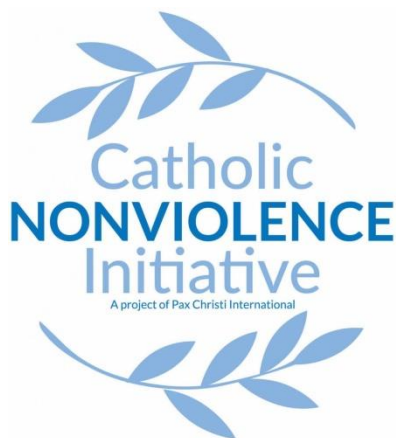


# Making Active Nonviolence Our way of Life in the Church and the World

*A tool and resource of the*

**Catholic Nonviolence Initiative,  
*a project of Pax Christi International***



## How to use preparatory document and questionnaire

This resource has been produced primarily as a tool and secondly as means of gathering information.

**Tool:** The introduction and preparatory section are background reading that set the scene, reminding us of the invitation of Pope Francis to shape a Church made of “artisans of peace.” The questions provide a framework for gauging experiences in nonviolence and to help groups and communities map out their response to this invitation.

**Information gathering:** Where possible try to capture the name and location of the group using the Questionnaire and the number of people who took part. How many men/women/young people?

- How many times did the group meet?
- Who is the key contact and what is the best way to contact that person?
- The information you gather and reports on how you use it would help the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative, a project of Pax Christi International to shape a global Catholic movement for nonviolence, as we assist grassroots networks and Vatican leadership on Catholic nonviolence as a spirituality, lifestyle, a program of social action and a universal ethic.

**Approach:** The materials take a *See-Judge-Act* approach. We hope that this reflective process will culminate in encouraging solidarity actions around the globe to promote nonviolence. For example, an annual communal ‘Celebration’ of nonviolence between 21 September (International Day of Peace) and 2 October (International Day of Nonviolence) in collaboration with the Season of Creation, 1 September to 4 October, celebrated by Christians around the world.

**Way forward:** Organise the reflection with groups from your community, institution or parish. Some examples of participants are youth groups, social action groups, women’s and men’s ministries, sports teams, prayer groups, etc. Make available to the group copies of the introduction and preparatory document. The document falls into 5 parts – perhaps each one could be the focus of discussion and reflection.

- **Cultivating Nonviolence** – *Introduction* with reflection on questions
- **Seeing Violence in our World Today** – *See* with reflection on questions
- **Discerning and Judging** based on the Good News of Jesus – *Judge* with reflection on questions
- **Acting with a force more powerful than violence** – *Judge and Act* with reflection on questions
- **Invitation to take up “active nonviolence”** – *Act* with reflection on questions

### Where to go next

- How might each group collect responses and identify key information or themes to share in your parish / with your organisation / with your Diocesan Bishop? What action does the group process lead to?
- Identify further information that needs to be gathered.
- What kind of event/activity/gathering might you plan to ‘Celebrate’ nonviolence during between 21 September (International Day of Peace) and 2 October (International Day of Nonviolence)? How can art, drama, or music be part of the celebration? How can you involve all sectors of the community-- bishops, groups, secular organizations? There are lots of ideas available here to help you get started <https://nonviolencejustpeace.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Framework-to-celebrate-nonviolence.pdf>
- At the celebration, invite your group/community to pray and reflect on the Vow of Nonviolence in communion with others around the world, many of whom renew this vow annually on 2 October. How might it change you / your community if you were to act out of it? <https://nonviolencejustpeace.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Multi-language-vow-of-nonviolence.pdf>
- Send responses or summary reports – individual or group based – to the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative, a project of Pax Christi International at [nonviolence@paxchristi.net](mailto:nonviolence@paxchristi.net).

