A Timboroa participant told us that many people ask her, “What is it that you are going to heal? We are going to be working. Why are you wasting time?” For this woman, she has come to understand the investment of her time in the group as part of the process of building peace. She tells skeptics, “We are not wasting time. While you continue working on your farm but you are not at peace with your neighbor, your work can be destroyed.”

### **Wounded Healers**

“I had a lot of problems when my husband died,” a Timboroa psychosocial group member told us. She struggled to raise her children on her own and pay for their school fees. When Florence, the facilitator from the Diocese invited her to attend the group, she at first “refused” but, she said, “a voice in my heart told me to go.” At the first meeting she was skeptical: “we were looking at each other in fear – how can these people help me?” She wondered “How is Florence going to heal me when I need money to take children to school?” But as the meeting “became an open forum” and “each person gave their stories”, she told us, she felt empathy for others in the group: “I realized my problems were not as bad as others – some lost their whole families. I realized my children are here.” While it took time, “as we kept coming to these meetings, our minds came back to their

senses. Our minds thought straight.” A crucial part of her recovery was the realization that “others could help.” The group held a *harambee* to raise money for her children to go to school: “Our God is a caring God! One of the children went on to university and others are still in school at different levels. They are doing well.” In reflection on her experience in the group, she suggested it had given her a sense of empowerment: “This has made me more courageous.”

While our psycho-social groups are led by people who have been trained in facilitating such support, they are not professional counsellors. Participants instead draw strength from the solidarity they find in each other's presence, a sense of sharing their pain. A Timbora participant told us that to find healing in the group she learned that she needed to, “Give a listening ear to people but also to your own inner soul.” They are, as the theologian Henri Nouwen put it, “wounded healers” – who draw upon their own brokenness to empathize with, support others and put their suffering in context. One Kapsoya group member said, “When the group started narrating their stories I realized that my problems were not as much.” Another said that she had learned that “We were all affected because of what happened” in the conflict.

A member of the Kapsoya group related to us the devastation of her experience during the 2007 clashes. She had gone away for the holidays and when she returned found the road to her home barricaded by men who told her, “if you are Kikuyu go back where you are from.” She was persecuted with ethnic slurs and struggled to find relief when area churches refused to help anyone but their own members. The trauma of this time followed her despite the return of peace and she felt her problems were “so deep they couldn't be helped.” When she joined the psycho-social group, she was surprised to be told by the facilitator that “you should give your problems to the group.” She had never thought that sharing her problems could be a gift to other people. Through the experience of relating her story with her peers and listening to them, “Our lives were renewed once more. Now we are beautiful.” In feeling useful she has also regained a sense of agency and identity, telling us, “Because of God's mercy we now have a face. People can see we have changed.” This has rejuvenated her faith that “There is a caring God who cares for the

**‘There is a caring God who cares for the vulnerable’**

vulnerable.” Other members also found spiritual renewal in the group. One told us that receiving support through his peers he no longer felt the need to self-medicate: “I turned from using drugs to using prayer.” Another said that while before he felt despair, now “I am thanking God for my life.” A participant from Timboroa said that she had learned that “When you are in problems, keep courage and believe in God” because “God still gives you life.”

Another woman in the Kapsoya group agreed. During the clashes, she said, she “was living in a very hostile place.” She “was terrified” for her children and felt her “heart was broken.” But in one of the group meetings, “We were given a chance to narrate what was in our hearts and what was in my heart came out.” She recalled that people were crying, which made her feel supported, despite the fact that the participants came from different sides of the conflict: “we are one,” she said, “like a family.” One of her fellow participants said that she had felt moved that when they shared their stories people stayed and listened – they dedicated their time and attention to her in a way she had not experienced before.

Getting to this place of powerful solidarity is, of course, not a simple task. As one Timboroa participant told us, initially “we couldn’t even greet each other” since they came from different sides of the conflict:

**At first ‘we  
couldn’t  
even greet  
each other.  
But now we  
share our  
feelings’**

“we wouldn’t even have done business together.” But now, she says, “we share our feelings with one another, share food and share our animals.” Building trust, then, requires skilled facilitation. It requires the constancy of regular meetings. The Timboroa group member said that she appreciated the commitment by participants to return again and again to difficult conversations: “It is good to keep meeting.” To provide a break from the emotional intensity, the meetings often have other activities, such as sharing in song, Bible study or prayer. Besides discussing the

problems they face, they discuss topics such as strategies for coping with anxiety, ways to stay hopeful, the notion of mercy and forgiveness, projects they can do together. In every session, each person is given the chance to participate, no one is excluded.

