



getting started with
COMMUNITY
PEACEBUILDING

**your first steps to understanding, connecting, and
collaborating for community change**



Getting Started With Community
Peacebuilding: Your First Steps to
Understanding, Connecting, and
Collaborating for Community Change

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Are you a Community Peacebuilder?

Do you long to be more engaged with your community?

Do you want to develop more trust, understanding, and care with your neighbors?

Do you dream about improving your whole community, but don't know where to start?

Then this is for you!

At Peace Catalyst International, we are passionate about empowering “community peacebuilders” wherever they are—folks committed to digging deep, building bridges, and partnering across differences for positive change.

This isn't about quick fixes or finding "the answer." It's about the slow, patient, humble work of earning the trust of our neighbors, integrating into the community, and finding our place alongside all those around us who are working for good.

Maybe you're new in your community; maybe you're newly inspired to get involved; maybe you've been engaged for years and want to discern new possibilities.

Wherever you are on this journey into community peacebuilding, we wrote this for you!

What is Community Peacebuilding?

What is Peacebuilding?

Often when we think of peace, we think of a lack of conflict, especially physical violence. We assume that we have peace when people aren't fighting, aren't arguing, aren't blaming, and aren't hurting. If things are calm and people appear to be getting along, then we may say things are "peaceful." But this absence of visible conflict—this negative peace—rarely lasts long, because the underlying harmful issues and broken relationships persist.

Instead, we envision a positive peace, a peace defined by the good being created. Positive peace is about preventing conflict by connecting and empowering people, interrupting violent conflict with creativity and compassion, and seeking healing, justice, and reconciliation once harm has been done.

In times of violent conflict, negative peace—stopping the physical violence—is a crucial first step. But peace cannot stop there, as negative peace alone leaves the situation ripe for future violence. Positive peace that addresses the roots of conflict is the antidote to a negative peace that maintains a status quo that benefits some more than others. It is a peace that must be built and cultivated, inviting us to work through conflict rather than avoid it. Peace means co-creating relationships and societies where everyone can flourish together.

What is Community Peacebuilding?

Negative and Positive Peace

Negative Peace can lead to...



avoiding discomfort



normalizing harm



ignoring conflict

Positive Peace can lead to...



resisting harm



including all



creating together

What is Community Peacebuilding?

What is Community?

We might understand community in two different ways.

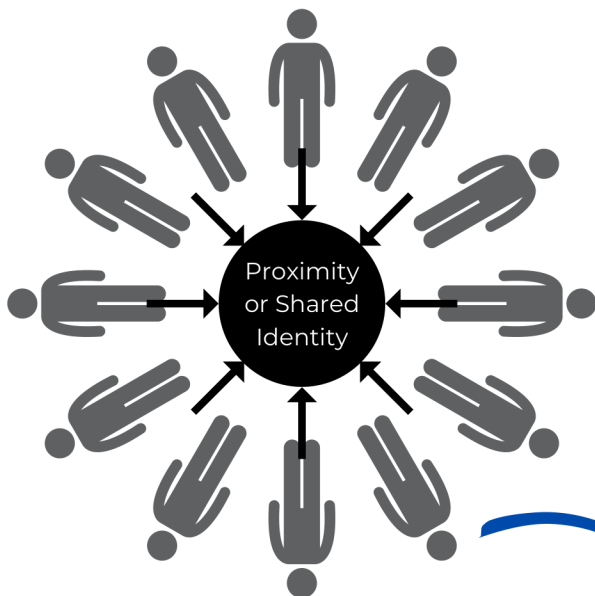
A superficial understanding of community is defined by proximity or shared identity. We might say we're in the same community if we live around the same neighborhood, town, or city. Or we might share an ethnicity. Or practice the same religion or attend the same school. Or play in the same sports league. Or participate in the same online fandom. When we have shared interests, history, or experiences, we may be in community. (This primer is written with a local neighborhood in mind, but the same principles apply almost everywhere.)

