



# Damascus Road Newsletter

For connecting, resourcing, growing teams and individuals in the Damascus Road network Vol. 4, No. 1 March 2001

## Keeping things in perspective: Recovering from near disaster

By Conrad Moore

Damascus Road core trainers take our call to the ministry seriously. We are continually challenged to remember to rely on God's grace and guidance to get us through every step of our work. We place a high premium on prayer coverage for good reason and with good results. After each training event the participants responses are most often positive. Trainers frequently come away feeling like we did the work to which God has called us. Core trainers spend the last evening together sharing things we think we did well and areas of improvement. We have found that opinions from participants and from one another are a blessing.

Recently Damascus Road trainers were reminded how things can go wrong in a training event. We did a two and half day training that did not go well. The HOURS spent processing that event have been valuable. As always, we got lots of positive responses from the participants. As always, some feedback was brutal (a). As trainers keeping things in perspective is important. There are times when, for example, you get evaluations where nine out of ten people give you a glowing report. Of course you smile in a totally modest Anabaptist way and you down play the glowing accolades. Those are not the comments you lose sleep over. The one or two comments that were, shall we say, negative(b) are the comments you lose sleep over.

We recently facilitated a training that was a near disaster. Several participants broke down in tears. (Thankfully not simultaneously). The equipment malfunctioned of course at a crucial point. (I know what your thinking, but we tested it just before the training started). The training events are always emotionally taxing for the facilitators. Two of whom also shed some tears during the training but out of sight of the participants. If ever we could call an event a near disaster, this was it. This was a battle. Overall this particular training didn't go well (c). Oh, did I mention the tornado? Somehow it seemed fitting that a tornado showed up at the end of the training.

So what did we learn? These types of situations remind us that we are in a spiritual battle but we also remember that the battle belongs to the Lord. We are most effective when we learn to fully rely on God. Drawing even closer to God is the recovery from near disaster.

The overwhelming majority of training events have the desired outcome. People have the "Aha" moments and go home to begin the work of dismantling racism in their institutions. Thank God that most training sessions go

## The Damascus Road Journey: Where are we going?

Iris de León-Hartshorn

As Tobin Miller Shearer and Regina Shands Stoltzfus get ready to step down as Damascus Road Coordinators many are asking where do we go from here? My answer to this question is that we continue forward in our journey together. Tobin and Regina have been a significant driving force in the formation of Damascus Road as we know it today. They leave their work in the very capable hands of Brenda Zook Friesen and Conrad Moore.

Our Damascus Road journey will take us on some challenging work ahead as we start to work more intentionally with congregations and develop resources on Internalized Racist Oppression. These two exciting additions to our work will keep all of us busy in working toward the dismantling of racism.

We also have the continued guidance and support of the Anti-Racism Table where many capable and committed people are involved. Our core training team now has eight core trainers with the hope of adding two more trainers this next year. We are on a quest together and not alone. God has been with us on this journey and will continue to be with us as we struggle together for a vision that includes all nations, tribes and languages in the kingdom of God. I am excited about the future of Damascus Road and thankful for such a strong foundation that was built upon God's word, many hours of work by dedicated individuals and the leadership of Tobin and Regina.

Remember Damascus Road in your prayers. Remember Tobin and Regina in your prayers as they continue to grow as people of God. Remember Brenda and Conrad as they step forward and take leadership of Damascus Road. Remember we are on this journey together and need to support each other in the dismantling of racism so that we can truly be the family of God.

well. Nevertheless, we are challenged to hear the voice of God in the comments that are not warm and fuzzy.

The challenge is to learn to totally rely on God. Obviously that does not mean just sitting on our hands and doing nothing. However, is it possible to just rest in God as we approach this work? I think in so doing we learn to come away from these near disaster situations much wiser and less bruised. Trusting God to strengthen

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## What does it mean to be a Hispanic in Goshen?

I did not know I was Hispanic when I came to North America; at least, I did not know it the way Anglo Saxon “white” people understand it. Hispanic people, according to Anglos, are a group of people that originates down south of the Rio Grande: from Mexico, Central America and South America.

When I say I did not know that I was Hispanic, it is because in my country (Colombia) I am regarded as a person. I am not seen differently because of the color of my skin, and perhaps that is the way I want to be seen.

On the other hand, to define a Hispanic person is very difficult. First of all, some people have asked me what the difference is between Hispanic and Latino, and to tell you the truth, I do not know. The truth is that the people termed Hispanic are a variety of people of “colors”. I was born in Colombia and my country is regarded as one of the most Spaniard countries in South America, which means that we are part white, part native - that is, mestizo. But not every one is mestizo. There is another ingredient added to my country’s racial mix that is the African people who came as slaves. So to define a Hispanic is to say that they are people made up of many races. Perhaps this is the true definition of American (I do not want to get into this topic now, but it is a significant one).