Facilitation of these groups is often emotionally intensive and often draining – particularly when facilitators themselves have suffered the effects of the local conflict. Florence, who has helped the Diocese set

up our psycho-social program has said it can be hard when a facilitator identifies with the stories of the group members, stirring up their own unresolved trauma. It is therefore crucial that the facilitators are supported with counselling and group work of their own as well as ongoing training. They need time to relax and engage in self-care.

### Meeting Material Needs

One of the things we have learned from the two support groups is that, at least in our context, we cannot make a clear separation between the psychological needs of community members and other concerns that often contribute to their distress. Sometimes the group themselves have stepped in to meet these needs of their peers. A Kapsoya participant told us, "If it were not for the group, I would not have a wife." He said his spouse had been bed ridden, unable to speak and, he feared, about to die. The support group prayed for her, visited her and helped in various ways around the home. "Through the prayers of this group my wife is alive," he said with pride. "I feel I can walk like a gentleman because of the faith and courage from this group." Another Kapsoya participant said the group had helped raise money for her daughter's school fees. The group has also organized a "merry-go-round" fund that gave her micro-loan to set up a salon. Sharing resources can create trust in the group, enabling group participants to rebuild a sense of confidence in the people around them.

Where it has the resources to do so, the Diocese has also contributed. One Kapsoya participant said that the parish priest had prayed for her, but has also paid the exam fee for her daughter, enabling her to finish school. She was also the recipient of goats that we provided to members of the group who needed assistance. In Timboroa, the group planted potatoes donated to them by the church and when they harvested, gave some of them to their neighbors. A participant told us, "People were happy, now many people throughout the community are planting these same potatoes." These projects illustrate the ways that many of the psycho-social group participants' recovery has been accompanied by new energy to connect with the world around them. Supported by the Diocese's

**The support group prayed for her, visited her and helped around the home**

microfinance projects, they are now selling secondhand clothing, *sukuma wiki* and milk, cutting hair, taking care of chickens and driving people around on a motorbike. Working on small projects enables group participants to go out and do something, giving them a sense of independence and self-reliance. They have re-discovered that they are valuable and can make a contribution by producing, supporting others and engaging in society.

### Re-engaging the World

Psychological healing is impoverished if it focuses only on the individual, rather than our relationship to other people and also the earth – plants and animals – around us. Beneficiaries of the goat donation told us that taking care of these animals focused their thoughts on something other than their anxieties. “When I look at the goats, all my thoughts go away,” said one group member. Another related to us the joy she felt when her goat gave birth, twice! “These goats were seen as a sign of peace,” she said. Similarly, a member of Kapsoya group told us that she started rearing chickens and finds “peace in my mind”, as they keep her busy. Together, group members have tried to find things to do “to keep occupied” and engaged with the world around them. One woman told us that selling clothes, “makes my heart calm down because it gives me something to do.” Another woman had been previously marginalized in her community and had been so victimized that she refused to talk to people: “no one gave me an ear to listen to me,” she said and so “had not poured out what was inside me.” However, after numerous sessions in the psychosocial group she began to open up to tell her story. She now speaks with her neighbors and has a small garden and a goat to take care of.

**‘When I look at the goats, all my thoughts go away’**

The Kapsoya group told us that their facilitator had encouraged them to pray not only for their own healing but also for peace in the world. They began to consider the ways in which, as one participant put it, “Peace starts with me, my neighbor and then others.” As the Kapsoya group members got to know each other better, they learned more about their talents. Some were good singers, others could dance, pray or ululate. One was a pianist. They decided to use their

gifts together and go out into the village to preach peace. They named their group after Mother Theresa because while they healing themselves they are also trying to help others who are particularly vulnerable in the community. For example, they visited a local orphanage and brought them gifts. “We have a lot of faith in what we are doing,” said one participant. Another agreed, saying “There is a bright future coming.” They are now thinking of other projects, ways to involve others and expand their impact in the community and beyond.

# 5

## WORKING TOGETHER TO BUILD A NEW SOCIETY

*They shall beat their swords into plowshares,  
and their spears into pruning hooks;  
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,  
neither shall they learn war any more.*

– Isaiah 2:4. NRSV.

Corruption, crime and uneven distribution of resources often contribute to conflict. Reconciliation is thus inadequate if it does not deal with the fundamental political and economic inequalities that exacerbate grievances and corrode social cohesion. The church must aid in developing non-violent, inclusive, productive and sustainable economies. The church can especially help in educating people in a culture of peace.