## Preparatory Document

Pope Francis invites Catholics to “make active nonviolence our way of life,” both in the Church and in the world. In accordance with “Nonviolence: A Style of Politics for Peace,” (NSPP 2017) released by Pope Francis on the 50th anniversary of the World Day of Peace, the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative, a project of Pax Christi International, calls the Church to reflect on the theme: **Advancing ‘Active Nonviolence’ As a Way of Life in the Church and the World**. New paths for evangelization must be designed for and with the People of God (“Being the People of God, means being God’s leaven in this our humanity” says Pope Francis), who live in situations of violence and yet are “artisans of peace” (Francis, NSPP, 7) and nonviolence in their communities and rural areas, their cities and urban centers, people who are migrants or displaced, in conflict zones or in situations of stable peace, and especially for and with indigenous peoples.

***Being the People of God, means being God’s leaven in this our humanity, says Pope Francis***

Around the world, people and living creatures, along with the delicate artistry of the planet are experiencing a crisis of violence. A “culture of waste” (Francis, June 5, 2013) and “unfettered greed” (Laudato Si, 237) have cheapened life and human dignity. Yet the People of God remain defenders of life, artisans of peace, promoters of justice and protectors of family and kinship, and caretakers of the earth. The defense Jesus revealed to us is not through physical assault, weapons, or militias or armies, but by active gospel nonviolence, which involves courage, training, strategy, and strong communities. The modern term “nonviolence” names a central dimension of the vision and mission of Jesus: the thorough rejection of violence combined with the power of unconditional love in action. Nonviolence is a constructive force, an active method and a powerful way of life that challenges injustice and violence without using violence, transforms and resolves conflict, fosters just and peaceful alternatives and seeks the well-being of all. It is a set of tools, methods and norms for preventing violence, actively making peace and advancing post-conflict reconciliation, reconstruction and sustainable peace. As Pope Francis writes, “A culture of nonviolence is not an unattainable dream, but a path that has produced decisive results. The consistent practice of nonviolence has broken barriers, bound wounds, healed nations” (Letter to Cardinal Cupich, Archdiocese of Chicago, April 4, 2017).

Social scientists Maria Stephan and Erica Chenoweth’s research shows that effective nonviolent strategies require certain key elements to be successful: Discipline and self-sacrifice; spiritual groundedness; a

***A culture of nonviolence is not an unattainable dream, but a path that has produced decisive results.***

common goal and a higher purpose; creativity and strategic thinking; access to all levels of the society; and an ability to negotiate. They have documented that nonviolence is proven effective in reducing violence and advancing a sustaining peace (even more often than violent responses); can be effectively implemented at the scale of social movements or at the level of the individual; is trainable with most populations, especially populations culturally or religiously predisposed to these key elements. Spirituality, discipline, self-sacrifice, common purpose are also elements found in the faith communities of the People of God. Love of enemies is the litmus test of authentic Christian faith. Gospel nonviolence teaches us to recognize that the enemy, too, is a child of God. As Pope Francis says, conflict exists, but violence doesn’t have to (EG, 226). Nonviolence is a spirituality, the way of life that embraces love, forgiveness, and respect, a program of societal action and a universal ethic. It is our path to restoring the right relationship with one another and Mother Earth.

For the Church to foster, model, and support gospel nonviolence in all its manifestations, the Church needs greater closeness with those experimenting with the truth, to quote Mohandas Gandhi, of nonviolence in situations of violence or injustice.

**We want to know the following:**

- How do you imagine a good, just, and peaceable life for future generations?
- How can we work together toward the construction of a world that not only resolves but transforms inevitable conflict through nonviolent means, creates alternatives to violence, lessens the use of weapons of destruction, and that promotes a dynamic integral peace?
- Above all, how is gospel nonviolence a particular mission of the Church today in the face of this reality?

This Preparatory Document, based on excerpts from [Nonviolence: A Style of Politics for Peace](#) by Pope Francis, is divided into parts corresponding to the method “see, judge (discern), and act,” which was developed by the Church and Catholic action groups. We encourage communities to conclude with ‘celebration.’ Each section is followed by questions to guide dialogue. The new paths for evangelization and for shaping a Church made of “artisans of peace” grow out of a “culture of encounter” (*EG 220*) in daily life, and the creative and courageous nonviolent actions that build up the family of God.

