

Building The Restorative Faith Community: Lessons From Indonesia

Duane Ruth-Heffelbower

Presented at the 9th Annual Restorative Justice Conference, Fresno, CA 10-26-02

The present reality for faith communities

Their members generally think of faith communities as a source of comfort and support when the vicissitudes of life are difficult to bear. Unfortunately, it is all too common for faith communities to either abandon their members in difficulty, or to make the problems worse. Many of these situations are quite understandable, and it seems inappropriate to fault the faith community.

An example of this understandable neglect can be seen in the very mixed responses by church members to the recent spate of allegations of sexual abuse by clergy. For parishioners whose family members are alleging abuse there is a great need for support, but the nature of the allegations makes it difficult for clergy to engage the hurting person. At the same time other parishioners who might offer support are confused by what looks to them like an attack on an innocent clergy person. Add to this the crushing financial burden lawsuits visit on churches. It is a rare church community that can walk the line in a way that allows them to support both sides of the situation, let alone work successfully at restoring the many damaged relationships.

Another more common example is the confusion resulting from a divorce between members of a faith community. Relationships are broken before the eyes of members, and no one know what to do. The under-the-breath comment in Christian circles is “who gets the church?” It is a very rare faith community that can keep both parties to a divorce, let alone work at healing the relationships broken by it.

Even less difficult interpersonal situations can be too much. How about two business partners angry with one another? Can their faith community surround them in a reconciling way?

How about the neighbors who keep tagging mosques, churches and temples? How do faith communities handle that? Or the neighbors screaming at each other, easily heard by members attending a service? Or even the two members at war over what type of music to use in the service?

Many times a faith community has no idea how to work at broken relationships, whether inside or outside the group. If restorative justice is to really mean something in the world, it needs to enter these types of situations, and not be seen as only applying to criminal justice. The Peacemaking Model, developed for victim offender work here in Fresno, can be used in every type of situation where broken relationships leave feelings of injustice. Restorative justice is a natural fit for faith communities, but how do we go about building restorative faith communities?

The faith base for restorative justice

Restorative justice seems good to people for many different reasons, and its practitioners have many different motivations. From the perspective of a criminal justice system administrator with no particular faith, restorative justice can be appreciated for saving money, or because it is more satisfying for victims. A humanist would find those things attractive as well, and would also like how taking responsibility for their actions allowed offenders to improve themselves personally, and as members of the community.

Faith communities have the added support provided by the tenets of their faith for actions that restore relationships, and this is generally true for all the major faiths. Surveys have not yet identified a faith that does not provide support for the principles of restorative justice. Some faiths are more obviously supportive than others, and Christianity seems to be the major faith most congruent with restorative justice.

Indonesia is a country nominally almost 90% Muslim. Presentation of the principles of restorative justice to over 1,000 individuals from all the major faith groups, including various traditional beliefs, is a portion of the experience base relied on in this paper. It can be said with some assurance that none of these people had any difficulty connecting restorative justice principles to their faith. The principles of restorative justice could be boiled down to respect for others, and that fits well with any religious faith.

It was in translating training materials that major differences between the levels of support provided by Islam, Christianity, and other religions as practiced in Indonesia were discovered. Indonesia is in some ways a special case in the study of religion and language, but we can draw some generally applicable observations from its situation.

The Malay Archipelago, most of which is now Indonesia, was originally animist in its faith orientation, the normal situation throughout the world. Towards the end of the first millennium of this era, Buddhism and Hinduism were introduced, both having a significant affect which continues today. The Rama cycle of Hinduism forms the epic basis of the traditional literature of Indonesia, and the Hindu scriptures are a significant cultural underpinning.

When I left Indonesia my farewell gift from the Indonesian church we attended was a Wayang-style carved leather portrait of Arjuna, the demi-god whose conversation with Krishna forms the Bhagavad-Gita. Arjuna is seen as a peacemaker who refused to kill Krishna's enemies. That story continues to have an influence on people to the extent that no contradiction is noticed in introducing it in a church setting, much as an American pastor might read a Robert Frost poem as part of the sermon.

