CHAPTER 6

Peace and Power Processes

When you shift to the ways of Peace and Power, you experience values in action:

- Every idea and every opinion is on the table.
- Everyone knows what is going on; if they do not, they have a chance to find out.
- All points of view are respected and given due consideration.
- How you do things is just as important as what you do.
- Leadership rotates and is shared according to who is willing and able.
- Everyone has a chance to learn new skills.
- Responsibility for what happens in the group is shared equally by every member.

What Is Different About Peace and Power Groups Compared to Traditional Groups?

When your group uses Peace and Power to its fullest extent, you do not have a structure of elected officers in the same way that many groups do. Instead, leaders emerge based on the needs of the group at any one time, and needs and leaders can shift at any time.

For example, group meetings are led by a convener, and the responsibility to convene a meeting shifts in a rotation that is agreed upon by the group. The more the group values everyone learning to be a leader, the more often they will rotate convening to make sure that every member of the group gains this important skill (see Chapter 7).

When a task requires specific knowledge, people in the group who have the knowledge or experience to do the task assume responsibility for it initially, but they gradually orient others to the task so that others can learn and assume the responsibility. For example, one or two members with experience in managing finances may perform financial management for the group initially, but they engage others with their work who do not yet know how to do this task, and gradually pass along this responsibility.

When your group needs to make a decision, you can take "straw votes" to get a sense of the whole, but your decisions are made using a process of value- based decision making (see Chapter 8). This is similar to what is commonly understood as "consensus," but differs dramatically in that rather than getting everyone to agree, you make sure that everyone appreciates why one option is better than others. And most important, this process ensures that everyone is able to fully support the decision of the group even if it is not their personal preference.

When your group faces conflict, you work with the conflict in very different ways—ways that promote growth and learning (see Chapters 9 and 10). Everyone learns ways to deal with

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difficult issues up front and how to prevent misunderstandings before they happen. When misunderstanding and conflict does occur, you learn ways to address the issues openly, then give one another time and space to consider all points of view, and finally arrive at a place of better understanding.

What Happens in a "Peace and Power" Meeting?

This chapter provides an overview of how face-to-face gatherings or online interactions are ideally conducted using Peace and Power processes. Chapters 7, 8, and 9 describe the major (more difficult) processes in more detail. Your group can form any number of ways to approach gatherings and online interactions, and can even use some of the traditional ways of conducting your business. Your most important concern is finding ways to work together so that how you interact and how you treat one another expresses your shared values and intentions.

The processes described in this chapter are well-suited to groups of 6 to 40 participants (face-to-face or online). Smaller groups tend to work in less formal ways than those described here. Larger groups need to adapt these processes, using smaller break-out sessions for some parts of the process, combined with large-group discussions and reports from smaller groups.

Four basic things happen in a Peace and Power meeting. They are:

- Check-in (described later in this chapter)
- Rotating chair (Chapter 7)
- Value-based decision-building (Chapter 8)
- Closing (Chapter 9)

Face-to-face groups sit in a circle so that everyone has eye contact. Usually one individual, the convener, prepares an agenda that provides structure for the group. This responsibility rotates among group members at regular times, such as every gathering or every month.

The convener opens a gathering or online discussion by beginning check-in, when each person becomes fully present in mind, body, and spirit. Check-in is a time for each individual to focus awareness on the purposes of the gathering, to share with the group any circumstances that might influence participation in the process, and to bring to the group intentions, expectations, or hopes for the time together.

Following check-in, the convener draws attention to the agenda and begins the process of rotating chair (see Chapter 7). In face-to-face gatherings, whoever is speaking is the chair. The primary purpose of rotating chair is to promote every viewpoint being heard, with each person's unique contribution being valued and necessary.

Group decisions are reached using value-based decision-building processes (see Chapter 8). Value-based decision-building focuses on reaching a conclusion that is consistent with the group's principles of solidarity and that takes into account all viewpoints and possibilities.

Value-based decision-building focuses on what each individual and the group as a whole gains by the nature of the decision the group reaches.

The final component is closing, which is a deliberate process to end a gathering or online discussion and at the same time begin movement toward the next stage of the group's process (see Chapter 9). During closing, each person shares appreciation for something that has happened during the process of the gathering, a critical reflection leading toward growth and change, and an affirmation that expresses a personal commitment for moving into the future

Checking In

Check-in is a brief (15 seconds or less) verbal statement by each individual that brings everyone together. For online groups, each person's check-in message should be about 100 words or fewer. The time for online check-in typically happens when the group begins a new discussion. Check-in ensures that everyone's concerns are considered fully by everyone in the group. At the end of check-in, everyone knows what needs to be on the agenda before the discussion starts, what the priorities are for the group and for individuals, and what the overall focus of a face-to-face meeting needs to be. For online groups, check-in usually addresses a time period when a specific topic or purpose is under consideration.