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## Background Reading and Questions

### Nonviolence: A Style of Politics for Peace

excerpts from Pope Francis' 2017 World Day of Peace message

#### Part I. Cultivating Nonviolence

"I wish peace to every man, woman and child, and I pray that the image and likeness of God in each person will enable us to acknowledge one another as sacred gifts endowed with immense dignity. Especially in situations of conflict, let us respect this, our "deepest dignity" and make active nonviolence our way of life." (*World Day of Peace, 2017, 1*)

"On this occasion, I would like to reflect on *nonviolence* as a style of politics for peace. I ask God to help all of us to cultivate nonviolence in our most personal thoughts and values. May charity and nonviolence govern how we treat each other as individuals, within society and in international life. When victims of violence are able to resist the temptation to retaliate, they become the most credible promoters of nonviolent peacemaking. In the most local and ordinary situations and in the international order, may nonviolence become the hallmark of our decisions, our relationships and our actions, and indeed of political life in all its forms." (*WDP 2017, 1*)

#### Questions

1. Have you ever heard of nonviolence? What do you associate with that word?
2. What are some positive responses to the call for gospel nonviolence you can identify in your community, in your local Church, in the Church as the Family of God?
3. How is gospel nonviolence integrated as a core value in your family's life? your living ecclesial community? your parish? or your diocese?

#### Part II. Seeing Violence in Our World Today

"Today, sadly, we find ourselves engaged in a horrifying *world war fought piecemeal*. It is not easy to know if our world is presently more or less violent than in the past, or to know whether modern means of communications and greater mobility have made us more aware of violence, or, on the other hand, increasingly inured to it.

In any case, we know that this "piecemeal" violence, of different kinds and levels, causes great suffering: wars in different countries and continents; terrorism, organized crime and unforeseen acts of violence; the abuses suffered by migrants and victims of human trafficking; and the devastation of the environment. Where does this lead? Can violence achieve any goal of lasting value? Or does it merely lead to retaliation and a cycle of deadly conflicts that benefit only a few "warlords"?

Violence is not the cure for our broken world. Countering violence with violence leads at best to forced migrations and enormous suffering, because vast amounts of resources are diverted to military ends and away

from the everyday needs of young people, families experiencing hardship, the elderly, the infirm and the great majority of people in our world. At worst, it can lead to the death, physical and spiritual, of many people, if not of all.” (WDP 2017, 2)

#### Questions:

1. What violence do you see in everyday life--in families, community, neighborhood, or diocese at different levels? Your country? International relationships?
2. Where is your community impacted by the violence of hunger and poverty?
3. What are the impacts of the ecological violence around you?

### Part III. Discerning and Judging Based on the Good News of Jesus

“Jesus himself lived in violent times. Yet he taught that the true battlefield, where violence and peace meet, is the human heart: for “it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come” (*Mk 7:21*). But Christ’s message in this regard offers a radically positive approach. He unfailingly preached God’s unconditional love, which welcomes and forgives. He taught his disciples to love their enemies (cf. *Mt 5:44*) and to turn the other cheek (cf. *Mt 5:39*). When he stopped her accusers from stoning the woman caught in adultery (cf. *Jn 8:1-11*), and when, on the night before he died, he told Peter to put away his sword (cf. *Mt 26:52*), Jesus marked out the path of nonviolence. (WDP 2017, 3)

To be true followers of Jesus today also includes embracing his teaching about nonviolence. As my predecessor Benedict XVI observed, that teaching “is realistic because it takes into account that in the world there is *too much* violence, *too much* injustice, and therefore that this situation cannot be overcome except by countering it with *more* love, with *more* goodness. This ‘*more*’ comes from God”.<sup>[4]</sup> He went on to stress that: “For Christians, nonviolence is not merely tactical behaviour but a person’s way of being, the attitude of one who is *so convinced of God’s love and power* that he or she is not afraid to tackle evil with the weapons of love and truth alone. Love of one’s enemy constitutes the nucleus of the ‘Christian revolution’”.<sup>[5]</sup> The Gospel command to *love your enemies* (cf. *Lk 6:27*) “is rightly considered the *magna carta* of Christian nonviolence. It does not consist in succumbing to evil..., but in responding to evil with good (cf. *Rom 12:17-21*), and thereby breaking the chain of injustice”.<sup>[6]</sup> (WDP 2017, 3)

