

The V National Encounters of Animators of Schools for Forgiveness and Reconciliation

By Dr. Eileen R. Borris

Note: While I was in Rome for a meeting with the "Council for Dignity Forgiveness and Reconciliation" I met another Council member - Leonel Narvaez who was another council member. We talked a lot to one another and realized that we were doing very similar work involving forgiveness on a political level. We decided to join forces and I have since been developing programs which involve "Schools of Forgiveness and Reconciliation" a forgiveness program developed by Leonel. I have since started this work in Africa but not before attending this wonderful meeting Leonel invited me to. I spoke of forgiveness and its healing power within nations to this group in Peru. Below is my reflection of that experience.

It doesn't happen very often in one's life where you hear about something so special that it touches your heart very deeply. This was the case when I met Leonel Narvaez and when he told me about the wonderful work he was doing with the "Schools for Forgiveness and Reconciliation" which he is the founder of.

After our first meeting in Rome which took place in April 2010 for the "Council for Dignity, Forgiveness and Reconciliation", Leonel and I continued our conversation about the work of forgiveness which was very near and dear to our hearts. Leonel graciously extended an invitation for me to come to Piura, Peru to attend the V National Encounters of Animators of Schools for Forgiveness and Reconciliation, August 20-22, 2010 to speak on general concepts of forgiveness, dignity and reconciliation.

Words cannot adequately express my gratitude for this experience. Leonel invited me to join the conference so I could get more of a feeling for the program of the "Schools for Forgiveness and Reconciliation." The Schools for Forgiveness and Reconciliation is a very profound program. Founded in 2001 in Bogotá, Colombia, the Schools of Forgiveness and Reconciliation (SFR) promote the theory and practice of forgiveness and reconciliation not only in scenarios where cycles of social or political violence have become entrenched but also in the daily lives of people.

SFR seeks to break these cycles of violence by transforming an individual's anger and resentment into the ability to live in dignity, harmony and peace with others. By removing the emotional and cognitive barriers to reconciliation for both victims and perpetrators, SFR helps to rebuild key pillars of human existence: meaning in life, psychological and physical security, and social integration. Forgiveness is not forgetting but rather seeing with different eyes.

The SFR methodology provides a process for healing the emotional wounds and memories of violence and for generating new narratives. It promotes reconciliation by fostering

truth, and endorsing restorative justice over punitive justice. Using a trainer-of-trainers approach, the methodology is delivered in small groups of 10-20 people and typically consists of 80 hour workshops divided into 10 modules (48 hours of forgiveness and 32 hours for reconciliation). Those who want to do their inner healing work around forgiveness and who take the training can also become facilitators or animadores/as. These facilitators then go into the villages and communities and begin new “Schools for Forgiveness and Reconciliation.”

Those attending the conferences were all animadores/as and were wonderful people. There were about 80 people from 7 cities in Peru. They were a very mixed group representing indigenous people, peasants from the mountains and coastal dwellers. All of them are very interested in forgiveness and reconciliation. Many of them were Catholics formed by Jesuit institutions.

Over the course of two days each of the groups represented gave inspiring presentations of the work they were doing with the SFR. Interspersed were other presentations which focused on aspects of forgiveness and reconciliation. The evenings were enchanting filled with memorable and meaningful moments of sharing. Saturday night the group organized a parade which filled the streets of Piura followed by an evening under the stars of music and dance representing the different regions of Peru. What was most striking was the love that flowed from everyone to everyone – a demonstration of the power of forgiveness when people accept forgiveness into their lives. To this day I can feel the power of that love.

So thank-you to everyone in Piura. I went there to learn and to share a bit of what I can offer and came back with so much more. I felt the love and the healing power that only forgiveness can bring and was reminded once again about the importance of this work. All those involved with SFR and the work of forgiveness will continue to spread the healing light around the world. Perhaps one day soon all those lights will merge creating a humanity filled with light and love.