As they struggled to respond to the 1997-1998 violence in Lelan, the local peace meetings began to discuss the role of cattle rustling in the conflict. Raiding draws support from cultural traditions that applauded the exploits of men who demonstrate prowess in fighting to protect and provide for his family and cattle. But modern cattle rustling is less about tradition than a complex and integrated political economy, with links to organized crime, crooked politicians, cattle markets in the big cities and global flows of money and goods. The stolen cow is a result of a political, economic and social system that profits from the systematic looting of people's livelihood. There was tremendous money to be made in keeping the conflict going. A member of the peace committee in Lelan told us, "The common denominator in the conflict was the cattle. We wanted to know: How can we turn it to make cattle a connector?" Could the people of Lelan discern ways to cultivate the seeds of a new economy, one that was not rooted in violence and exploitation?

They decided to start small. With funding from the Diocese the established a cattle dip in the area that had become the boundary between the conflicting Marakwet and Pokot communities. They established a management committee to maintain the structure with people representing both groups. While some were skeptical of this joint effort, it soon became clear that those who used the dip had more healthy cows – there was a dividend from cooperation. The dips in Lelan at Kamelei, Korongoi, Kipteber and Kapsait continue to this day – serving 300 cattle every Saturday – and surrounding communities soon also wanted cattle dips of their own. "The cow which we were fighting over has become something that is helping both communities," a local farmer told us.

People have also begun to adopt a new breed of cattle that cannot travel as far and so are harder to steal. And as milk production has increased, the peace committees decided to build a processing and cooling plant. Again, they faced difficulties from those who did not want to work crosslines. People spread rumors claiming the Pokot would cheat the Marakwet in the joint project and they had to hold many meetings to dispel the falsehoods.

**'Local'  
cattle  
rustling has  
links to  
corrupt  
markets at  
the national  
and global  
levels**





**People from around Lelan bring their milk to Lelan Highland Dairy, which has played an important role in bringing conflicting Pokot and Marakwet communities to work together.**

But in 2008 a small group of Pokot and Marakwet farmers mobilized to make the plant a reality. By the next year, Lelan Highland Dairies was up and running. Located on the border between the two communities, they have both groups represented on the cooperative's board as well the staff. In the beginning, they were producing just over 600 kilograms of milk per day. By the end of 2014, output had soared to 17,000 kilograms per day. The farmers who use the dairy are the shareholders; each share costs 1000 KES (US\$11) and to maintain equitability, no one is allowed to own more than five shares. They have made especial effort to include people, such as women and youth, who are often excluded from community development projects. The plant sells the milk to the producers and distributors on behalf of the farmers, bargaining on their behalf for a good price. As they have expanded production, they have invested in both communities, establishing four satellite coolers to reduce transport costs. Since all the shareholders own the satellite coolers, this gives them a stake in each other's communities.

David Longoripuo, Manager of the dairy, said that “through this project you don’t know who is Pokot and who is Marakwet, we are all just Kenyan.” As people have seen the success of the dairy, it has attracted those who were initially skeptical. However, even today not everyone is on board and they have to do outreach in the villages to explain the benefits. Nevertheless, Longoripuo said that the cooperative’s members now realize that “You can’t do business by yourself – you must come together” because you “need the volume to influence the price of milk.” He has learned that in building peace you often “need a common objective so that people come together and mingle together and meet together.” Lelan Highland Dairy’s logo depicts the hill overlooking the community where the cross was placed to memorialize the peace process. Light streams down from the top of the hill, while two cows – representing the Pokot and Marakwet communities – face each other.

This story of transforming cattle from a symbol of conflict into a source of connection illustrates the ways in which peacebuilding and reconciliation necessarily involves the effort to foster new social, economic, cultural and political institutions. To overcome the old systems that were built on exploitation and enmity, one needs to create new opportunities to offer people livelihood, dignity, recognition and authority that do not rely on violence. The work of the local peacebuilders in Lelan demonstrate that ordinary people can – starting with a small a project as a cattle dip – reorganize the structures that order their lives. Since there was no financial institution in the village – often leaving people at the mercy of usurious lending practices – the dairy has expanded into a village bank, backed by the deposits of milk. Seeing the opportunity in the regular traffic of people coming to drop off their milk, other investors have opened businesses around the dairy. There is now a small grocery, a butcher, an M-Pesa point and a medical dispensary. The border area between the communities has now transformed from a line of division to a place for meeting, mixing and exchange. The success of the Leland Highland Dairies has now gained significant press attention,

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including from *The Nation* and *msafiri* (the Kenya Airways in-flight magazine).

