One week. Every Seventh-day Adventist school. Every year.

This call to action is laid out with astounding directness in an official Seventh-day Adventist Church statement entitled “A Call to Peace.”

“The Seventh-day Adventist Church operates what may be the second-largest worldwide parochial school system. Each of its more than 6,000 schools, colleges, and universities is being asked to set aside one week each school year to emphasize and highlight, through various programs, respect, cultural awareness, nonviolence, peacemaking, conflict resolution, and reconciliation as a way of making a specifically ‘Adventist’ contribution to a culture of social harmony and peace. With this in mind, the Church’s Education Department is preparing curricula and other materials to help in implementing this peace program.”

Though that curricula has not seen daylight, the call endures. From its inception, Adventism has taken peacemaking seriously (see “Seventh-day Adventists: ‘People of Peace’” on page 44). The spirit of peacemaking is simple: We must be followers of Jesus.

Not surprisingly, misinterpretations of peace abound—so education remains paramount. Peacemaking is not principally a passive enterprise, just as light is not merely the absence of darkness. The difference between a peace lover and a peacemaker is similar to the difference between loving money and making money.

• Union College’s second annual Peace Week, held April 17-24, 2011, was designed to turn minds toward existing conflicts—both on the personal and the societal levels—and to study peaceful methods to resolve them. “Helping people learn to become better at listening, problem solving, and staying aware of issues around the world and how they are a part of it is the purpose of Peace Week,” said Kourtney Shoemaker, a member of the Conflict and Peacemaking class that helped plan the first Peace Week.

• “Crossing the Line,” a dialogue activity, took place on Monday. As students entered Woods Auditorium, Kelly Phipps, a junior communication major, directed them to gather on one side of the room. Participants were asked to follow instructions in silence, paying attention to feelings that arose. “Notice who is with you. Notice how it feels to be where you are.”

In addition, participants were asked to respect one another

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by maintaining confidentiality with regard to this activity. After explaining the rules, Phipps read aloud one statement at a time. Any participant who heard a phrase that was personally relevant could choose to step across a strip of duct tape 15 feet away. She began, “Cross the line if . . . ”

“You were raised by a single parent.”
“You had an imaginary friend as a child.”
“You are of multiethnic heritage.”
“You wish you were out of school right now.”
“You do not consider yourself to be a member of any religion.”
“Someone in your family is gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgendered.”
“You have a visible or hidden physical, learning, or developmental disability or impairment.”
“You speak more than one language.”
“You have ever been dangerously or continuously sick.”
“You have ever used food stamps.”
“You have been discriminated against because of who you are.”
“You have cried in the past month.”

These and more statements addressed depression, sexual orientation, and racial prejudice—topics that often drive people apart and stir up conflict. However, knowing this was a safe place, a true sanctuary, students stepped forward without hesitation. The honest dialogue, in word and action, paved a path toward acceptance and unity in the debriefing afterward.

When Phipps addressed those who had previously used food stamps, a shocked Bernice Tumangkeng, a sophomore nursing and international rescue and relief major at Union College, watched several classmates cross the line. “You don’t know what’s going on,” she admitted, “so when you learn that other people are fighting battles, you get a sense of humanity, and you want to help carry those burdens.”

When Tumangkeng was asked to find a peace role model, Mohandas Gandhi, Mother Teresa, and Martin Luther King, Jr., sprang to mind. Tumangkeng chose Jesus. “Even if I wasn’t a Christian,” she said, “that is the Person I would be following. Like Jesus, I want peace to be the root of my actions, but also the result of my actions.”

For many students, Peace Week was another positive step in their education. “Service and being nice to everyone is not enough,” said Phipps. “We must take time to educate ourselves about issues around us and to seek a true understanding. Only then will true peace be achieved.”

Starting a Peace Week

What practical essentials are needed to “set aside one week each school year” to emphasize peacemaking?

1. **Acknowledge that peacemaking is vital to education, to Christianity, and to the world.** Without a genuine belief in the importance of peacemaking, any dedicated time will fail to retain the requisite urgency to sustain creative viability. The Bible, the character of Jesus, official Adventist statements, and today’s newspaper headlines help provide the foundation for sustained action.