5. If violence has its source in the human heart, then it is fundamental that nonviolence be practised before all else within families. This is part of that joy of love which I described ... in my Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, in the wake of two years of reflection by the Church on marriage and the family. The family is the indispensable crucible in which spouses, parents and children, brothers and sisters, learn to communicate and to show generous concern for one another, and in which frictions and even conflicts have to be resolved not by force but by dialogue, respect, concern for the good of the other, mercy and forgiveness.<sup>[16]</sup> From within families, the joy of love spills out into the world and radiates to the whole of society. <sup>[17]</sup> An ethics of fraternity and peaceful coexistence between individuals and among peoples cannot be based on the logic of fear, violence and closed-mindedness, but on responsibility, respect and sincere dialogue. (WDP 2017, 5)

The politics of nonviolence have to begin in the home and then spread to the entire human family. “Saint Therese of Lisieux invites us to practice the little way of love, not to miss out on a kind word, a smile or any small gesture which sows peace and friendship. An integral ecology is also made up of simple daily gestures that break with the logic of violence, exploitation and selfishness”.<sup>[19]</sup> (WDP 2017, 5)

#### Questions:

1. What are some key lessons from the gospel that can enrich one’s commitment to nonviolence?
2. How can faith in Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace and what we know of Jesus' life and witness, help us to promote gospel nonviolence in the Church and in the society?

#### Part IV. Acting with a force more powerful than violence

4. Nonviolence is sometimes taken to mean surrender, lack of involvement and passivity, but this is not the case. When Mother Teresa received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979, she clearly stated her own message of active nonviolence: “We in our family don’t need bombs and guns, to destroy to bring peace – just get together, love one another... And we will be able to overcome all the evil that is in the world”.<sup>[7]</sup> For the force of arms is deceptive. “While weapons traffickers do their work, there are poor peacemakers who give their lives to help one person, then another and another and another”; for such peacemakers, Mother Teresa is “a symbol, an icon of our times”.<sup>[8]</sup> (WDP 2017, 4)

The decisive and consistent practice of nonviolence has produced impressive results. The achievements of Mahatma Gandhi and Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan in the liberation of India, and of Dr Martin Luther King Jr in combating racial discrimination will never be forgotten. Women in particular are often leaders of nonviolence, as for example, was Leymah Gbowee and the thousands of Liberian women, who organized pray-ins and nonviolent protest that resulted in high-level peace talks to end the second civil war in Liberia.

Nor can we forget the eventful decade that ended with the fall of Communist regimes in Europe. The Christian communities made their own contribution by their insistent prayer and courageous action. Particularly influential were the ministry and teaching of Saint John Paul II. Reflecting on the events of 1989 in his 1991 Encyclical *Centesimus Annus*, my predecessor highlighted the fact that momentous change in the lives of people, nations and states had come about “by means of peaceful protest, using only the weapons of truth and justice”.<sup>[10]</sup> This peaceful political transition was made possible in part “by the non-violent commitment of people who, while always refusing to yield to the force of power, succeeded time after time in finding effective ways of bearing witness to the truth”. Pope John Paul went on to say: “May people learn to fight for justice without violence, renouncing class struggle in their internal disputes and war in international ones”.<sup>[11]</sup>

The Church has been involved in nonviolent peacebuilding strategies in many countries, engaging even the most violent parties in efforts to build a just and lasting peace.