In our experiences of peacebuilding in the North Rift region, we have learned that one cannot separate reconciliation from development. Conflict is often rooted in the struggle over resources, recognition and political power and so any reconciliation effort that ignores the need for overcoming social and economic injustice is bound to falter. In our new effort in the West Pokot/Turkana region we have discovered that, like in Lelan and Kapsait, the conflict – often described as cattle rustling – is linked to a corrosive political economy of gangsterism which has metastasized into banditry along the main road. Corruption, crime and uneven distribution of resources often contribute to conflict and must be overcome through the development of productive economies. While some may not see development as the work of the church, our tradition offers us the knowledge that God can “make all things new” (Revelation 21:5 NRSV, also Isaiah 65:17). Indeed, the word the early Christians used to call their church *oikoumene* (from which we get the word “ecumenical”), is the root of the English word “economy.” As described in Acts 2, the early Christians sought to build a newly inclusive and equitable economy that was rooted in valuing every person as an image of God, rather than on exploitation, theft and division.

### Overcoming Exclusion

In the North Rift region of Kenya, conflict often arises in part from differential access to development. Marginalized communities resent their exclusion from the fruits of the national economy and widespread unemployment enables militias to recruit young people more easily. Reconciliation is thus inadequate if it does not deal with the fundamental political and economic inequalities that build grievances and corrode social cohesion. The gospel offers us a different vision. In Acts 2, the disciples share the gospel with people from all different cultures and backgrounds, not only the group they are most comfortable with (verses 1-42). But as these new converts came to their new faith, their spiritual renewal led them to create new

**Development in the North Rift region is shaped by colonial legacies of exploitation**

economic realities, as they gave their possessions to the needy, held their wealth in common and ate together (verses 43-47).

Of course, overcoming systemic inequalities is not easy. Members of the Tarakwa Peace Committee in Burnt Forest warned us that in establishing ‘peace connector projects’, one needs to look beyond the “surface” to understand the “deep rooted causes” of violence, “which cause the conflict to recycle.” Development in the North Rift region continues to be shaped by the colonial legacy of widespread displacement which dispossessed Africans of their access to the most fertile land. The post-colonial redistribution of this land often failed to benefit those most marginalized and also spurred resentments between ethnic groups placed in competition with each other by the political system. Misunderstanding of the colonial history has also placed the blame for ongoing exclusion on ethnic “others” that are seen as interlopers in what is perceived as the birthright of one group.

External actors providing aid to reduce poverty can sometimes exacerbate these tensions. Before joining us as coordinator of the Diocese’s Justice and Peace Commission, James Kimiso had worked in the Kerio Valley for child development projects and had seen how such assistance could play into conflict. The mission stations had initially been established in Marakwet areas, which had excluded Pokot children from the project. When Kimiso began working in Lelan for the Diocese, he encouraged the church to ‘do no harm’ as it supported projects – like the cattle dips – intended to bridge divisions rather than make them more impassable. We have learned that the socio-economic projects sponsored by the church – schools, medical facilities, roads, cooperatives – must work in concert with our goals of peacebuilding and reconciliation.

One of the ways that the Diocese has tried to overcome economic exclusion, particularly of women, is through our Savings and Internal Lending to Communities (SILC) program, supported by Caritas. Our has SILC extended financial services to 127,000 people who are otherwise unable to save and borrow money since 2009. We have observed that many conflicts within families in our region are exacerbated by a lack of resources. The gendered distribution of money means that women are asking men for funds to cover their

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necessities. The SILC program has enabled women to have access to resources themselves, as some 80% of SILC group members are women. Over 60% of the SILC members are youth, another economically marginalized group. Each SILC group consists of around 20 members who are of similar economic status who save money and lend it to each for livelihood projects. They receive business development training and also contribute to a social welfare fund that they manage themselves to help members in crisis or who have been particularly affected by the post-election violence. With the help of field officers, they set rules about how much to lend each other and how. Many of these field officers were selected because of their participation in local peace processes and we use the SILC meetings to also propagate the message of peace and reconciliation. Members of SILC groups in Burnt Forest and Yamumbi/Kapteldon have helped each other rebuild houses burned down in the conflict. Being organized enables SILC groups to better access external microfinance funding, such as the government's Youth Enterprise Fund and Women Enterprise Fund.

### Swords into Plowshares

When the Prophet Isaiah shares his vision of nations abandoning war, he offers us a compelling image, in which formerly conflicting peoples “shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks” (Isaiah 2:4 NRSV). This tells us that it is not enough to halt the fighting. We must also transform the instruments and institutions of violence into ones that encourage livelihood – to turn people from

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killing to production. This is not to repeat the cliché that markets make for peace. Economic relations are often fraught with conflict. But rather Isaiah calls our calling attention to the ways in which reconciliation has an economic component, in which we knit together ties of obligation and interdependence.