But real community, deep community, goes beyond shared interests and location. Community Peacebuilders dream of a community defined by care, by trust, and by dignity. A thriving, peace-filled community means people have a sense of responsibility for their collective future: a future where folks look out for each other, value and include each other, and understand that the well-being of one person affects the well-being of everyone.

Community peacebuilding is the journey of pursuing positive peace in a specific context, growing a caring and flourishing community together.

What is Community Peacebuilding?

From Disconnected to Connected Community



The Disconnected Community

A superficial community where people are associated through proximity or a common identity, but with little relationship or investment in each other's wellbeing.

The Connected Community

An intentional, chosen community marked by shared trust, inclusion, care, and a concern for the flourishing for everyone.



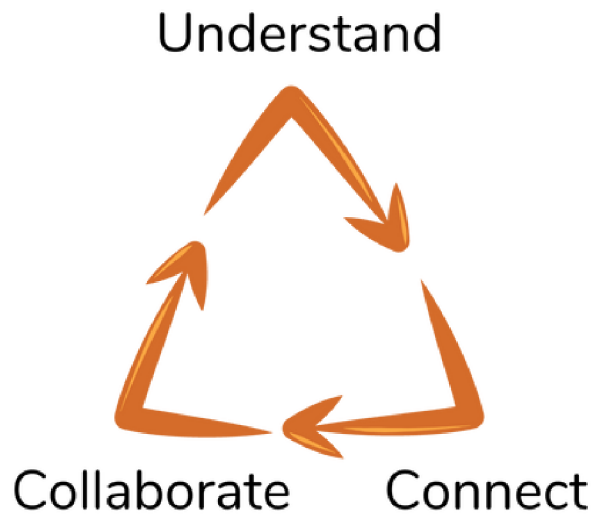
"Connected" and "Disconnected" language adapted from Cormac Russell's introduction to Asset Based Community Development, *The Connected Community* (Berrett-Koehler 2022)

Postures for Community Peacebuilding

Understand, Connect, & Collaborate

At Peace Catalyst, we approach peacebuilding through a journey of Understanding, Connecting, and Collaborating.

Community peacebuilders seek to **Understand** their context, its conflicts, and their own place within it all. When peacebuilding is not grounded in understanding—or at least the desire to Understand—it can harm more than it helps.



Peacebuilding is rooted in relationships. We build those relationships by intentionally **Connecting** with those around us. We Connect to find partners, to include others, to amplify unheard voices, and to build bridges across divides. Change only happens through trust.

Our goal is **Collaboration**—working with our neighbors, our partners, possibly even our perceived enemies to build a thriving community. Change that arises from within a community is more transformative than a fix from the outside.

Though these stages loosely build upon each other, the cycle never stops. When we Connect, we Understand more. When we Collaborate, we also continue to Connect. Community Peacebuilding invites us to weave all three elements together.

Postures for Community Peacebuilding

Grounded in Relationship

Community Peacebuilding is rooted in authentic, mutual, vulnerable relationships. Becoming part of deep and meaningful transformative change in our communities only happens when we are known and trusted by our neighbors and collaborators. What do trusting relationships look like for Community Peacebuilders?

Peacebuilding rooted in authenticity

Can we build peace with integrity and transparency? Can we bring our full selves to our community? People will sense ulterior motives. We build trust when we are open and vulnerable about our values, our motives, and our experiences.

Peacebuilding rooted in humility

Can we arrive as learners, recognizing the dignity and wisdom of our neighbors? We are not saviors in our community, and assuming we are the experts causes harm. We build trust through honoring and celebrating the contributions of all.

Peacebuilding rooted in a shared future

Are we part of our community, or separate? Are we fixing other people's problems, or contributing to our own future? Nobody wants to be someone else's project. We build trust when our well-being is tied to the flourishing of our neighbors. We act out of a sense of solidarity and interconnectedness rather than disconnected charity.