Each person's check-in begins by calling (or typing) your name as a symbolic gesture of placing your Self into the circle, fully present in mind, body, and spirit. Then include at least one of the following:

- Share circumstances or events that are likely to influence your participa- tion during the discussions.
- Reflect briefly on what you integrated or gained from the last gathering.
- State what you want on the agenda, and what you are prepared to con- tribute to the discussion.

In online groups, check-in can happen at any time from anyone, but from time to time the group might want to have everyone check in so that the entire group knows who is really present for the group, and how each individual in the group is doing. In virtual groups, it is very easy to lurk. This may not be a problem for a group that is not focused on a task, but in a group that has a task or a specific focus, lurking is not helpful and plants seeds of distrust. Checking in from time to time brings about a much better level of trust among everyone in the group and compensates for the difficulty of getting to know one another online. Checking in online can be more detailed than it is in a face-to-face group because there are no time constraints online and a lengthy check-in will not prevent others from speaking. However, be aware that everyone in the group will have to read your check-in message, and if it is unduly long and tedious, your readers just might check out!

For face-to-face groups, time is extremely valuable. Although it is important for everyone to

speak and express their intentions, everyone needs to keep in mind that the group has other things to discuss or do besides checking in! Prepare in advance what you want to share during check-in, and be very focused—and brief!

HOW TO PREPARE FOR CHECK-IN: KNOWING WHAT TO SHARE

If you are joining an established group, check-in might feel intimidating at first. A lifetime of hierarchical group processes creates doubts about speaking openly in a group. Until you feel comfortable in a group you may only wish to share who you are and your purpose for being present.

One purpose for checking in is to address your own ability or limits in participating during the gathering. If you are not sure how fully present you are able to be, you might say, "I am distracted tonight, but I want to hear the discussion and participate as much as possible." You may choose to provide some details that will facilitate the group's understanding, such as, "My dog got out of the yard today and I have not found her. I do have friends searching, and it is important to me to be here and help plan the opening of the Center. I will leave at some point to call home and check on things, but I want to stay present as much as I can."

Or online: "I will be moving to a new apartment over the next week, and may not be able to be online as regularly as I would like. I will drop in as much as I can to check messages, and will let the group know when I am online. I am very concerned about keeping up with the information that the publicity group will be posting, so I will make sure and check on that when I can be here. I will let you all know when I have everything set up to be back online regularly as well."

It is important to say something about what you expect or need at this time. If the group knows about circumstances that are influencing your ability to attend to the work of the group, the group can respond in a supportive and caring way. If something is bothering you, say something about it during check-in. Do not dwell on what is bothering you, but let the group know if this is something you just want everyone to know about, or if you would like to have some discussion or other action from the group.

Although every individual's check-in differs in extent and detail, it is vital for everyone to share their intention for each gathering. Silence or online absence during check-in leaves others wondering what you are thinking and leaves room for doubts about your intentions. Silence at this time interferes with creating solidarity within the group.

RESPONDING TO CHECK-IN

Check-in does not occur in a vacuum. The group briefly focuses energy, time, and attention on what individuals share. When a person shares exciting good news, let your congratulations and shared joy erupt! When a person is preoccupied with some circumstance that may interfere with her participation ("My dog is lost"), someone in the group may ask, "How can we best

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respond right now?" to find out what the person needs from the group. If someone shares a dramatic and important event—such as the death of a friend—the group may wish to suspend the agenda entirely or alter the agenda in some way in order to be fully responsive to the tragedy.

Everyone in the group needs to take care not to let someone's check-in derail the meeting to a discussion that is not on the agenda. If discussion is needed based on someone's check-in, the convener (or any other member) can step in and note that this topic will be added to the agenda, so that everyone can check in before any discussion begins.

Checking OUT

There are at least two types of check-out. First, if you are not able to participate in an active way, it is wise to check out entirely, either from the current discussion or from the group altogether. Sleeping or reading a book during a gathering does not constitute being present or participating!

Another kind of check-out occurs when you are present and committed to the group, but you have specific limits on your time and energy for this particular gathering or for a time period online. If you will not be able to be online for a while, let the group know when you will be away and when you will return. If you come to a gathering and have to leave before closing, then explain your situation during check-in and give the time frame to which you are committed. As the time nears, request the chair and share any closing comments. Give the group time to attend to your concerns or unfinished business or to make plans for finishing something in which you might be involved.