There is no real color for a Hispanic person; it could

*“I did not know I was Hispanic when I came to North America”*

be white, brown or black. There is no one color to define a Hispanic person. Therefore, what is the issue of racism in this country about Hispanics? I have to say that perhaps we do not have the same history of suffering as our brothers and sisters who are descended from African background. We do share one thing in common. That is being exploited by white people. Perhaps the ways we have been exploited have been different, but in the end, everything comes to the same conclusion: oppression.

The Hispanic people living in the USA have experienced a systemic racism that has pushed them to the edge of our society. Even though many people think Hispanic people are no longer in that place, there is a great deal to be done to really leave behind that place of oppression. The reasons for this oppression are many, and it would take a very long article to tell about it all. I just want to focus in on how I am experiencing racism in Goshen, the city where I live.

Goshen is a small town in the midwest of the USA. As a small town in this area, it is regarded as a very Anglo community. In the last 15 years many Hispanic people have moved to this area to find jobs. They have become the fastest growing minority group in this area, a situation that is being experienced in all of the U.S. I live and work in this city, and have been able to understand this town and its racial prejudices. I have been able to see the kind of lives Hispanic people have here. There is no doubt that there is racism in this city; in

fact, we have had two KKK rallies in this town in the last five years. And by the way, it was not against African Americans, because the African American population is very small in Goshen since they were never allowed to live here in the past.

A week ago I had an encounter with the chief of police of this city to talk about racial profiling. I had been told by a number of Hispanic friends that the police had stopped them with no reason whatsoever. I decided to check that out with the police. I did not go alone to meet with the chief of police, but went with my pastor who is white “ethnic” Mennonite. To tell you the truth, I felt good about my pastor being with me. The meeting was very interesting. From the beginning of the meeting the chief of police was ready to answer any questions regarding what we call racial profiling (although he was also somewhat defensive). He told us he had been waiting for this to happen. He somehow sensed that someday someone was going to confront him about this issue, so he was ready with statistics on hand. The meeting was successful, and we realized that the system is made to catch those who break the law, but also that the law is not fair to those at the edge of our society. The laws made by white people work against those who are not.

The Hispanic population in this area is made up mainly of people from Mexico who are not well educated and the only work they can do is factory work. They are simple people with very noble views about themselves and others. There are other people from Central and South America who suffer the same situation. In the Hispanic world we have learned that the laws are made to be broken, not because we want to, but because they are not fair to us. Breaking laws when they are causes for injustice is a Biblical attitude. I am not saying that the laws do not work, because they often do, but when they cease to serve the purpose of bringing human dignity, then they no longer work.

Racism is alive in my town. If churches, schools,

*“Racism is alive in my town”.*

restaurants and many other places do not start changing the mentality that this is not a white town anymore, Hispanics will be pushed more to the edge of this society: they will remain uneducated, confined to doing only one job to satisfy the ruling class. I wish that someday Hispanics experience in this country what I experience in my own so that we can all be regarded as persons.

N. Raul Bogoya Associate Pastor - Community Outreach /North Goshen Mennonite Church

In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends.

Martin Luther King, Jr.,  
The Trumpet of Conscience, 1967.

and empower us for the tasks he sends us to do. Putting things in full perspective, not taking full credit when things go well is important. However, in humility we need to recognize the role God has allowed us to play. That perspective gives us the freedom of not having to take full responsibility when they don't go very well.

Antiracism educators face problems they have no idea how to solve. The participants can feel emotions they may not have expected to rise in this setting. Participants and facilitators may find that managing their emotions can be more difficult than either thought it would be. It is rarely the technical stuff that takes these situations to near disaster. It is the emotional stuff.

This may sound like a "DUH," but having a prayer team who will bathe these anti-racism activities in prayer is crucial. Racism is a resistor and the resistance is active. Racism does not want to be exposed and when exposed will always try to look like something else, such as classism. Putting on the full armor of God is critical in the work of dismantling racism.

As Jesus reminded his disciples, we are reminded that there some situations that are affected only by prayer and fasting. God help us when we think that merely educating people is the answer.

The training I am writing about would be categorized a complete disaster by some. Not a near disaster as I have called it. I think that if the training had ended when the sessions ended then it would have been a disaster, tornado and all. Yet for the core trainers the training continued in the things God showed us about ourselves and the things we learned about anti-racism educating, organizing and the vital link reliance on God and prayer.

- a. some text translate "brutal" as caustic, vicious, abusive, ferocious, scathing, heartless and mean.
- b. "negative" is probably an understatement
- c. "didn't go well" is definitely an understatement!

### **Damascus Road upcoming events**

March 23-25, 2001 Open analysis training, Dallas, TX Michelle Armster, Iris deLeon-Hartshorn, Tobin Miller Shearer

March 31, 2001, Introductory analysis, Lancaster, PA Brenda Zook Friesen, Conrad Moore, Sharon Williams

April 2-6, 2001, Internalized Racist Oppression training development, Cleveland, OH  
People of color from Damascus Road leadership

May 4-5, 2001, Damascus Road Steering Committee meeting, Philadelphia, PA

June 7-11, 2001, Damascus Road educating and organizing training, Cleveland, OH Iris deLeon-Hartshorn, Conrad Moore, Tobin Miller Shearer, Regina Shands Stoltzfus, Brenda Zook Friesen

July 3, 5, 2001, Bread for the Journey events, Nashville, TN Conrad Moore, Brenda Zook Friesen

## **History and Activities of Damascus Road at Bethel**

### **College**

by Julie Hart

Bethel College made a commitment to the Damascus Road Project in 1996 under the leadership of President Doug Penner. An initial team of five persons were sent to a three day training with Crossroads Ministries in Chicago.