In an effort to reduce banditry along the main highway through the West Pokot/Turkana region, Bishop Korir met with the commander of a gang responsible for much of the raiding. The Bishop challenged him to stop his violence, but the young man responded, “What

am I going to eat if I stop?” The Bishop asked him what else he might like to do instead and the commander said he would like to be a *boda boda* driver, transporting people and goods along the road. As a result, the Diocese has helped some former bandits to organize a cooperative of boda boda drivers to provide them with alternative livelihoods. Many other people in this region have told us “we are willing to surrender our guns if we can get something to eat.” It is thus not enough to achieve a ceasefire, we need to invest in formerly conflicting communities to show them that livelihood without guns is possible. We need to help communities see alternatives to “survival fighting.”

As we described in *Amani Mashinani*, Yamumbi/Kapteldon Peace Committee brought people together through a road project, built by youth, which connected the two communities. The road is now well used and has shortened the journey into town. The road catalyzed much greater freedom of movement between Yamumbi and Kapteldon. Peace Committee members told us that, “Initially people were worried to even go along the road.” However, the road has allowed people to “meet our friends on the other side” as well as sell their harvest to people in the other community. Now, they said, Kalenjin children now feel free to take short cuts through the gardens owned by Kikuyu people. The road has also enabled a quarry at the boundary between the communities to moved their goods to market and employ young people from the surrounding area. This has stimulated business in the area around the border. A *posho* mill and butcher have opened their doors, serving both Yamumbi and Kapteldon and there is a healthy trade in clothing between the two communities. The road project was highlighted as a “success story” in a report, *Reconciliation in Practice*, published by the United States Institute of Peace.

**‘The road has allowed us to meet friends on the other side’**

These accomplishments spurred the Peace Committee to facilitate additional projects. Youth in the community have established a savings and internal lending microfinance project. When displaced people began returning home, the Peace Committee decided to form a small ‘border committee’ that met regularly at the river that forms the boundary. They decided to establish a joint vegetable plot with people





**Trees planted by the peace club at St. Cecilia Koiluget Mixed Day Secondary School in Burnt Forest.**

from both communities. They are now selling the vegetables, have bought cattle and meet to discuss how to sustain the peace.

The Peace Committee in Burnt Forest has had a similar experience, rebuilding a bridge that had been destroyed in the fighting. While the ruins of the structure had served as a symbol of division, its reconstruction has reestablished social and economic connections. Community members tell us that as they cross the bridge, it serves as a reminder of the peace process. It is like a rosary, which through repeated use, serves to focus people's attention, reminding them that they were once fighting but are now reconnected. The bridge, beyond its practical value, serves as an opportunity for consciousness-raising.

## Educating for Peace

Besides calling for a transition from fighting to production, the Prophet Isaiah also envisioned nations refusing to “learn war any more” (Isaiah 2:4 NRSV). This suggests that the new economic and social relationships must be sustained through a transformation of the ways we educate, inform and preach. Members of the Yamumbi/Kapteldon Peace Committee remarked to us that it was not enough to have the right sentiments – working for lasting reconciliation required them to learn new knowledge and skills. “You need to be trained to facilitate peace, because what you say has the potential to heal or to cause further violence,” said one community leaders. He told that he had found a 2008 training held jointly by our Diocese with two others in Nakuru was “very helpful.”

But peace education cannot only focus on leaders. In addition to establishing the cattle dip, the early peace meetings in Lelan considered the possibility that keeping young people in school could help to prevent cattle rustling and establish links between students of different backgrounds. An early project sponsored by the Diocese brought primary school children together for a joint exam. Later, the Diocese aided Pokot children to go to school to overcome historic disparities. At the beginning of the project in the early 2000s, there were only around 500 Pokot children in primary school; now there are more than 20,000. The Diocese itself runs three primary schools in the area serving both Pokot and Marakwet children and located boundaries at the mission stations in Chesongoch, Endo. The project built one primary school for Pokot children at Kakapul village in Koloa Division between communities. Barpelo mission also built a secondary school that now has both Marakwet and Pokot children learning together.

**‘We realized that as parents we are responsible for poisoning the minds of the young ones.’**

In Burnt Forest, the Tarakwa Peace Committee told us that “We realized that as parents we are responsible for poisoning the minds of the young ones. We wanted to remedy this by bringing them to school to learn about peace.” As a result, they helped to build an administration block at St Cecilia Primary School, to serve its 189 multiethnic students. “We saw



that this school was important to people in this area,” a Peace Committee member remarked to us. “We wanted people to feel at home here.” The Peace Committee ensured that people from both the Kalenjin and Kikuyu communities were involved in the construction and they “preached peace to the workers” who were building the structure. “People were touched and opened up,” they said. The school’s principal told us that the school has established a Peace Club, “to help students understand each other and take the message back to their parents.” Children in the club have planted trees at the school as a symbol of peace and reconciliation. “By starting this project we were planting seeds of peace,” said a community member, “we are now seeing the fruits.”