The next wave of outside religious influence to come was Islam, brought by traders, not missionaries. A couple of hundred years later Christianity arrived. Generally speaking, the Indonesian approach to new religions was to identify their sources of spiritual power, and to appropriate those without switching religions. This syncretistic style allows an accumulation of cultural practices with no particular effort made to recreate them to fit a new religion. European Christianity, for instance, felt the need to adapt those pre-Christian cultural practices that would have been impossible to eradicate, giving them new Christian meaning. Indonesians felt no such need. They simply adopted what seemed good from each new religion. This style continues even though there are groups trying to purify each of the received world faiths.

This process shows itself in language that developed over the same time period. Javanese, the language of the largest tribe of the archipelago, is a wonderfully complex language which is really three separate languages spoken by people of different status. When the nation of Indonesia was being born it adopted as its official language not Javanese, which would certainly have caused great resentment, but a version of Malay, the lingua franca of the area between Asia and Australia. Studying this new Indonesian language shows how religion contributed to the ethical thought of the area.

The pre-modern society of Java and its surrounding major islands was feudal. This continued until after the Second World War, for the most part. Traditional religion with overlays of Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam was practiced. Some groups practiced Christianity and Confucianism, both being strongly impacted by traditional practices. The concepts of law, rights and justice were not present in a way recognizable to most Americans in that feudal society. The words for these concepts in the Indonesian language are all Arabic, having arrived with Islam. Adding words to a language, however, does not add an understanding of the concepts they represent to the people who speak them.

The Indonesian word for “just”, *adil*, comes from a root meaning judgment in a law court sense. In other words, getting what you have coming for your actions. The English word “justice” comes instead from a root referring to right action, or righteousness. The difference is important for those of us working with restorative justice. It is the difference between a focus on avoiding bad actions and a focus on affirmatively doing good actions.

Both the Bible and the Qu’ran encourage doing good to others. The Qu’ran says:

28.77 And seek by means of what Allah has given you the future abode, and do not neglect your portion of this world, and do good (to others) as Allah has done good to you, and do not seek to make mischief in the land, surely Allah does not love the mischief-makers.
(<http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/koran.html>)

The Bible quotes Jesus saying:

“Do to others as you would have them do to you. (Luke 6:31 NIV)

In practice it seems that the general understanding of the many calls to do good to others in the Qu’ran is interpreted as an obligation to give alms, one of the five pillars of Islam, whereas the usual Christian understanding of Jesus’ teaching has led to very substantial charitable giving and service to others. The result of this difference in the Indonesian context was a culture not given to altruistic action beyond the giving of alms, no concept of extending grace to others, and one in which the word “reconciliation” is the English loan word *rekonsiliasi*. Perhaps more difficult was the pervasiveness of the Javanese mystical concept *rukun*, or societal harmony. A person is required by that principle to suppress all negative emotion or outwardly revengeful action in favor of the appearance of harmony. To acknowledge negative feelings which need to be worked through to achieve reconciliation is a violation of *rukun*. How could one work at an understanding of restorative justice in such a context?

If there is no faith base from which to work, restorative justice needs to base its appeal on purely pragmatic or rational arguments, as has been done at various places in North America and other parts of the world populated by European immigrants. In an emerging democracy with no functioning legal system, where people must settle or ignore their own disputes, those arguments are hollow. If there is no cost to the criminal justice system in the first place, RJ can’t create a cost saving. If people are motivated to create the appearance of social harmony by settling or ignoring their disputes, restorative justice does not appear to offer anything new.

A person looking more closely, however, sees that these traditional ways don’t function as advertised. The social inferior dropping the matter resolves most situations. Another common resolution is the wealthier person being pressured into paying damages they did not cause. The residue of resentment is great, and the taboo on expressing this resentment leads to passive aggressive actions of great subtlety.

We found that opening this topic in a safe setting led to a flood of unresolved injustices pouring out. We also found that there was a longing for true social harmony that could be attained only by working through injustices. When presented in this way all faith groups were supportive of restorative justice, though somewhat skeptical of their ability to use the principles, given the impediments described. We focused on *syaloom*, the word used by Indonesian Christians and Muslims to equal the Hebrew *shalom*, wholeness in relationships. Hindus, Buddhists and Confucians all expressed support from their faith perspective for this goal of social wholeness, so different from the social cauldron created by *rukun*.

