

SEEDS OF PEACE

BARBARA PENGELLY AND ARTS FOR PEACE



*'If you think you are too small to make a difference,
then you've never been in bed with a mosquito'*



It is possible to be overcome by the violence we feel within ourselves and the violence which permeates us from outside. Oppressed by the forces of un-peace – part of what the New Testament calls the '*powers and principalities of our world*' – we may then become less than we might be and lose sight of our own power to make a difference. Part of the antidote lies in (re)-imagination. Indeed, it is perhaps no coincidence that John Lennon's song '*Imagine*' became so popular. For rediscovering the power of imagination (and for religious people, living within God's Imagination or Sacred Dreaming) is a vital element in overcoming violence, and artists of all kinds help show us the way.

Barbara Pengelly from Newcastle certainly shows us 'what one person can do'. She is a potter who, in August 1985 (the International Year of Peace) came up with the idea of making little white peace buttons as a sign of peace, after talking to some of her students about her belief that individuals can and should make a difference in the world. That day she went to her studio, found a little piece of plaster and carved a tiny dove into it to use as a stamp. She took a thumbnail size piece of white clay and pressed the image into it. When she turned the piece of clay over she saw the imprint of lines from her hand – her life line, her heart and head line. Aware then that she could make a difference, when she returned to college the following week she had a bundle of peace buttons.

As a result, since 1986 thousands of little buttons have travelled all over the globe. Her initial target was 100,000 but she later decided to make 145,000 in recognition of the official death toll in the Hiroshima bombing. The buttons are given free by Barbara on request, and she is compiling a collection of stories about the strange connections and coincidences they have brought her since the project began. As Barbara says:

WHAT CAN ONE PERSON DO?

- *One person can use his or her abilities, strengths, talents to share with another or others a thought, a word – a deed*
- *One person can make peace with himself or herself and offer the fruits of that state of being to others*
- *One person's thoughts and ideas – if shared – can germinate a peace seed in the minds of others*
- *Others can grow from that beginning, and establish a chain through this link to a place where decisions are made for peace or war*
- *One person can push the war button - We can all push and press the peace button*
- *Every act of peace – every peaceful act – in the name of peace can be shared*

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Opening Up To Peace

Barbara Pengelly was one of a number of creative artists involved in the 'Opening Up To Peace' DOV Summer School in January 2004, which explored how we may grow in personal peace through the arts. Alongside Barbara, other artists and 'seeds of peace' such as Trish Watts, noted musician and Arts in Action program leader, Judith Keller, dance and labyrinth teacher, and Pene Brook, artist-theologian, shared visual art, drama, dance, pottery, dynamic liturgy, and audio-visual presentations, seeking to open up hearts, bodies and imaginations, as well as minds, to that 'peace of God which passes all understanding'. Exploring these various media enabled participants to connect deeply with the pain and power of their spiritual autobiographies.



The four main themes of the *Decade to Overcome Violence in Australia* formed the framework, with four key symbols related to the DOV themes also acting as a focus for each day: the symbol of the heart for Mercy-power; the sunflower for the transfiguring power of Truth; the (concentric) circle for the cultivating of harmonious, inclusive Community; and the (sharing) hands for the doing of Justice.

Arts in Action: A Local Church's Involvement in the *Decade to Overcome Violence*

Chester Street Uniting Church (Epping NSW) has also effectively used art activities to enable people to explore and overcome violence. This began in 2003 with a children's after-school Advent workshop, culminating in the creation of a very large poster proclaiming 'PEACE ON EARTH'. Then, in 2004, the church's **Arts in Action** program initiated a '*Cultivating Peace Thro' Creativity*' series of workshops open to the community, as a direct response to the *Decade to Overcome Violence*. Local artists, poets and school children were invited to submit works on the theme of peace, and two community projects were completed as part of the response. The community artwork was facilitated by the church's artist-in-residence Lindena Robb, producing a painted silk banner incorporating words relating to peace, and a painted and gilded papier maché bowl to hold messages of peace. Both of these now have a place among the visual images used in worship. They were exhibited at a five day Spring Arts Festival, together with paintings by children and local artists, drawings, collages, a large paper-cut, and poetry. An evening of conversation with three artists working with different media (visual arts, music and movement) was arranged during the week, and a concert was held on the Sunday afternoon featuring Gospel singers and a jazz duo.

Sources and more information

www.ncca.org.au/special_projects/dov/stories/events/
www.chesterstreet.org.au