### Sustainability

In the preceding pages, we have focused largely on the successes of the Peace Committees in the conflicting communities we serve. But, of course, our work is not always successful. It can be particularly difficult when the initial excitement about a project wears off, funds start to run out and the community encounters unexpected obstacles. One group we spoke with had come up with many interesting ideas in the aftermath of the 2007 clashes, including organizing sports for youth and keeping animals together. But after a couple years, interest rapidly dwindled, particularly as money for projects became scarce. “Though we had the desire to work together,” a committee member explained to us, “we failed.” Part of the difficulty is that external donors rarely want to support prevention work before violence breaks out and then lose interest as media attention moves to a crisis somewhere else in the world. This rapid inflow and outflow of capital makes it difficult to plan and establish well-grounded programs. It is therefore crucial that we not overpromise to the communities where we work, to avoid raising expectations irresponsibly.

**Sustained  
reconciliation  
requires  
intensive  
work at the  
grassroots to  
build local  
resilience**

Nevertheless, it is the responsibility of churches, which at least in our Kenyan context, often have strong local roots to help communities build long-term reconciliation. We do not have to have the short-term

timeframes of development agencies. Rather our relationship with our people must derive from a long-term solidarity, a sustained presence in the lives of our communities. Any efforts to create change must start small. If we go big too soon, we will lose people's trust when we fail. And while at some point, long-term reconciliation requires the involvement of the political elite to prevent the recurrence of violence, one cannot rely only on the 'top.' Rather sustained reconciliation requires intensive work at the grassroots level to build local resilience to withstand externally-driven crises.

This means that we must have strategic vision, acting not only for short-term gain. We should seek inspiration from the writer of Psalm 102, who writes verses not for the immediate audience but rather, in praising God's care for the "destitute", commands: "Let this be recorded for a generation to come, so that a people yet unborn may praise the LORD" (Psalm 102: 17-18 NRSV). For as a member of the Tarakwa Peace Committee in Burnt Forest reminded us, reconciliation "is not only concerned about the past but also the future." As a result, true reconciliation in our context cannot focus exclusively on those who live in this moment. We feel inspired by the ritual inclusion of the ancestors in the peacebuilding work in Lelan. But even as we honor those who suffered in past violence, we must look forward to honor those of the coming generations who, like us, will be made in the image of God.

# 6

## REFLECTING ON THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION

*In Christ God was reconciling the world  
to himself, not counting their trespasses  
against them, and entrusting the  
message of reconciliation to us.*

– 2 Corinthians 5:19. NRSV.

Our experience in Kenya's North Rift region has demonstrated that sustained contact between people can aid understanding. But this 'theory of change' must be supported by a commitment to transform the social systems that generated the violence in the first place. The church must not shrug its responsibility for helping in this process as Jesus has called us to the ministry of reconciliation.



**Our Altar of Peace at the Catholic Diocese of Eldoret Cathedral.**

There are many shelves of books written on reconciliation and related topics by academics in the social sciences. We in the church have much to learn from those who have been called to pursue truth and develop their intellects. In our social mission, the church benefits from dialogue with others who seek pathways to a more peaceful and just society. For example, the literature on “Contact Theory” suggests that the more contact we have with people who are strangers to us – even enemies – the more likely we are to treat them with respect. Violence against others is often a final stage in a long process of distancing and dehumanization that can be interrupted through engaged, non-violent interactions. This is not just simply about meeting people or seeing them in everyday life. Social scientists have found reconciliation requires extensive contact, hearing other people’s stories, dialoguing with them as equals and working together on common goals. It must be supported by people in authority, who can too often undermine progress at the grassroots level.

We know this as Christians. As we read in Matthew 18:20 (NRSV), “where two or three are gathered in my name, I am among them.”

When we come together in earnest, in the spirit of understanding, the Holy Spirit can transform human brokenness and create unity. But dissension can quickly appear. Apostle Paul's letters are preoccupied with conflicts in congregations. It takes concerted, ongoing effort to build trust after conflict has torn it apart. Reconciliation requires faith, sustained through ritual and communal support, to see the face of God in the other.

**Contact  
between  
people can  
build  
understanding  
and trust**

We have seen the effect of contact in our work throughout the North Rift region. People who were from supposedly irreconcilable communities have, through dialogue and joint activities, found ways to work together and reconcile. We have not always succeeded in our work. The structures of corruption, vested interests and ethnocentrism are sadly well entrenched in our beloved Kenya. But the stories in this book illustrate that the humble actions of people working at the grassroots – supported by people of goodwill from the region and beyond – can transform the brokenness of the present. While nothing can replace the loss of human life or make amends for mass displacement, we can still hold perpetrators accountable, move toward symbolic and material restitution and support those wishing to offer forgiveness. We can seek out those who are suffering, those most harmed by the violence, and support physical, psychological and spiritual healing.