2. **Encourage students to take major roles in planning and administering Peace Week.** Students learn best by doing. Lao Tsu observed, “But of a good leader . . . when his work is done, his aim fulfilled, they will say, ‘We did this ourselves.’” Jesus employed this principle often with His disciples: “The Lord appointed seventy others, and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to come” (Luke 10:1, RSV).

3. **Use one day to focus on each of these topics: dialogue, justice, forgiveness, and reconciliation.** Union College follows this format (adapt to fit your situation):

   **Sunday: Resurrection Day (Easter)**—when possible, begin with the liberating action of the Prince of Peace. On this day, Union College has also held a benefit fundraiser for a worthy cause.

   **Monday: Dialogue activity.** Create opportunities for everyone to listen. Focus on active listening—paraphrasing—and on inclusive behaviors. For example, consult Google for a “Crossing the Line Activity.” Provide a list of memorable quotes on the topics as a “takeaway” for each day’s emphasis.

   **Tuesday: Justice activity.** Many excellent articles and films—particularly documentaries—can be used to highlight injustices locally and worldwide. Be certain to provide opportunities for students to address the injustice. For example, have a staff member play the part of a prisoner of conscience—complete with meager food and furnishings behind duct-tape bars—and supply Amnesty International Urgent Actions for students and teachers to sign.
Wednesday: Forgiveness activity. Distribute free carnations for students to give to someone as they ask the person for forgiveness. Be certain to qualify what forgiveness is and is not (e.g., releasing from our judgment entirely, not condoning the wrong). Carrying an unforgiving attitude harms us. As author Anne Lamott points out, “Not forgiving is like drinking rat poison and then waiting for the rat to die.”

Thursday: Reconciliation activity. Read brief excerpts of how conflicts have been reconciled through peaceful means (the civil rights movement in the United States, the People Power Revolution of 1986 in the Philippines, Hungary’s Peaceful Revolution in 1989, the non-violent appeasement in Northern Ireland). Role-play various ways to achieve interpersonal non-violent reconciliation, even with bullies. Find ways to infuse each activity with fun.

Friday: Concert, open mike, free clothing/book/art exchange. We go outside to enjoy the day in peace and joy. It’s a day for everyone—tree huggers and military enthusiasts alike—to experience peaceful community.

Saturday: Focus the sermon and liturgy on peace and peace-making possibilities. Then use the Sabbath as it was intended, as a day of liberation. “If you had known what this means [on the Sabbath], “I desire mercy and not sacrifice,” you would not have condemned the guiltless” (Matthew 12:7, NKJV). Spread peace in active, merciful ways.

4. Foster a climate throughout the year that nourishes peacemaking. Build a consensus of respectful interaction—student to student, student to staff, and staff to staff. Be intentional about this on a daily basis. From this soil will sprout the fruits of peace you seek.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES
2. Student quotes were gathered by Michelle Current.
3. Lao Tsu, Tao Te Ching, chapter 17.
4. Bible texts credited to RSV are from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright © 1946, 1952, 1971, by Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. Used by permission. Texts credited to NKJV are from the New King James Version. Copyright 1979, 1980, 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.
models an in-the-trenches prophetic Advent faith.

And finally, a how-to guide for Adventist campuses. Peace Weeks have been organized at a number of Adventist universities and colleges, such as Walla Walla University and La Sierra University. At Union College, Chris Blake draws on his years of experience to present a model for a yearly Peace Week that showcases the works of justice and mercy carried out by students, faculty, and staff.

Engagement in social-justice activities, such as short-term mission trips at home and abroad, feeding and clothing the poor, and raising funds for disaster relief and constructing chapels and schools help cultivate in students a spirit of selfless service that bodes well for the future of Adventism as it “occupies” until the Lord comes.

One of the participants in the New York City “Occupy Wall Street” protesters gave this answer when asked why she was there: “We are here because we know something is wrong.” If we as Adventist educators know “something is wrong,” we, too, must respond in ways that honor our own faith tradition while implementing eternal biblical mandates in a manner that is relevant to hurting people in the 21st century. If we do, our students will rise and bless us for teaching them how to live relevant and meaningful Christian lives.