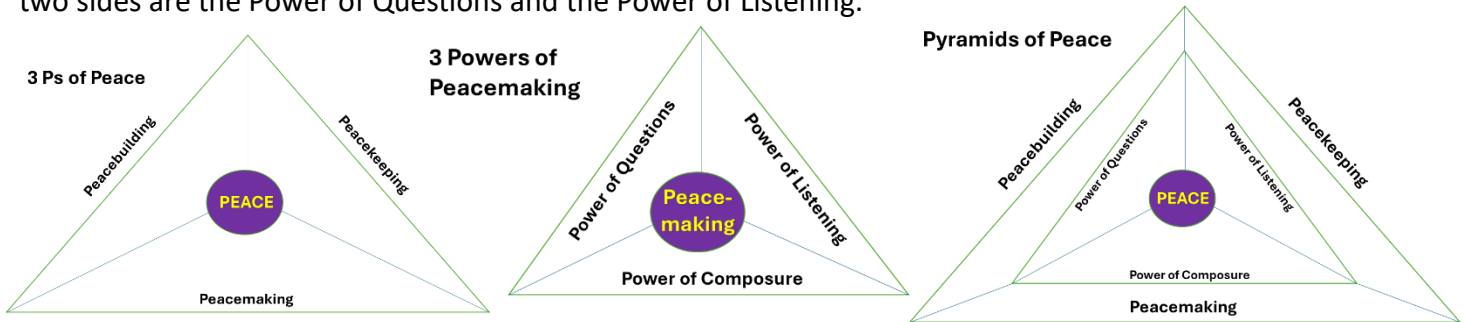


**Barbara:** Welcome back to People’s Peace Talks. Peacemaking rarely, if ever, happens naturally. An intentional process and plan moves us into the work of *peacemaking*, followed by an intensive period of *peacebuilding*, and a sustained effort at *peacekeeping*. Each of these functions depends on a set of specialized skills that need cultivation and development. Visualize two pyramids. The baseline of the first is peacemaking, and the two sides are peacebuilding and peacekeeping. This is a linear process, but with quite a bit of overlap among the steps. The second pyramid provides the foundation for the first. Its baseline is the Power of Composure, and its two sides are the Power of Questions and the Power of Listening.



**Dan:** Today we are going to launch our very first Bits & Peaces segment with a look at the first pyramid: what exactly do we mean by peacemaking, peacebuilding, and peacekeeping, how are they related, and how do we create an effective peacemaking system? We will also introduce the concepts of composure, questioning, and listening. In subsequent Bits & Peaces episodes we will explore in detail the three sides of the second pyramid. The more we can master the powers of composure, questioning and listening, the more effective we will be as peacemakers, peacebuilders, and peacekeepers.

**Barbara:** For the purposes of People’s Peace Talks, we often refer to the whole system as peacemaking, because this is the crucial first step toward peace, and both peacebuilding and peacekeeping depend on this foundation. In brief, here are the three functions of the peacemaking system, using the analogy of constructing a building. Peacemaking is the site selection, visioning, big picture, resource investment, permit & deed obtaining work in the process. Peacemaking depends on identifying the real source of conflict, applying the specialized skills of conflict transformation and de-escalation, defining the necessary outcomes, getting key people on board and in the room, establishing protocols and behavioral guidelines, and getting a commitment to work the whole process with integrity. This establishes an environment to focus on the possibilities instead of the problems (though, those must be dealt with along the way).

**Dan:** Once the fundamental work of peacemaking occurs, the vital processes of peace building take place. While interpersonal and group dynamic skills are most important to the peacemaking process, critical thinking, systems design, common sense, attention to detail, and vision casting are essential to move things forward. The building analogy follows with the blueprints, engineering, contracting, and construction provided to build the structures, practices, and procedures that create and maintain peace. Peacemakers do not hand their work off to peacebuilders; they work collaboratively, developing and fine tuning the building process. Peacemakers continue to interpret the work of the peacebuilders to the public at large, shaping the message of the peacemaking/peacebuilding process.

**Barbara:** Peacekeeping is the grand opening, where the work of the business of peacemaking takes place day to day. Staffing the building, from maintenance to marketing, directing to supervising to occupying, is the work of peacekeeping. Everyone involved supports establishment of the new reality: the ground rules, the

guidelines, the practices, accountability, improvement, and integrity. Let me emphasize at this point that peacekeeping is very messy, often chaotic, and anything but simple. It is hard work, and from time to time requires some severe and un-peaceful-like responses. Those who intentionally and maliciously work to undermine peace must be dealt with and dealt with emphatically. The maintenance of a new peace may be the most demanding effort we will ever make.