This offers a different model – theory of change – than that offered by many donors, politicians and NGOs who parachute into our local communities, understand little about them, speak with a few hand-picked leaders, and quickly leave. We have found that lasting reconciliation requires sustained, intimate knowledge of and engagement at the very grassroots of society – *maridhiano mashinani*. Lasting reconciliation does not reconcile itself well with the timelines of donor funding cycles, electioneering or short-term consulting contracts.

However, as we have discussed in the last chapter, it is not enough to talk to each other. Reconciliation cannot solely be on a personal, one-on-one basis. It requires a concerted effort to reorganize the

**To sustain  
reconciliation  
the church  
must support  
social  
transformation**

political, economic, social (and too often religious) systems that produced the violent rupture in relations. It is not enough to tell people to say sorry or to ask them to forgive. We cannot march around preaching clichés like “forgive and forget” or “time will heal.” We must commit body, heart, mind and soul to work for justice and social transformation, working in solidarity with those working for structural change at the local, national and global levels.

This means external actors – whether Kenyans or foreigners – have an important role to play. But they must be willing to listen to those most affected by conflict, supporting local initiatives and committing to a long-term relationship with the communities where they intervene. This includes the church and other faith institutions. We cannot abdicate responsibility for public reconciliation if we are to take seriously our Social Teachings. The church is located extensively throughout Kenya and the world and must serve as a voice of conscience and a helping hand.

As the Apostle Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians, Jesus helped reconcile us with God. The ministry of reconciliation is thus at the very heart of the Christian faith. It is not an easy task and many clergy would rather leave it to political leaders and NGOs. But we were never told the life of the faithful would be easy. God calls us to have faith in a biblical vision unseen: a renewed earth where swords are beaten into plowshares, the hungry have food, lions and lambs coexist and our nation learns peace instead of war. But we must be the instruments of reconciliation and healing. With steadfast assurance of God’s mercy and compassion, let it be so.

**External actors must listen to those most affected by conflict and commit long-term**

# Annex

# A

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Annex

# B

## THE CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF ELDORET

The Catholic Diocese of Eldoret is located in the North Rift Region of the Republic of Kenya, approximately 320 km from the capital, Nairobi. It was established in 1953 as an Apostolic Prefecture and in 1959 became the Diocese of Eldoret. The Diocese covers seven administrative districts: Uasin Gishu South, Uasin Gishu North, Uasin Gishu East, Nandi North, Nandi South, Keiyo and Marakwet. There are 42 parishes with a Catholic population of over 400,000 out of a total population of some 1.7 million. The Diocese is cosmopolitan with peoples from different Kenyan communities and a few immigrants from other countries. The political situation in the area is generally volatile, with recurrent election violence and a history of cattle rustling. This has been exacerbated by high levels of poverty and unemployment among the youth. The Diocese has been working to address these challenges by providing emergency relief, offering sanctuary, building peace at the local level and producing books like the acclaimed *Amani Mashinani (Peace at the Grassroots)*.

Annex

C

## CONTRIBUTOR PROFILES

**Matthew Bolton** is Associate Chair of Political Science and Director of the International Disarmament Institute at Pace University in New York City. He has worked as an aid worker, advocate, researcher and journalist in 16 countries, including Kenya, where he coordinated the production of the book *Amani Mashinani (Peace at the Grassroots)* for Catholic Relief Services. Bolton has a PhD in Government and Master's in Development Studies (Research) from the London School of Economics and Political Science and a Bachelor's in History and Religion from Graceland University.

**James Kimiso** is the immediate former Diocesan Justice and Peace Coordinator for the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission in Eldoret. He now works as an independent consultant in peace and conflict resolution. Kimiso has managed various projects in peacebuilding and human security, especially in areas of armed conflicts of North Rift Valley. He was instrumental in the reconciliation process of the Diocese after the post-election violence of 2007/2008 and in the Pokot/Turkana/Marakwet conflict. He holds a Masters' in Peace and Conflict Studies from Masinde Muliro University and a Bachelor of Business Management from Moi University, Eldoret.

