

## Letter from Birmingham Jail



### TRANSFORMATION? RECONCILIATION? DOES NONVIOLENCE WORK?

#### Directions:

Take two sheets of paper and on one write the word "Transformation" across the top. On the second write the word "Reconciliation". Underneath each word, write your quote and explain why you chose this quote. Choose an example from the events in Birmingham that illustrates your quote.

#### TRANSFORMATION AND RECONCILIATION

Discuss with your group members your definition of social transformation and reconciliation. As you read the following quotes, decide which one best represents your definition.

The nonviolent resister must often express his protest through noncooperation or boycotts, but noncooperation and boycotts are not ends themselves; they are merely means to awaken a sense of moral shame in the opponent. The end is redemption and reconciliation. The aftermath of nonviolence is the creation of the beloved community, while the aftermath of violence is tragic bitterness.

—Martin Luther King, Jr., 1957

The method of nonviolence seeks not to humiliate and not to defeat the oppressor, but it seeks to win his friendship and his understanding. And thereby and therefore the aftermath of this method is reconciliation.

—Martin Luther King, Jr., 1956

Love is creative and redemptive. Love builds up and unites; hate tears down and destroys. The aftermath of the 'fight with fire' method which you suggest is bitterness and chaos, the aftermath of the love method is reconciliation and creation of the beloved community. Physical force can repress, restrain, coerce, destroy, but it cannot create and organize anything permanent; only love can do that. Yes, love—which means understanding, creative, redemptive goodwill, even for one's enemies—is the solution to the race problem.

—Martin Luther King, Jr., 1957

True reconciliation is never cheap, for it is based on forgiveness which is costly. Forgiveness in turn depends on repentance, which has to be based on an acknowledgement of what was done wrong, and therefore on disclosure of the truth. You cannot forgive what you do not know.

—Archbishop Desmond Tutu, 30th November 1995

Nonviolence is not sterile passivity, but a powerful moral force which makes for social transformation.

—Martin Luther King, Jr., 1964

In the application of the method of non-violence, one must believe in the possibility of every person, however deprived, being reformed under humane and skilled treatment.

—Mahatma Gandhi, 22nd February 1942

We must not allow ourselves to become like the system we oppose. We cannot afford to use methods of which we will be ashamed when we look back, when we say, '...we shouldn't have done that.' We must remember, my friends, that we have been given a wonderful cause. The cause of freedom! And you and I must be those who will walk with heads held high. We will say, 'We used methods that can stand the harsh scrutiny of history.'

—Desmond Tutu

The nation is sick; trouble is in the land, confusion all around... But I know, somehow, that only when it is dark enough can you see the stars. And I see God working in this period of the twentieth century. Something is happening in our world. The masses of people are rising up. And wherever they are assembled today, whether they are in Johannesburg, South Africa; Nairobi, Kenya; Accra, Ghana; New York City; Atlanta, Georgia; Jackson, Mississippi; or Memphis, Tennessee, the cry is always the same: 'We want to be free.'

—Martin Luther King, Jr., 3rd April 1968