



The Reconciliation League
DEDICATED TO DIALOGUE

The Mission Shapes *The Reconciliation League*

The Reconciliation League

The **Reconciliation League** is an independent non-profit dedicated to creating a group of leaders (**a Reconciliation Corps**) who are trained in creating genuine conversations across the divides that characterize contemporary society and who are dedicated to using over time the skills they are taught to create positive dialogue in civil society.

The institutions gathered as the founding members of the League are very different from each **other in many ways; but each is dedicated both to academic excellence and to the League's mission: BYU, Fordham, Kentucky, Lafayette, Morgan State, North Carolina, NYU, Pomona, San Carlos Apache College, and Yale are the American schools, and they are joined by the African Leadership University, the Asian University for Women, and the London School of Economics.** In addition to the member schools, **The Posse Foundation** is affiliated with the League.

The League's featured initiative is a **Fellowship Program** which brings together students identified by the League schools as leaders willing to engage in dialogue with others who have very different experiences and viewpoints. These **Reconciliation Fellows, drawn as they are from a range of backgrounds and cultures, join each other for an eight week intensive, residential program** consisting both of specially developed courses and exercises designed to hone the skills of bridging divides.

Each member school sends between 2 and 6 student leaders to each eight week session, the first two sessions of which will take place in the Summer of 2027. In addition, The Posse Foundation will send to each session Posse Scholars chosen from different universities or colleges that are not League member schools. And, about 15% of each cohort will be Fellows from schools that are not League members chosen through an "at-large" selection process.

Having completed the initial program, the Fellows join the Reconciliation Corps; and, as Corps members, they pledge to continue over time the work of building bridges. This is not a casual commitment. Periodically, especially as a culture of engagement builds, members of the Corps from across cohorts will participate in recruiting future scholars, interviewing them, and mentoring them. The Reconciliation Corps itself will convene periodic conferences to reinforce this process. And, each quarter, every year, Corps members will be expected to post on a Corps bulletin board a report describing what they are doing to foster genuine dialogue in their communities.

The urgent *need we see*

Over the past half century, and at an accelerated pace over the past decade, we have witnessed in societies around the world (including, as one clear example, in American society) a profound loss of our capacity to engage in genuine dialogue with our fellow beings who view the world differently from us (not only strangers, but also friends, neighbors, and even family). We have retreated into conversational caves, echo chambers in which our particular view of the world is reinforced; and we too often view those who see things differently as enemies to be resisted and avoided. As Albert Hirschman predicted over three decades ago, this "systematic lack of communication between groups of citizens such as liberals and conservatives, progressives and reactionaries" has created in the body politic the unsettling condition of "being shut off, not just from the opinions, but from the entire life experience of large numbers of our contemporaries," with the result that "each group [asks] about the other, in utter puzzlement and often with mutual revulsion, 'How did they get to be that way?'" *The Rhetoric of Reaction* (1991).

NYU President Emeritus John Sexton has called universities "the last, best hope" to counter these trends. *Standing for Reason* (2019). Alarming, however, the disease he saw infecting our politics today has metastasized into universities themselves. It is imperative that we act decisively to reverse this trend - both in society and in our universities. The Reconciliation Project is designed to do just that.

The League *in Operation*

The first (but only the first) element of the Reconciliation League program is the **Reconciliation Fellows Program**. Each League school chooses a set of Reconciliation Fellows who then join those chosen from the other member schools to experience, over eight weeks, a curriculum designed to develop in them an ability to reckon with competing ideas (both familiar and unfamiliar) and to engage in productive conversation about them.

A core part of this curriculum is a course devoted to the study and practice of time-tested techniques for fostering genuine understanding and communication - techniques that were developed in the ecumenical and reconciliation movements. During their time together, Fellows both study these techniques and apply them in a set of activities.

This initial version of this program will take place in two parts: six weeks in Summer 2027 and at least a week in January 2028. The elements will be take place in different contexts, with (1) several weeks on a rural campus devoted to an introduction to ecumenical techniques; followed by (2) several days “off the grid” in a team building exercise that immerses Fellows in unfamiliar surroundings that prompt a need for working together; followed by (3) several more days back on the original campus, this time sharing lessons learned during the experience “off the grid” and developing projects to be implemented upon return to the communities; in which they live, and (4) still another several day session during the following January to review the status of projects and plan future activities.