**Dan:** Mixing metaphors a bit, peacemaking requires the acquisition and mastery of a specific set of tools. There are a wealth of tools available through conflict resolution and mediation, appreciative inquiry, body language, asset-based community development, collaboration, facilitation, restorative justice practices, circle process, and many more that provide a base curriculum for peacemaker training. These skills and areas of process knowledge cannot be learned then applied; peacemaking is on the job training. Early efforts may be ineffective as you learn, but there is no better teacher than experience. In fact, peacemaking is best done in pairs or teams where less experienced peacemakers can join with more experienced peacemakers to help soften the learning curve. From experience, I suggest you learn these tools and practices in small groups of 5-7 members. This allows for a broader perspective, a deeper learning immersion, and the small size of the group maximizes engagement, participation, and retention.

**Barbara:** Proper use of the proper tools greatly increases the chances for success. Different tools have different applications in making, building, and keeping peace, yet all are important. Every bit as important as the tools are interpersonal skills, interaction styles, and the personalities of the people involved. Peacemaking and peacekeeping depend heavily on good communication skills as well as patience, tolerance, and self-control. The less ego and defensiveness, the better.

Peacemaking relies on a basic knowledge of group dynamics, peacebuilding on recruitment and training, peacekeeping on facilitation and collaboration. Peacemaking can begin with as few as three, for example, a stance, an opposition, and a mediator. Peacebuilding depends on a small group with complementary skills, to work with larger groups to design and construct appropriate protocols and processes. Peacekeeping tends to involve larger groups, creating a critical mass of people committed to peace for the common good. Each function builds upon and expands the prior function, but this movement is synchronous, not sequential.

**Dan:** This may sound a little overwhelming and too specialized for just anyone to engage in. It's not. Most of us know what needs to be done. We just have little, if any, practice in doing it. One hundred years ago, one of the fundamental subjects of public education was something called *comportment*. Comportment taught children how to conduct themselves, how to respect others, how to deal with conflict, and to display a basic set of manners. Children were taught to value dignity and reason. Following the second World War it was determined that comportment was a waste of time. There were more important subjects to learn, and besides, why teach what every child had already been taught at home. Hmmmm. Things have changed. Essentially, peacemaking, peacebuilding, and peacekeeping rely on common sense. Yes, there are skills to learn, but almost anyone can learn them if they truly want to. Yes, the 3 Ps require a change of perspective and approach, but once again, nothing we can't easily practice. The most important aspect of any of the 3 Ps is intentionality. We can accomplish just about anything if we really, really want it.

**Barbara:** In coming episodes, we will look in depth at the foundational practices of peacemaking, what we call the 3 powers:

1. The power of composure
2. The power of questions
3. The power of listening

Once we master these three powers, we have the groundwork in place for peacemaking, peacebuilding, and peacekeeping. Those who develop skills and proficiency in these three areas enter a whole realm of new possibilities. We can change the entire nature of our conversations, and, when we learn to have healthier conversations, we can change the world.

Throughout my life, I have had a sense of personal mission: changing the world one person at a time. Often, that person has been me. I see this as a helpful guideline for all aspects of peacemaking work. When we look at the violence and destruction, the penchant for power and control, the greed and inequity in our world, it is very easy to be overwhelmed. Who do we think we are, imagining we can make peace when so few people seem to want or value it? I invite you to raise your spirit by lowering your sights. Don't spend time thinking about what you CAN'T do; focus on what you CAN do.

**Dan:** A key concept of peacemaking, peacebuilding, and peacekeeping is your *sphere of influence* and your *control space*. We interact with people all day long. When we encounter someone, our sphere of influence crosses their sphere of influence. The sphere of influence is basically self-explanatory; it is the opportunity we have to share our thinking, beliefs, worldview, and opinions. Our control space is that which is within our power to do or not do.

Let me give an example that may clarify and define what I am talking about. A Trump supporter and a Biden supporter meet at a diner. The Trump supporter wears a MAGA hat and as the Biden supporter sits down, she makes a “pffff” noise that gets the Trump supporter’s attention. “What?” says the MAGA man. “Oh, nothing,” responds the Biden supporter. “No, you made a rude noise when you sat down. What, are you some kind of liberal America hater?” The Biden supporter responds, “I’m not the one who hates America. You’re the ones trying to destroy democracy!” You can see where this is heading. Both sides are losing any opportunity to truly influence the other, because they are choosing to use their control to argue, preceding an outright fight.

**Barbara:** What if this encounter went a different way? What if the Biden supporter chose to control her responses a different way? She may begin with a “pffff,” but when the MAGA man says, “What?” imagine this response: “Sorry, I am never sure what Make America Great Again means, and I just reacted. Why do you wear that hat, and what are you hoping it means?” Instead of using her control space to deflect or defend, she uses it to question, then to listen. She engages the person, not the person’s hat. She deals with the individual rather than the label or category. She chooses to set aside preconceptions to allow the person to explain. She becomes responsive rather than reactive. Too often, we try to extend our control space farther than it is meant to go, thinking that—through power, energy, emphasis, and volume—we can not only influence another’s thinking but control it. This. Never. Works.