For the multi-cultural society of Indonesia restorative justice found its faith base in the shared concept of social wholeness described for all faith groups by the Indonesian word *syaloom*. Our work here in the United States with people of many different faiths shows a similar pattern. The two versions of the Peacemaking

Model, one used for Christians and another for groups with other religions, indicate the difference.

Ron Claassen developed his Peacemaking Model [see Appendix A] for use in victim offender mediation to describe the necessary movements to work toward forgiveness. The circle is described as the Commitment to be Constructive, and also as Love, which is further defined in the presentation of the model as being *agape*, the Greek word for self-giving love as opposed to either erotic (*eros*) or brotherly (*philos*) love.

This representation of the model was found not to be acceptable in Muslim groups due to the word “love” being seen as a Christian code word. The Indonesian version [see Appendix B and its English version Appendix C], which was used with success, replaces the reference to love with a Carl Rogers’ term “unconditional positive regard” (*penerimaan tanpa syarat*). The explanation of the model then described how the goal was *syaloom*. The Indonesian word for forgiveness, *pengampunan*, is not the same as forgiveness, although it occupies that spot in the diagram. It has more of the sense of extending mercy, or amnesty. Forgiveness is understood in Indonesia as the extension of mercy under *syaria*, as is done by the family of a murder victim when blood money has been paid and the killer is spared execution.

The faith base for restorative justice in the Muslim-dominated society of Indonesia is the vision of *syaloom*, and that the use of principles of restorative justice allows mercy (forgiveness) to be exercised in situations far beyond those normally considered as being described in *syaria*. This understanding can apply equally well to other multi-religious societies, and may be a key for involving many faith communities in restorative justice.

The faith base of restorative justice comes from an understanding of wholeness in relationships as the goal of the existing order, and an understanding that victims exercising mercy toward those offenders who accept responsibility for their actions and accept forgiveness can achieve this wholeness. A description of why this is true will vary among faith communities. Those that worship a creator will see wholeness in relationships as the desire of the creator. Those that see spiritual and physical life as intertwined in a great circle of being will understand wholeness as the ultimate goal of existence. Those who see enlightenment as the goal will see achievement of wholeness through mercy and acceptance of responsibility as the mark of enlightened ones.

Creating restorative faith communities

As we noted in the beginning, faith communities have much to offer the field of restorative justice. Their commitment to wholeness in relationships, and to achieving this wholeness through acceptance of responsibility and the exercise of mercy, forms a strong base from which to offer restorative justice.

It is an unusual faith community, however, which is committed to being a force for restorative justice. Whatever their innate potential to be restorative, faith communities need encouragement to achieve their potential. Here in Fresno, Victim Offender Reconciliation Program was established 20 years ago with the mission of encouraging and assisting the churches in their ministry of peacemaking. It was not VORP's mission to be the community's agent for restorative justice, but to be the encourager of those whose natural mission it was to make restorative justice available to the community.

Restorative faith communities are not just sources of restorative justice services for the larger community. A restorative faith community uses restorative justice principles in its own life, and from the overflow of wholeness resulting from that way of being together provides restorative opportunities to the wider community. This means that a faith community must first focus on its own internal life, ensuring that restorative practices are endemic within it. This also means that advocates for restorative justice need to be offering encouragement to faith communities in developing internal restorative practices before asking those communities to reach out to the surrounding world in restorative ways.

Faith communities in Indonesia have had much less attention paid to these issues than those in North America, Europe, New Zealand and Australia. Restorative justice has been a known quantity other places, but for Indonesia, the last few years have been a time of hearing the concepts described for the first time. The first challenge, as has been mentioned, was vocabulary. While the language of restorative justice has been developed in English to the point of having been co-opted to describe practices with little restorative value, Indonesia lacked language to meaningfully describe the concepts. The translation process itself needed to include representatives of different faith communities to guard against selection of charged words that would work against advocates. These words had to be infused with meaning by presentations to many groups.

The most ready acceptance of restorative justice concepts came from Christians in Indonesia. The congruence with the teachings of their faith, and the fact that the advocates were Christian, made it a small step to begin imagining what a restorative faith community might look like. This process was also sped considerably by two major reconciliation processes led by restorative justice advocates for two important Christian groups.