Postures for Community Peacebuilding

The Roles of a Peacebuilder

Although their skills and interests will vary, all community peacebuilders embrace key leadership roles in their neighborhood. Whether the leadership is formal or informal, these are just a few roles we may fill.

Bridge-builders

Community peacebuilders know that, to build peace, it is necessary to cross our society's many divisions and build bridges with those different than ourselves. When we cultivate authentic relationships across differences, trust grows and paths open for diverse groups to partner.

Weavers

Community peacebuilders know that communities won't flourish if all relationships center on them. They don't just build their own relationships, they weave a wide web of relationships, introducing neighbors to each other so that positive peace multiplies widely.

Organizers

Community peacebuilders know that relationship-building alone isn't enough for wide-spread change. If neighbors want to transform their community and work toward positive peace, they must take action. Peacebuilders organize and empower neighbors to act together.

Storytellers

Community peacebuilders know the importance of a good story. People aren't motivated by facts alone, and fear-based action exhausts quickly. Informed by the ideas positive peace and a connected community, peacebuilders help neighbor cast a vision of a future they want to build.

Tools for the Journey

Navigating Our Way as Community Peacebuilders

In Peace Catalyst, we often talk about peacebuilding as a journey upon which we embark. We have a destination—or more accurately, a guiding vision—toward which we move. But as we journey toward peace with our community, we never quite know where a path will take us, what challenges or opportunities will arise along the way, or which travel companions will come and go over time.

But we are not without direction. We have a sense of what positive peace and connected community look and feel like. We also have peacebuilding postures to help us show up well.

Finally, we have developed three navigation tools to keep us oriented on our journey:

The Ecosystem

Navigating any journey requires understanding the environment through which we travel and how we are situated within it. The Ecosystem offers a glimpse of the different ways to work for change.

The Compass

Understanding the terrain is great, but we still need to find our way through it. The Compass is a reflective tool that helps us to stay true to our goal of community peace in a way that is authentic and sustainable.

The Map

We know the ecosystem, and the compass points us toward true north. The Map charts our path, guiding us through the repeating and ongoing steps of understanding, connecting, and collaborating for peace.

Tools for the Journey

The Community Peacebuilding Ecosystem

There is no one "right way" to build peace. Communities are complex and constantly changing, as is the path to a flourishing future.

Our journey leads us into broad ecology of methods for cultivating peace. Each is essential—these methods don't compete, they work together. Community Peacebuilders may feel especially drawn to one part of the ecology, or they may participate in several. Many movements and projects will integrate multiple elements. Understanding the ecosystem of community change helps us celebrate and collaborate with different ways of pursuing a common vision.



Tools for the Journey

The Community Peacebuilding Ecosystem

Community Aid

“How can we reduce harm?”

Community Aid is an urgent and emergency response to harm; it doesn't fix the problem, but it keeps it from getting worse.

Examples include food pantries, homeless shelters, needle exchanges, violence interrupter teams, mutual aid, and soup kitchens.

Community Development

“How do we build and skill up?”

Community Development is about the community's economic capacity, empowering people with skills and resources.

Examples include ESL classes, community gardens, job training, business microloans, recreation centers, and youth mentoring.

Community Building

“How do we relate?”

Community Building is all about relationships: connecting across differences, reconciling broken relationships, and creating a collective story and vision.

Examples include potlucks, block parties, story circles, dialogue events, restorative justice circles, mediation, and cultural celebrations.

Community Activism

“How do we use our power?”

Community Activism is using collective power to influence government leaders, institutions, and businesses.

Examples include advocating for new street signs, protesting unfair policies, participating in government meetings, and boycotting harmful businesses.

Tools for the Journey

The Community Peacebuilding Compass

Collaboration with neighbors is the fruit of our Understanding and Connecting. We find our place in the ecosystem of change through skills, passions, relationships, and community needs.

What relationships do you have?

Relationships guide our collaboration. What do those around us care about? What is important to those we trust? Who can involve us in existing work, or be a partner in something new?

What are you passionate about?