**Dan:** Peacemaking requires three intentional and conscious shifts: first, a shift from certainty to curiosity; second, a shift from assertiveness to inquisitiveness; third, a shift from argument to understanding.

Certainty is the death of learning and growth. Once we are certain, we stop seeking, we stop questioning. How many things in this life do we absolutely, without question, without doubt, know for certain? Uncertainty is the only certainty in this life. It is essential for peacemaking that we are clear about those things that are *true* and those things that are *opinion*. And this even means *relatively* true. For example, I can make the true statement that to get to Pittsburgh, you must travel southeast through Indiana and Ohio. That's because I live in Wisconsin. If you live in Florida, please don't travel southeast to get to Pittsburgh. It is no longer true, and you won't get there.

Sweeping generalizations are seldom, if ever, true. See what I did there? I used conditional language. In my opinion, sweeping generalizations are flawed and false, but a sweeping generalization like, no one can survive being thrown in a blast furnace, is probably true, but who is going to test it? The sweeping generalizations I am talking about are the seemingly innocuous hyperbolic statements we see all the time: Democrats are liberals, Republicans hate immigrants, politicians are crooks. No doubt there are examples of each of these, but there are exceptions as well. I have a friend who is a right-wing lesbian Christian, who is pro-abortion, anti-death penalty, carries a gun, drinks to excess, teaches a children's Sunday school class, wants to build a border wall, and is suspicious of all Jewish people. Go ahead, try to slap a label on her. This is most troubling when the sweeping generalizations are aimed at a specific racial group, ethnicity, sexual or human identity, religion, or range of abilities. These sweeping generalizations are also known as prejudice, bias, hate, bigotry, or some destructive form of -ism. These create a false sense of certainty in many people, never questioned, never examined, but strenuously defended. Peacemakers need to recognize and reject these biases and generalizations.

**Barbara:** When you interact with others, is your basic approach to make statements or to ask questions? Research shows that we are an assertive and declarative society. Even when we are making conditional statements, we tend to leave off such ascriptions as "I think . . .," "I feel . . .," "in my opinion . . .," or, "I've always believed . . .". We say, "Guns aren't the problem," "Babe Ruth was the best baseball player ever," or "This song is terrible." Assertiveness and declaration are both invitations to argue. Conditional language softens the statement and offers room to disagree without reactive anger.

Beyond conditional language is an inquisitive approach. Asking is very rarely as threatening as telling (though some people master the art of aggressive questioning). You may be a firm believer that our country needs strict gun regulation and ownership limitations, but you have a choice to make when someone states, "Guns aren't the problem." The choice is in your response. You can make a counter statement that will probably escalate stress and defensiveness, or you can ask a question. This gentle probing shifts the energy and reframes the conversation. Such questions might be, "What do you think the real problem is?" "Tell me why you feel that way." "That's interesting, I know many people feel that way, but I am not sure I understand that position. Could you help me?" These questions, and others like them, are disarming and undercut tension. Peacemakers meditate to the mantra, "I will not tell; I will ask."

**Dan:** Just about every question is motivated by a peacemaking desire, to move from argument to understanding. What do we gain by fighting, arguing, shouting, threatening, mocking, manipulating, and intimidating? Do any of these things bring us peace? No peace of mind, no peace of heart, no peace of resolution, no closer to any kind of mutual respect. But when our driving value is to understand those who differ from us, or to help others understand each other better, we are opening up a host of new possibilities. Will we come to agreement? Not always, maybe not usually, but we have impacted the environment and the

processes by which we disagree. I disagree with a large number of people I still call friends and respected colleagues. We may never agree, but we will always be friends (and in a few cases, family).

**Barbara:** Peacemaking is, at its core, a spiritual discipline and a means of God’s grace. To be Christian is to take up the mantle of the peacemaker. Peacemaking is the honor and privilege of every child of God. We will make a case in future episodes for the adoption of classical spiritual practices to help prepare and guide peacemaking: prayer, meditation, fasting, corporate study of scripture and worship, Holy Communion, and Sabbath.

**Dan:** Oh, yeah, and also juggling. We’re going to talk about juggling and encourage every peacemaker to learn to juggle. Stay tuned.

**Barbara:** People’s Peace Talks is a production of People’s United Methodist Church in Oregon, Wisconsin. This resource is intended to encourage and support peacemaking, peacebuilding, and peacekeeping ministries. If you share content from the podcast, please credit People’s United Methodist Church. If you would like to contact us, email [peacetalks@peoplesumc.org](mailto:peacetalks@peoplesumc.org).