The first group was the largest synod on the Indonesian side of the Island of New Guinea, now known as Papua. For some years there has been agitation for independence from the nation of Indonesia for this large island populated by people ethnically different from most Indonesians. The church had not taken sides in this dispute, although pastors and members had taken sides. The result was a polarization of views that was threatening to destroy the synod. The leadership had called a series of regional meetings for all 450 of their pastors to work at reconciling the sides, but had no idea how to use the meetings to make things better. They had a vision for being a restorative community, but did not know how to achieve it.

The synod called on a team of conflict interveners from Duta Wacana Christian University (UKDW) to help them plan and lead the meetings. They did not know that this team was the first restorative justice advocacy group in Indonesia. The team led the pastors in the Peacemaking Model process over the course of three weeks. The result was a plan for working together that has been followed since then, increasing the trust of pastors and members for each other and forming one of the first restorative faith communities in that part of the world. By ordering its internal life around restorative justice principles, the synod has been able to reach out to those around it in restorative ways.

When the leader of the nonviolent independence advocacy group was assassinated, it was leaders of this synod who led his funeral in a way that prevented violence. It is from the overflow of restorative practices within a community that the larger surrounding community can be benefited. Had the synod not been able to operate restoratively itself it could not have offered the province restorative responses to great provocation.

Another Christian synod, this one on the island of Java, had been split for ten years. Help of various kinds had been offered from the outside, and the two sides had come to the point where they believed reconciliation was the right thing to do, but they had no idea how to achieve it. The hurts on both sides had been too much to overcome with the tools they had available. They invited the UKDW team to lead them in a process. Two hundred leaders of the two sides gathered together for several days as the team led them in a process of identifying what needed to happen to allow reconciliation, and making a specific plan for doing those things.

The group developed a plan and adopted it by acclamation. The result seemed miraculous, but the two hundred leaders now needed to communicate this plan to 60,000 members who had not participated in the process. The plan described how they would accomplish this huge task, which required travel through an area the size of the western United States to people lacking modern telecommunications equipment. In three months it was done, and the two competing synods elected a single board for the first time in ten years. The process they experienced has served them well, providing a model for working through issues as they arise without outside help.

This synod could not have reached out to its surrounding community without achieving internal reconciliation. They were losing their long-time members instead. A restorative faith community must first practice restorative justice within before it can reach out.

There are times and places where existing faith communities are unable to work through the issues for themselves to become truly restorative in their own practices. The burden of history or leadership unwilling to change may keep them stuck. Where there are inter-religious conflicts and stuck faith communities, is there a way for the faith community to become restorative?

This situation applied on the Indonesian island of Ambon, one of the Maluku Islands. The conflict there was called a Muslim-Christian conflict, although those keeping the conflict alive were not the leaders of either faith community and most people wanted peace. The question was whether a mixed group representing both faith communities could work together to create a zone of peace. This was personally dangerous for participants since those who crossed religious lines for any purposes were targeted for terrorist attacks, and any places where mixed groups congregated were bomb targets. Sponsored by UNICEF, the UKDW team brought together a mixed group of Ambonese Christians and Muslims. Initial distrust and fear gave way to joyful participation as they learned how to apply restorative justice principles to their situation.

Since that time there has been renewed violence on the island, although now that a group of fighters from another island has left things have quieted down again. The large building where the team worked was destroyed, but the participants have continued to teach the principles they learned in a variety of church and school settings. When the time comes that people are prepared to reconcile, there will be a group of trained and experienced leaders for the necessary process.

Conclusion

Creating restorative faith communities is not a quick process. When groups are ready the results can seem quick, and even miraculous, but as with most overnight successes, there are usually years of preparation leading up to the breakthrough.

Restorative faith communities are themselves the result of a process. There needs to be an openness to changing the way the community operates, and that openness is sometimes created by fear of failure. A community that is tearing itself apart is more likely to be open to change than a community where everything is going along just fine.