Through this structure, the project features two unique elements. First, the cohorts are immersed in the lessons taught, almost around the clock, as a community working together for extended periods of time without any of the distractions that attend ordinary university life; and, second, in a set of carefully designed exercises and outings, the cohorts test what they are learning and have learned in an environment that is new to them.

Moreover, the continued presence of the entire community - students, faculty, staff, and a group of successful leaders drawn to the project as a later life learning experience - will afford students an opportunity to mix and mingle with their teachers and other leaders that simply is utterly unmatched in normal settings.

Finally, attention has been given to identifying appropriate settings in which the faculty and students might best do the work of building a dialogic community. Lafayette College’s magnificent campus in rural Pennsylvania will host one of the Summer 2027 cohorts; and, the historic Wroxton Abbey (a historic 54 acre estate in the United Kingdom, formerly the home of Prime Minister Lord North) will host the other.

The abbey campus offers a uniquely appropriate setting for the Project. The nearby city of Coventry is recognized as a City of Peace and Reconciliation. Following the horrific 1940 bombing that killed more than 500 of people and destroyed 43,000 homes and buildings (including the City’s medieval cathedral), the City’s civic and religious leaders vowed to work for reconciliation with those responsible, establishing a radical commitment to peace over vengeance. This commitment is alive today: The city hosts an annual Peace Festival and a Peace Lecture (which former Prime Minister Gordon Brown, adviser to the Reconciliation League, once delivered) to promote peace and reconciliation within its communities; and, there is a Centre for Trust, Peace, and Social Relations, which supports research in peace-building and security.

The Value *Multiplier*

The impact of the Project only begins with the initial time spent together by the participants. The most powerful and important effects of the Project are the catalytic, multiplier effects of this collective skill building in the various spheres of influence occupied by those who directly participate.

The most immediate impact, beyond the personal growth of the participants themselves, will be on the campuses to which the scholars will return and in the communities in which they will live after graduation. Each participant, having been chosen for the Project because he or she already is a leader, will be armed with the tools necessary to lead in a different way - a way that incorporates the learned and practiced skills of communication and dialogue across differences. As leaders, they will attract others to the cause and will advance the hard work of bringing our universities and society to a better place.

The Project will be very intentional in its pursuit of the widest possible impact. Each cohort will end its experience by presenting a proposed set of capstone projects, plans upon which combinations of the participants will work after departure to nurture more productive dialogue in their respective communities. These capstone ideas may be original to the particular cohort, or they may be connected to and built upon work already having been done by earlier cohorts. And a major continuing activity of the Project will be maintaining an active network of participants and will be convening them regularly in service of the ongoing mission.

Over time, through a set of post-departure activities that will supplement the foundational experience, the Project will mobilize an army of citizens who will remain meaningfully connected both to their respective initial cohort and to all subsequent and prior cohorts. To this end, the League will convene periodic events and virtual sessions designed to amplify the concerted efforts of former Project participants as they seek to foster conversation across differences. In short, once a scholar has experienced the foundational elements, he or she will become a life-long member of the Reconciliation League (members of a Reconciliation Corps). Not merely an alumnus or alumna, but much more: a senior member of the mission.

Conclusion

The Reconciliation League will have an immediate, positive effect upon the scholars who share the experience, at the very least affording each scholar the tools of ecumenical discourse. After this initial experience, some will dedicate themselves immediately and enthusiastically to the task of building dialogic habits in the communities to which they return (here, it is noteworthy to emphasize that scholars chosen to participate will have been nominated by their respective universities as campus leaders who have shown an openness to the views of others). Other scholars may take longer before they put their newly learned skills to use in a significant way. But even this latter group will leave the experience both more able truly to engage in dialogue and, importantly, through the set of supplementary programs offered to members of the Reconciliation Corps, they will remain connected to the the other scholars with whom they shared their training period experience and to the larger network of leaders (scholars from other cohorts) committed to inculcating the spirit of dialogue in society.

Collectively, it is hoped that the Reconciliation Fellows, who over time will comprise a growing, connected Reconciliation Corps, will be the disciples of dialogue our society needs to reconnect us as a community. True, this is a hope; however, resignation to a world without such disciples cannot be an option.