We want to collaborate in ways that are exciting and life-giving for us. Our passions help sustain us for the long haul. What ideas, issues, or activities are close to your heart?

What skills and resources do you have?

To collaborate well, we want to have something to contribute. What do we bring to the work? What skills, resources, and connections can we use for the good of our community?

What does your community need?

Community Peacebuilding requires understanding our community. We may have passion, relationships, and skills, but our ideas will still fall flat if we aren't meeting felt needs.

Tools for the Journey

The Community Peacebuilding Compass



Tools for the Journey

The Community Peacebuilding Map

Peace Catalyst uses the framework of **Understanding**, **Connecting**, and **Collaborating** to guide our we do peacebuilding. The Community Peacebuilding Map is a tool that guides us through those steps specifically in the context of integrating into and working for change in our community. As we do this, we explore our community's history, identity, and guiding narratives in order to work toward a more beautiful future together.

These stages of the journey never quite end; though we might focus on different ones at different times, they all happen together. We try to understand some as we begin; connecting deepens our understanding; collaborating strengthens our connectings and our understanding. When collaboration slows, we return to understanding and connecting.

Who have we been?

To know where a community is going, we need to know where it has been. What stories guide it? What needs and wounds have shaped it?

Who are we now?

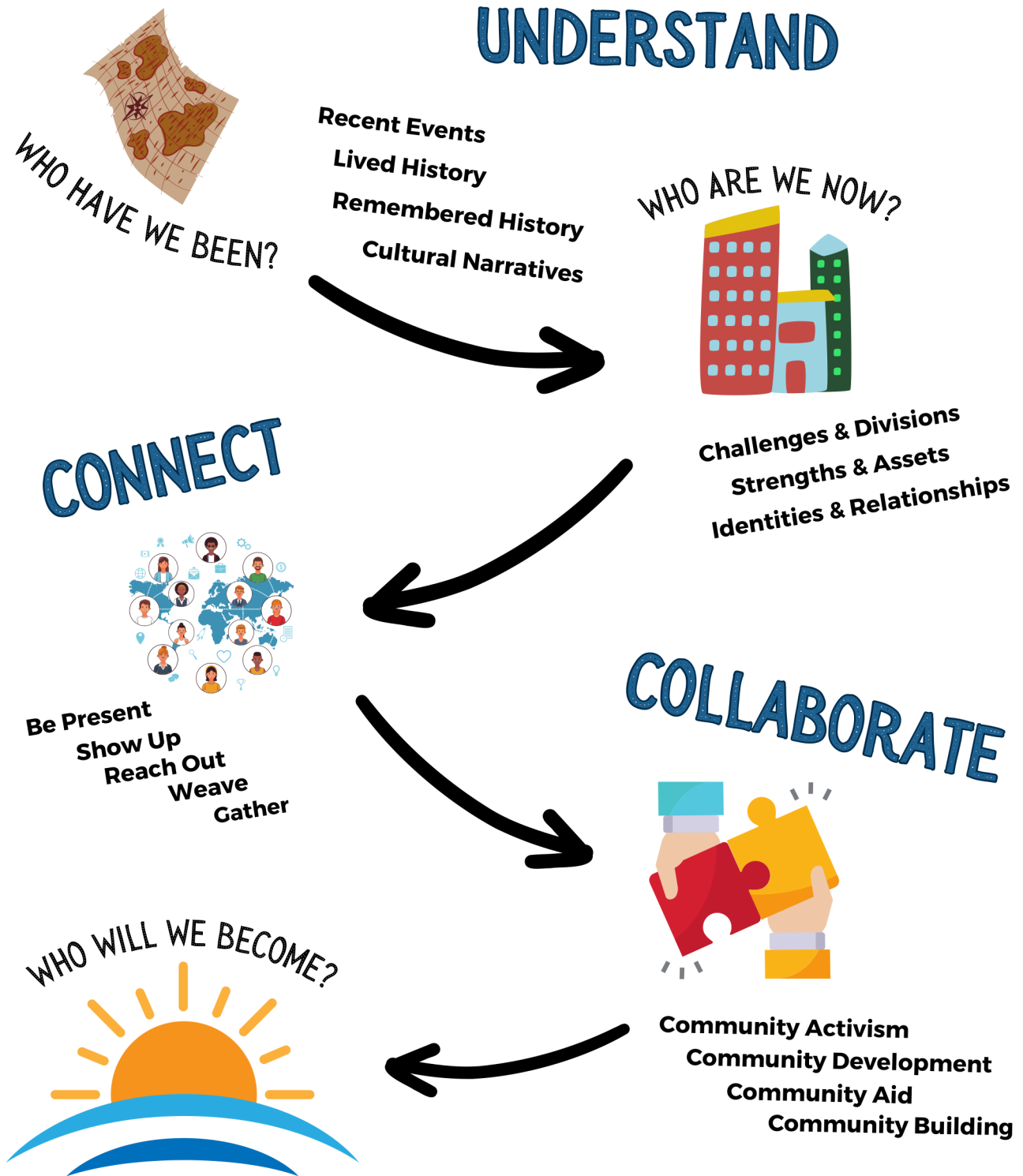
The community's past shapes its present, but the present community continues to change. Who is here now? How do they relate? What are the current conflicts and challenges, strengths and resources?