**William Kiptoo** is the peacebuilding coordinator for the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), Kenya. He has several years of experience in peacebuilding and conflict resolution, focusing on faith-based peacebuilding interventions, grassroots civil society development and fostering democratic political culture in transitional societies. Kiptoo has trained peace workers in the Philippines, worked with political parties, assisted the peace process in Kenya and has been involved in peacebuilding interventions in Uganda and Tanzania. He served as the peace research advisor for the Catholic Relief Services in the Philippines and Kenya, as well as for the National Council of Churches of Kenya. Kiptoo earned his Bachelor's degree in Counseling from the Kenya Methodist University and a Master's degree in Peace Studies from the University of Notre Dame. He studied a year-long peacebuilding and conflict transformation course at Mindolo Ecumenical Foundation, Kitwe, Zambia in 2002.

**Rt. Rev. Cornelius Korir** is the incumbent Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Eldoret, appointed in 1990 by Pope John Paul II. He had previously worked as a priest in Nakuru Diocese, as the Vocations Director and Episcopal Vicar of Kericho Diocese. Bishop Korir did his priestly studies at St. Augustine's Senior Seminary, Mabanga, in Western Kenya and St. Thomas Aquinas Seminary in Nairobi. He has a degree in Theology (S.T.L.) from St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, Ireland.

**Samuel Kosgei** works as the Diocesan Program Coordinator for the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, Eldoret Diocese. He has managed and implemented various projects in peacebuilding, human security and livelihoods in the North Rift Valley and pastoralist areas of Northern Kenya. Kosgei holds a BSc in Agricultural Engineering from the University of Nairobi and a Diploma in Project Management from the Kenya Institute of Management (KIM). He has also attended peacebuilding courses at the Africa Peacebuilding Institute (API).

**Florence Njeri** is an experienced peace builder and a psychosocial counselor for the Diocesan Catholic Justice and Peace Commission in Eldoret. She has worked extensively at the grassroots level in reconciling communities affected by inter-ethnic conflicts in her native area of Burnt Forest, Uasin Gishu County. Njeri was a victim of the

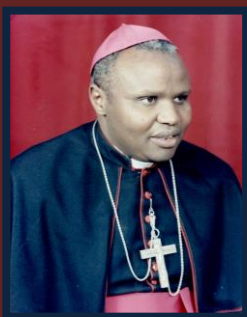
2007/2008 post-election violence where she and her family were displaced from their home. She has overcome many odds, including being the only woman dealing with the male war perpetrators to enable traumatized victims to overcome atrocities of war. Njeri holds a Certificate in Psychological Counseling and as participated in numerous peacebuilding and psychosocial trainings in Kenya.

**Ronald Pagnucco** is Associate Professor in the Peace Studies Department at the College of Saint Benedict and St. John's University. He is co-editor of *A Vision for Justice: Engaging Catholic Social Teaching on the College Campus*, co-author of *Transnational Social Movements and Global Politics: Solidarity Beyond the State* and co-edited a special issue of the *Journal of Peace and Justice Studies* on "Peacebuilding in Africa." Ron has a PhD in Sociology, Master's in Anthropology and a Bachelor's degree in Religion and Anthropology from the Catholic University of America.

**Emily Welty** is Vice-Moderator of the World Council of Churches Commission on International Affairs and Director of Peace and Justice Studies at Pace University in New York City. She is also the Main Representative of the International Peace Research Association to the United Nations. Welty is co-author of *Unity in Diversity: Interfaith Dialogue in the Middle East* and has published widely on the intersections between religion, social movements, the arts and peace. She has a PhD in the Study of Religions from the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies, a Master's in International Peace and Conflict Resolution from American University and a Bachelor's in Religion from the College of Wooster.

# MARIDHIANO MASHINANI

Faced with recurrent political and inter-communal violence since 1992, the Catholic Diocese of Eldoret has responded in numerous ways to alleviate, contain and end the conflicts that have divided local communities. Out of his almost 25 years of experience with peacebuilding at the community level, Bishop Korir follows up on the success of his book *Amani Mashinani (Peace at the Grassroots)*, by turning his attention to reconciliation. With co-authors from the Diocese and beyond, he shows how reconciliation after violent conflict is a subtle, slow and often difficult process that is not just about ending observable fighting. It requires communities to recognize the worth of other, atone for injustice, heal wounds of the spirit and commit to building a non-violent, equitable and just society. While external actors can support it, sustainable reconciliation requires an intensive focus at the grassroots – *maridhiano mashinani* – by faith institutions and local civil society to build relationships of interdependence.



Rt. Rev. Cornelius Korir is the incumbent Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Eldoret, appointed in 1990 by Pope John Paul II. He had previously worked as a priest in Nakuru Diocese, as the Vocations Director and Episcopal Vicar of Kericho Diocese. Bishop Korir did his priestly studies at St. Augustine's Senior Seminary, Mabanga, in Western Kenya and St.

Thomas Aquinas Seminary in Nairobi. He has a degree in Theology (S.T.L.) from St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, Ireland.