

## S E S S I O N 5

# How Can We Serve Diverse Interests?

### Session Objectives

- To explore the difference between tolerating human diversity and embracing it.
- To discuss the moral as well as political power of diverse peoples aligning themselves behind a common cause.
- To analyze how people who are educationally, economically, or culturally different can work together on a campaign, as well as the potential limitations of doing so.

### Suggestions for Facilitation

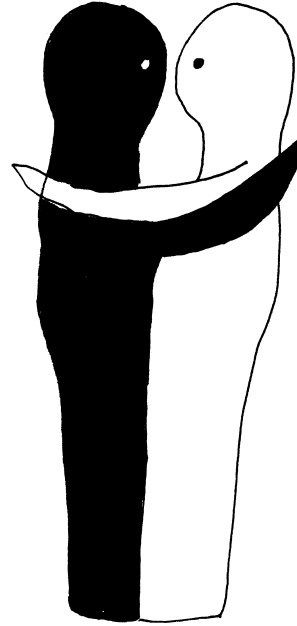
Read aloud the account below of the peace efforts of Mairead Corrigan Maguire and Betty Williams in Northern Ireland. Discuss within the group the probable compromises, negotiations, and steps taken to embrace different viewpoints that enable their activism to be successful.

This is a broad and important topic. The fishbowl tactic of facilitation may work best to get the discussion going. Have a small group of volunteers hold a dynamic discussion of the topic, followed by a larger group discussion of the session (see Appendix B for more details).

## Reaping the Harvest of Peace and Justice

### **Mairead Corrigan Maguire and Betty Williams: Peace Activists**

*Ireland's struggle for independence began several centuries ago when it was conquered and then colonized by the English. Their rule over Ireland's Catholic majority was often characterized by prejudice, discrimination, and neglect, leading to poverty and famine. In 1921, Irish revolutionaries gained ground, winning a measure of national independence through a treaty. Under the terms of the treaty, six Protestant majority counties in the north were partitioned to remain part of Great Britain. Despite the Protestant majority's support for British rule in Northern Ireland, the new Irish Republic continued to formally regard the partition as provisional as did most of the Catholics residing in the North. In recent decades, as a result of the disputed status of the territory, sectarian violence between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland has led to over 3,000 dead in a country with less than 2 million inhabitants.*



*Against this historical backdrop, Mairead Corrigan Maguire and Betty Williams were drawn together by a violent tragedy that would transform their lives forever. On 10 August 1976, two of Maguire's nephews and one of her nieces were killed on a Belfast street corner when a British army patrol shot an Irish Republican Army (IRA) gunman whose car then plowed into a sidewalk.*

*After the tragedy Maguire, a Catholic, appeared on television, denouncing the IRA's violence. Williams, a woman of mixed religious background, had witnessed the accident and immediately circulated a petition. With 6,000 signatures to protest the children's deaths, she presented the petition on television two days later. At the children's funeral, Maguire and Williams, grieving and tired of senseless violence, joined forces, agreeing to strive for peace. They founded an organization called Women for Peace, later renamed the Peace People Organization.*

*Within a month the organization mobilized 30,000 women, both Catholics and Protestants, to march the Belfast streets. Although accused of collaboration with the enemy and physically threatened, Maguire and Williams did not stop marching and attracted more followers. Their supporters were drawn to the peace movement by their common goals. Participants discovered that they shared not only their desire to end the violence, but that people on both sides of the conflict faced poverty, lack of political autonomy, and civil liberty restrictions imposed by Northern Ireland's emergency legislation.*

*Maguire and Williams earned worldwide recognition for their work, receiving the Nobel Peace Prize in October 1977. Williams eventually left Belfast for the United States, but Maguire continued her efforts to reeducate Northern Ireland's warring factions and to bring them to the negotiating table. Dismissed during the 1980s and early 1990s by those who considered rage the only reaction to injustice, she persisted, articulating her message of nonviolence long before the 1998 peace agreement was reached.*

*As Maguire explained, "I believe that hope for the future depends on each of us taking nonviolence into our hearts and minds and developing new and imaginative structures which are nonviolent and life-giving for all. Some people will argue that this is too idealistic. I believe that it is very realistic. I am convinced that humanity is fast evolving toward a higher consciousness. For those who say it cannot be done, let us remember that humanity learned to abolish slavery. Our task is no less than the abolition of violence and war..." Indeed, she still insists that "to reap the harvest of peace and justice in the future, we all have to sow the seeds of nonviolence, here and now, in the present."<sup>18</sup>*

## Questions for Discussion

- What events inspired Mairead Corrigan Maguire and Betty Williams to seek a resolution to the conflict in Northern Ireland?
- What methods did they use in their quest to resolve this conflict? Why did they choose these methods?
- What value do you see in the kind of leadership Maguire and Williams demonstrated? How do you think being women helped or hindered them?
- What goals did Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland have in common? What impact did working together have on their ability to achieve those goals?
- What beliefs motivated Maguire to persist in her quest for peace in Northern Ireland and around the world against seemingly insurmountable odds?

<sup>18</sup> The information is taken from

[http://www.wagingpeace.org/articles/peaceheroes/mairiad\\_corrigan\\_maguire.html](http://www.wagingpeace.org/articles/peaceheroes/mairiad_corrigan_maguire.html) as excerpted from Mairead Corrigan Maguire with John Dear, S.J., ed., *The Vision of Peace, Faith and Hope in Northern Ireland*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1999.

- Does having a common goal surmount all differences between people? Why or why not?
- Have you ever worked on a project with a person or people with whom you had many differences? If so, how did you work through or around your differences?
- Do you prefer to acknowledge differences between yourself and others or do you tend to ignore or remain silent about such differences? Why or why not? What is the result of either strategy or behavior?
- What do the terms “diversity” and “negotiation” mean to you?

### **Group Activity: Embracing Diversity**

*Allow approximately one hour for this exercise.*

- Identify together a possible or hypothetical project that the group would like to work on.
- Discuss and come to consensus on a “community” (for instance, a professional community or members of a different ethnicity, generation, or gender) with whom members of the workshop group have little contact or few similarities.
- Consider ways in which the participation of this “community” would benefit the group’s project.
- Devise strategies for including the “community” in the group project in ways that would enhance understanding of one another. How might the group create a mutually hospitable environment, value the others’ strengths, and work collaboratively?



We must learn to see others as genuine, whole human beings intent on doing good. We must think that they want to learn to become better individuals, and to work not primarily for rewards or glory, but to achieve the vision that their work inspires.

Ideally, men and women become partners in defining, working for, and achieving goals that benefit all. . . . [S]uch a partnership is possible and must be attempted if we are to succeed in achieving the social, economic, and political frameworks that help us reach the goals of a good, dynamic, and fruitful life.

**“The Building Blocks of Leadership”**