Who will we become?

Community narratives can change. Communities that are deeply divided or carrying collective wounds might see a bleak future ahead of them. We connect and collaborate together for a more beautiful future for all.

Tools for the Journey

The Community Peacebuilding Map



Understand the Context

Understanding is foundational for Community Peacebuilding. It is continuous—every new piece of information, every new relationship, every new experience helps us better understand from where our community came and what we are today.

Peacebuilders are drawn into this journey through different paths. Some are responding to a conflict or issue they care about; some see ways to strengthen the community; some want a stronger sense of connection with others. All paths can invite us deeper in.

What do we want to understand?

Understand the Conflict

Every community has a conflict. Every present-day conflict has a history. We work to uncovering the histories, relationships, traumas, power dynamics, and more that shape a current conflict or issue.

Understand the Community

Every community has its stories about itself. Every community has strengths and challenges. We work to learning about the histories, stories, cultures, resources, landscape, and people of the community.

Understand Yourself

We are not separate from the community, we are part of it. To show up well, we reflect on our own identities in our community and the passions, skills, stories, and relationships we bring with us.

10 Ideas to Start Understanding

- 1 Take a walk around your community. Where are you comfortable? Where do you feel uneasy? What's under those feelings?
- 2 Draw a map of your community. Who lives there? What resources exist? What places gather and empower people?
- 3 Read your local paper. What conflicts or fears do you see? Whose voices and perspectives are left out?
- 4 Learn your community's history. Go to the library, visit a local historical society, or listen to the stories of your elders.
- 5 Who is in your community? Be curious: explore learning basic phrases, culture, and history of other groups.
- 6 Seek out stories, narratives, local art and music, or experiences different from your own. What needs and values do you hear?
- 7 Reflect on community conflicts. Who is "othered"? Who holds power? What stories or assumptions are being made?
- 8 Every community conflict is part of something bigger. What national issues are affecting local relationships?
- 9 What is your relationship to local conflicts? To whom are you connected? How are you and your neighbors impacted?
- 10 Consider your place in the community. What's your own history? What resources, skills, and passions do you bring to the table?

Connect Across Differences

Connecting across differences is the lifeblood of Community Peacebuilding. Community healing and change are impossible until diverse and divided neighbors know, trust, and reconcile together.

Be Present

Connecting gets easier with familiarity and proximity. In which public or high-traffic places might we intentionally and regularly spend time so we can meet new people?

Show Up

Familiarity and common interests increase trust. Which community activities, such as celebrations, city and school events, volunteer days, protests, might we attend to learn and meet new people?

