

# Localizing Peace: Dr. Nathan Funk speaks at St. Paul's College

By James Buchok

Outsiders attempting to bring peace to a land and culture that is not their own will do more damage than good if they fail to respect local resources for peacemaking, according to a professor from the University of Waterloo.

"If we want to enter into peace building with people who think differently we need to know what peace means for them," says Dr. Nathan Funk. "When we talk about peace it's becoming clear we are not always talking about the same thing."

Funk presented a public lecture March 23 entitled *Localizing Peace: Religious & Cultural Dimensions of Sustainable Peacebuilding* at the Arthur V. Mauro Centre for Peace and Justice at St. Paul's College in Winnipeg.

Funk is assistant professor of peace and conflict studies at Waterloo's Conrad Grebel University College. He has lived in the Middle East and South Asia, designed Internet courses on peace and conflict resolution, and



Dr. Nathan Funk

worked on research and training projects for the United States Institute of Peace. He is a member of the board of directors for two Canadian NGOs; Project Ploughshares and Peacebuild: The Canadian Peacebuilding Network.

Funk said peace making is a cultural activity and its principles may translate well between cultures but peace processes may not. He said one culture may define peace as a negative, for example an absence of violence or war, while another culture defines peace as a positive, characterized by the presence of justice,

human rights and ecological sustainability.

"We need to appreciate the diversity of peace and peacemaking," said Funk. "To have a chance at local peace we need to respect local meanings of peace."

Funk said peacemakers from wealthy nations often bring an attitude that "the world needs more of us." We have seen throughout history people filling in the blanks with their own solutions. Colonialism was a period in which sincere people thought they were caring for people but it produced mixed results."

Funk said there have

been many attempts at peace that have been heavy handed and self-serving. "Peace from the outside is top down," he said. "Local culture is seen as a barrier rather than a resource and the locals feel that such an effort lacks authenticity. Peace must be locally constructed." Funk said peace from the outside acts "like a midwife, not an engineer."

"Locals need to be regarded as agents, not objects and outside groups need to tap local resources," Funk said. "I'm not denying that outside advice can't be shared but local resources are necessary resources that the people already have and they are renewable while international resources are not. There must be recognition of the value and skills that are present in a culture, the stories, histories and the peoples' knowledge of their own reality."

Funk said local peace-making is more effective when religion is engaged "because religion is a key factor in identity and culture."

"Most words for peace are rooted in religion," Funk said. "Religion informs conceptions of peace and peace making. It provides powerful examples and narratives. It provides social capital, addresses ritual and symbolic dimensions of reconciliation and offers a way to make a peace process personal."

Funk said religious words for peace in different languages don't mean exactly the same thing but there is overlap. "They all convey ideas of safety, security and just relationships."

The Mauro Centre was established in 2001 with an initial donation of one million dollars from Arthur V. Mauro. In its brief history, the centre has established a Ph.D. Program in Peace and Conflict Studies, coordinated the North American Conflict Resolution Student Exchange Program (2003-2007), and has organized numerous outreach activities reaching an audience of more than 15,000.