Once the openness exists there needs to be a source of teaching on the principles of restorative justice and their application. Those of us who advocate restorative faith communities need to be prepared with teams of trustworthy people to enter these potentially restorative groups. Part of the preparation is developing the relationships that create trustworthiness. For those wanting to work cross-culturally this means teaming with members of the target culture and helping to prepare these indigenes for the work. Translation of teaching materials is a key preparation step, and that also means working with native speakers of the language to develop good translations.

When an open faith community works with a team of advocates for restorative justice, the opportunity exists for the creation of a restorative faith community. Once that way of being is embedded in the community's internal practices it can begin to reach out beyond itself to offer restorative justice to its surrounding community.

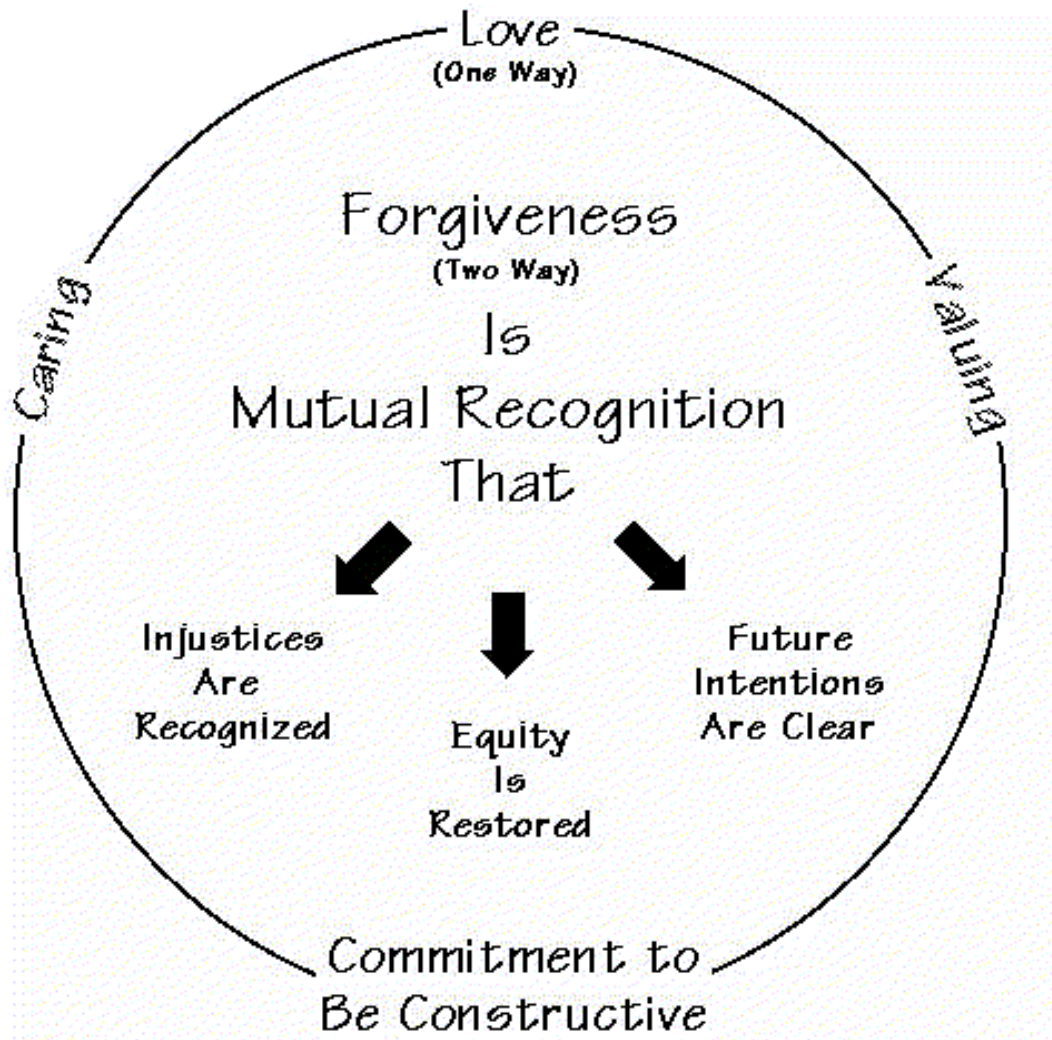
Restorative faith communities make real the vision of shalom to their members, and to the surrounding society. Those of us who advocate for restorative justice can be part of the process by which these restorative faith communities are created.