Reach Out

Familiarity isn't enough, we must deepen the relationship. Reach out to those we want to know better, such as a neighbor, a leader, a volunteer, or a connector. Reach out directly or find an introduction.

Weave

As our relationships grow, we will find people with similar or complementary stories, passions, skills, and projects. Let's de-center ourselves, introduce them to each other, and see what develops.

Gather

Lasting peace depends on the strength of a community's overlapping web of relationships. We set the stage for collaboration when we gather people together, invite others to Understand and Connect along with us, and cultivate a collective identity and purpose.

10 Ideas to Start Connecting

- 1 Start with people you already know. Hear their stories, concerns, values, and hopes. Ask who else you should talk to.
- 2 Make new connections. Have you been hearing about a neighbor or local leader? Seek an introduction, or reach out yourself.
- 3 Be present and available in your community. Spend time in public spaces: parks, libraries, your front yard. Who do you see often?
- 4 Show up at community events: block parties, prayer gatherings, performances, celebrations. Meet helpers, neighbors, and leaders.
- 5 Knock on doors. Go meet neighbors you don't know. Introduce yourself, and maybe bring some treats. Remember their names!
- 6 Invite neighbors to a barbecue or potluck. Host a fun gathering where folks can meet and contribute with little pressure.
- 7 Invite community members to a conversation. Host a more structured gathering to share stories or discuss a local issue.
- 8 Invite someone you disagree with out for a coffee. Go with the express intention of listening and understanding, not arguing.
- 9 Find a community to learn and grow with. Join folks with shared values: faith communities, cultural groups, non-profits, etc.
- 10 Invite someone of a different identity to hold you accountable. This trust and humility helps you address your blind spots.

Collaborating for Good

Community peacebuilders know the journey doesn't stop with understanding and connecting. We want to be good neighbors working for the good of everyone in our community. Regularly returning to the Community Peacebuilding Compass helps us discover where we fit in our community's ecosystem of change.

Get involved with others

Most communities are already full of wise, experienced neighbors already working for good. How can you join them?

Start something new

As we work with partners and cultivate community, we may sense new ideas are needed. How can we experiment together?

Find your movement(s)

Every local issue shapes and is shaped by larger-scale conflicts. What bigger movements for change are we part of?



10 Ideas to Start Collaborating

- 1 Support the good work of others. Celebrate other peacebuilders. Share their news, join their events, and bring others along.
- 2 Volunteer. Invest yourself in groups that share your values and passions. This deepens your relationships and builds credibility.
- 3 Get your community to show up for groups and issues you care about. Personally invite those in your network to get involved.
- 4 Start network weaving. You've already built your network. Now consider, who should know each other? Who can you introduce?
- 5 Partner with neighbors to host community events. Barbecues, potlucks, story circles, block parties... it's better with a team!
- 6 Partner across divisions to learn together. Co-host a diverse group for a book club, film discussion, or community conversation.
- 7 Find an organization to host you. Have an idea for a project? Pitch it to a local faith community or non-profit—they may love it!
- 8 Organize neighbors to identify a shared need, then work on it. Need a stop sign? Repairs in the park? Get busy and advocate!
- 9 Skill up together. What does your community need? What skills would make it happen? How can you learn with your neighbors?
- 10 Bring your skills to your community. Every vocation has a role. How can your business, IT, or construction experience help?

Next Steps


Want to go deeper into community peacebuilding with Peace Catalyst?

- ▶ Join us for an event or training at www.peacecatalyst.org/events
- ▶ Learn with us through our podcast (peacecatalystpodcast.podbean.com) and blog (www.peacecatalyst.org/blog)
- ▶ Join the Christian Peacebuilding Network to find support and learn more about peacebuilding at <https://www.peacecatalyst.org/christianpeacebuildingnetwork>
- ▶ Learn about shalom, the biblical concept of peace at www.peacecatalyst.org/shalom
- ▶ Join Peace Catalyst on staff or as a volunteer at www.peacecatalyst.org/join





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