

# **Voices: Things I've learned about bridge building & peacemaking**

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KELLER (RNS)—I hate the term “the other,” which sounds alienating, but I admit it serves a purpose.

From the beginning of his papacy, Pope Francis has gone out of his way to reach out to “the other.” He has gone beyond his own tribe. He is a Catholic who is a global citizen, valuing all the citizens of this world—even the ones he would disagree with.

In reflecting on Francis' experience and mine, I've seen a few things about bridge building and peacemaking that hold true for both of us.

## **Four lessons**

First, the people who give you the hardest time for loving the other are not the other but generally come from your own tribe. They live by fear of loss—of life, power, position, many things.

Second, it's rare that people reject overtures of peacemaking from people of the other tribe. At a minimum they want to hear what you have to say. I don't know how many times I've been told: “Bob, you are not like other Christians. You're more open.”

The truth is, I am like many other Christians. I'm just the only one they know, and I know them not because I waited for them but because I reached out to them first.

Third, culture has to be challenged. We live in a very uncivil time and tone. Hate and hate speech, calling people names and getting in a huff only polarizes people. It does nothing to bring peace and resolution. Jesus didn't change people by calling them idiots or other names.

Fourth, peacemakers conquer not with hate but with truth and endurance. They are unassuming, kind and gentle. They are in the same current as their contemporaries and colleagues, but they move up the ladder not through power and force but through humility and love.

## **Making lessons personal**

Angry, mad, vengeful, greedy people don't age well with history. History is the story not merely of people who "conquered" the world, but who "transformed" the world, through the thoughtful power of faith, hope and love—people like Augustine, Francis, Tolstoy, Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., Mother Teresa and Pope Francis.

This morning I prayed for myself, "Jesus make me a man of peace, a peacemaker. I've got a long way to go. Calm down the Texan in me. Tone down the Baptist in me. Turn up love, mercy, kindness, gentleness, humility, so that I'll be a bridge builder and peacemaker."

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