During the first four years of our work, we have accomplished the following:

- \*Wrote a mission statement, goals and objectives in 1998.

- \*Worked to strengthen the team through monthly meetings since 1996. These include relationship building and worship time together (except during summer months).

- \*Expanded institutional support of the project through sending additional staff, students and advisory board members to the three day training by Crossroads and now MCC (1997-2000). This includes a three hour training for the Administrative Cabinet in 2000. Our regular team includes three administrators, five faculty, the campus pastor, the president of the Bethel College board, five community members who are persons of color and constitute our "Accountability Team," and staff from all areas of the college. Our total membership currently is twenty trained members although we have lost six persons due to students graduating or staff leaving the institution. We have also sent five persons to the advanced training and have hosted two Damascus Road events for regional teams on our campus.

- \* We designed a brochure to describe our work which includes mission, longterm goals, objectives, rationale for our work, and definitions of racism and various types of prejudice and white privilege (1998 and 2000 revision).

- \*We formed an "Accountability Team" of five persons of color who have power to initiate, support, veto and work to implement all of the goals of the team (1997).

- \* We designed a Damascus Road 101 course dealing with prejudice, racism and cross cultural competency as an optional course for students to take. The course includes a cross cultural immersion experience on the Texas/Mexico border. This is awaiting approval (11/2000).

- \* We are in the process of designing a 'Grow Your Own' policy to encourage students of color or staff of color to stay with Bethel College as fulltime staff or faculty (2000).

- We have an approved budget line item for our work of \$1,500 annually (1998-2000).

- \* We designed three questions we have asked the staff and faculty to consider when making major institutional decisions (1999). The questions encourage input from persons of color.

- \* We have sponsored four all-campus convocation presentations and/or small group discussions to address issues of racism and white privilege (1997-2000).



21 South 12th Street  
PO Box 500  
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### Editorial

First, I want to thank those who responded to our goal to write more about struggles and have a grassroots approach in the Damascus Road newsletter.

This issue carries voices from different contexts, yet the various writers are doing their part in this anti-racist struggle. As strange as it may sound, one learns a lot from mistakes and reflections over them. The monster we are battling against keeps changing its shape and manifestation and when people share from where they are at, we can learn from each other's experiences.

On the other hand, I would like to explore further the issue of accountability. Since Damascus Road has been intended to dismantle systemic racism, we want to have a real sense of the change, a sometimes difficult task. We all know that a change on the written word of documents, does not account for a meaningful change in how things are running in an institution. Even more when a group of people have worked so hard in a cause, there is a tendency to see the immediate signs of change around them, but overlook signs of change at other levels. Accountability beyond the circle of influence is supposed to remedy that

triumphant tendency. People of color who have not escalated within the system have a clearer picture of what is not working, and they can enrich the vision by expressing their concerns. Damascus Road is seeking a transformation, not an accommodation. Thus we must be open to opinions that do not come from 'specialists'.

The business world has certain methods to guarantee quality. They don't ask just their sales or public relations people how the company is doing. They make sure that the "clients" know what they are offering and how it can benefit them. They also check with the regular guy out in the street to see if he notices changes and whether he is satisfied with these changes.

Maybe we can simulate some of this 'checking method'. We may find out if the people in the pews are noticing any changes, or if a church reflects the social composition of its location. In all instances only the team at their respective sites of action can make a difference. They can also give the kind of input that would generate systemic changes.

We are eager to hear from you. Please share with us your stories, accomplishments and lessons. Let's turn the newsletter into an instrument that will benefit us all.

Zulma Prieto

"I am convinced that if we are to get on the right side of the world revolution, we as a nation must undergo a radical revolution of values.  
We must rapidly begin the shift from a 'thing-oriented' society to a 'person-oriented' society. When machines and computers, profit motives and property rights are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, materialism, and militarism are incapable of being conquered."  
Martin Luther King, Jr.,  
"Beyond Vietnam" speech, April 4, 1967

Found a good book or magazine other Damascus Road members might find helpful? Send a note about it to Zulma Prieto P.O.Box 553 Goshen, IN 46527. The newsletter also welcomes stories about Damascus Road members or information about what your team is doing.—*Editor*

The Damascus Road Newsletter is published quarterly by the Racism Awareness Program of Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Editing and layout are by Zulma Prieto. Contact Zulma with your comments, inquiries or submissions at P.O. Box 553, Goshen, IN 46527. <jzprieto@sbt.infi.net>. Subscriptions are free and limited to members of the Damascus Road network. For address changes, contact Damascus Road at P.O. Box 500, Akron, PA 17501-0500, 717-859-3889, <tms@mccus.org>.  
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