References

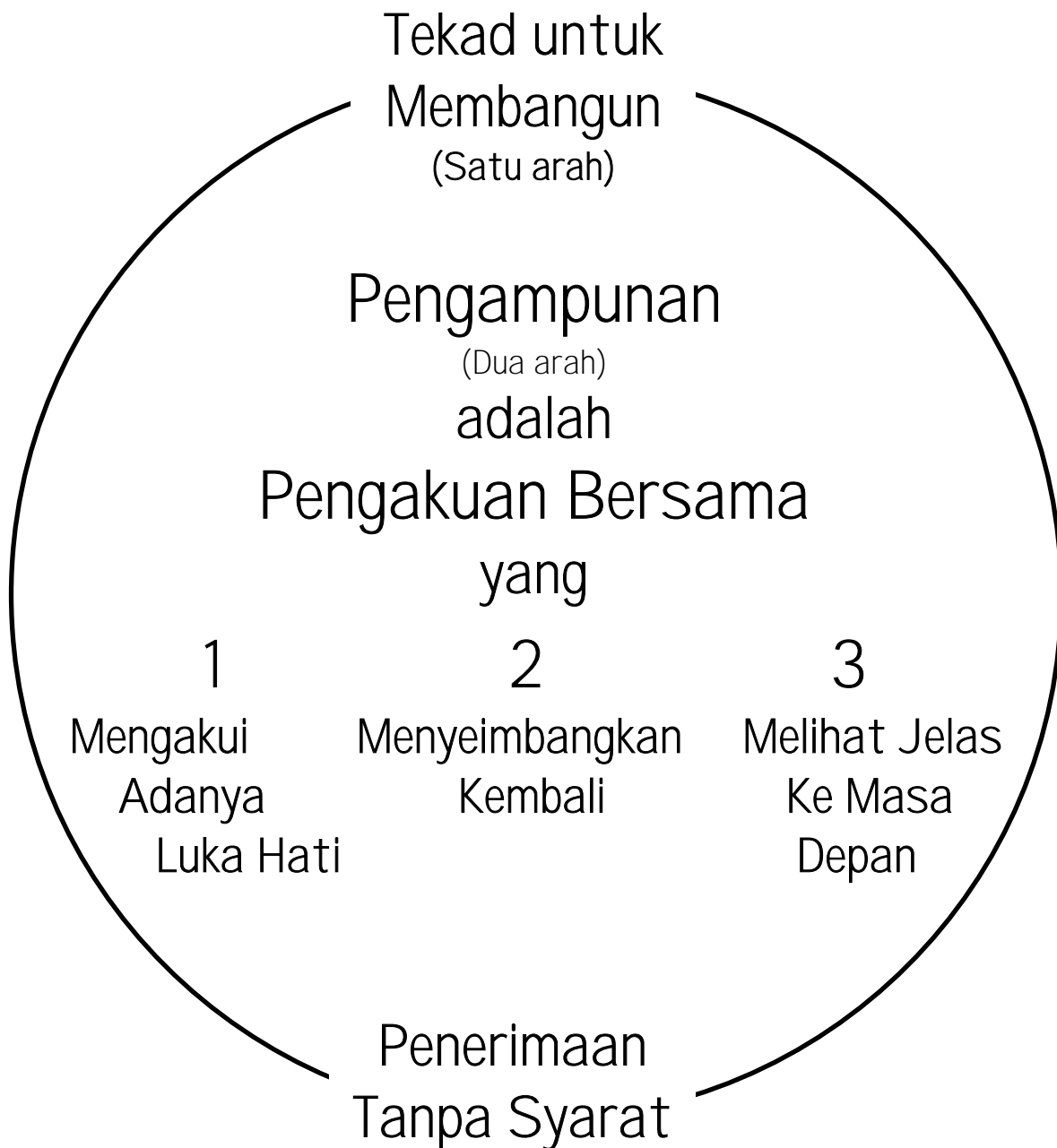
The Holy Qur'an, Electronic Text Center, University of Virginia Library,
<http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/koran.html>

