
AGLI - Report from Kenya - June 17, 2010

AVP in an Institution

Dear All,

The African Great Lakes Initiative introduced the Alternatives to Violence Project to western Kenya in 2003. Shortly thereafter we started doing AVP workshops at Friends Theological College (FTC), a small institution in Kaimosi, Kenya with now about 85 students who are studying for a diploma or a bachelors degree in theology. When we started this, we thought it was good for the students, before they go out on their career - mostly as pastors, that they learn the basics of non-violent conflict resolution. We also thought that the experiential methodology of AVP would be a beneficial example for preachers who think that behavior will change by their exhortations. The concept that everyone has the transforming power within them if they wish to access it is also an important concept for them to have.

As funds have been available over the years, we have done basic workshops, as well as advanced, and training for facilitators workshops. A few FTC students helped with the AVP workshops we did after the post-election violence in Kenya in 2008. This year, the Principal, Ann Riggs, found funding to do the whole program during the school year. At the end of each of the three semesters, the three levels of AVP workshops were held, not only for the students, but also for the staff. AVP is voluntary so only those who wished to do so participated; this was most of the students and some of the staff.

Earlier this week I was with Ann Riggs and she gave AVP a glowing thumbs-up. She felt that AVP had changed the climate of the institution from one of hostility and suspicion to one of cooperation in working on common problems. As examples of the change, she indicated that the student council had changed their by-laws from saying something like "the Student Council will fight for the rights of the students" to something like "the Student Council will work with the Administration to resolve issues on campus"; moving from an adversarial position to one of cooperation. A second example: as in any boarding institution there are conflicts among the students. Ann says that by the end of the year students who formerly were coming to her to resolve their conflicts were now solving them on their own. As an additional bonus the AVP workshops uncovered at least two students who were still badly traumatized by the post-election violence. The one I remember is a student who was married to a Kikuyu whom he had to hid during the two months of the violence. The AVP facilitators noticed these cases, counseled the students, and the school was able get further professional counseling for them.

As a result of this success of the AVP program, Ann is going to have the first AVP basic workshop for the incoming students - not at the end of the first semester as was done last year - but the first week after they arrive.

We are hoping for bigger things. The University of Nairobi, the oldest university in Kenya and state sponsored, has over twenty thousand students and has been closed after students fought with each other over the election for the student government. We have had initial contacts with some lecturers at the University and hope to initiate AVP workshops with these students.

AVP has many opportunities for direct action in bringing non-violent solutions to conflicts of all kinds.

Peace,
Dave

New webpage: www.aglifpt.org
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