Appendix A

Peacemaking Model



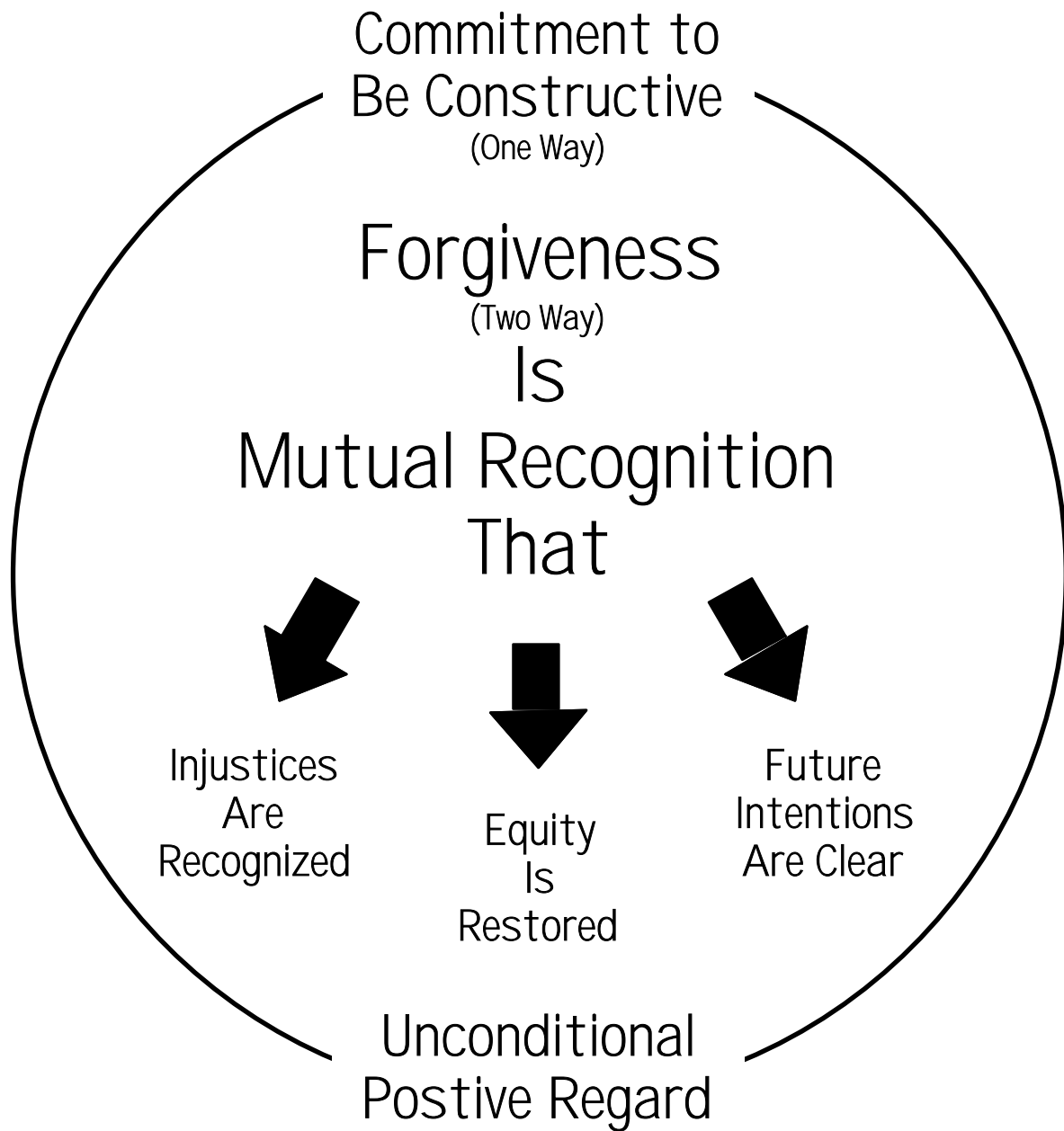
***When Agreements Are Made and Kept,
Trust Grows.***

Appendix B**Model Pembuatan Perdamaian**

**Waktu persetujuan dibuat dan dilakukan,
kepercayaan tumbuh**

Appendix C

Peacemaking Model



When Agreements Are Made and Kept,
Trust Grows