Such efforts on behalf of the victims of injustice and violence are not the legacy of the Catholic Church alone, but are typical of many religious traditions, for which “compassion and nonviolence are essential elements pointing to the way of life”.<sup>[12]</sup> I emphatically reaffirm that “no religion is terrorist”.<sup>[13]</sup> Violence profanes the name of God.<sup>[14]</sup> Let us never tire of repeating: “The name of God cannot be used to justify violence. Peace alone is holy. Peace alone is holy, not war!”<sup>[15]</sup> (*WDP 2017, 4*)

#### Questions:

1. How do we all respond (as bishops, priests, consecrated persons, laypersons and ecclesial formation institutions) to the call to gospel nonviolence?
2. What are you doing in your community to promote gospel nonviolence as a way of living in love with all creation?

#### Part V. Pope Francis’ invitation to take up “active nonviolence”

6. Peacebuilding through active nonviolence is the natural and necessary complement to the Church’s continuing efforts to limit the use of force by the application of moral norms; she does so by her participation in the work of international institutions and through the competent contribution made by so many Christians to the drafting of legislation at all levels. Jesus himself offers a “manual” for this strategy of peacemaking in the Sermon on the Mount. The eight Beatitudes (cf. *Mt 5:3-10*) provide a portrait of the person we could describe as blessed, good and authentic. Blessed are the meek, Jesus tells us, the merciful and the peacemakers, those who are pure in heart, and those who hunger and thirst for justice.

This is also a programme and a challenge for political and religious leaders, the heads of international institutions, and business and media executives: to apply the Beatitudes in the exercise of their respective responsibilities. It is a challenge to build up society, communities and businesses by acting as peacemakers. It is to show mercy by refusing to discard people, harm the environment, or seek to win at any cost. To do so requires “the willingness to face conflict head on, to resolve it and to make it a link in the chain of a new process”.<sup>[20]</sup> To act in this way means to choose solidarity as a way of making history and building friendship in society. Active nonviolence is a way of showing that unity is truly more powerful and more fruitful than conflict. Everything in the world is inter-connected.<sup>[21]</sup> Certainly differences can cause frictions. But let us face them constructively and non-violently, so that “tensions and oppositions can achieve a diversified and life-giving unity,” preserving “what is valid and useful on both sides”.<sup>[22]</sup>

I pledge the assistance of the Church in every effort to build peace through active and creative nonviolence. (*WDP 2017, 6*)



### Questions:

1. Pope Francis invites us to “active nonviolence.” Have you ever heard of Pope Francis’ call to nonviolence? Has this invitation been shared in your community or local church?
2. Are there any initiatives for disseminating it and making it better known? What are they?
3. What else could be done to motivate more “active non-violence” in response to Pope Francis’ call?

## Part VI. Prayers and Peace

1. Mary is the Queen of Peace. At the birth of her Son, the angels gave glory to God and wished peace on earth to men and women of good will (cf. *Luke 2:14*). Let us pray for her guidance.

“All of us want peace. Many people build it day by day through small gestures and acts; many of them are suffering, yet patiently persevere in their efforts to be peacemakers”.<sup>[24]</sup> May we dedicate ourselves prayerfully and actively to banishing violence from our hearts, words and deeds, and to becoming nonviolent people and to building nonviolent communities that care for our common home. “Nothing is impossible if we turn to God in prayer. Everyone can be an artisan of peace”.<sup>[25]</sup>

2. Give me a heart of poverty,  
*able to love and open up and give myself to others*  
Give me a heart of patience,  
*able to love and live in hope.*  
Give me a heart of justice,  
*able to love and measure myself by the standard of justice.*  
Give me a heart of mercifulness,  
*able to love and understand and forgive others.*  
Give me a heart of sensitivity,  
*able to love and weep without being discouraged*  
Give me a heart of strength,  
*able to love and be faithful unto death.*  
Give me a heart touched by the Gospel,  
*able to love*

*(Adapted from WCC prayer – full prayer on Pax Christi E&W prayer card)*

3. How I wish that all men and women of good will would look at the Cross if only for a moment!

There, we can see God's reply:  
violence is not answered  
with violence,  
death is not answered with the  
language of death  
In the silence of the cross,  
The uproars of weapons ceases  
And the language of reconciliation,  
Forgiveness, dialogue and peace is spoken  
*Pope Francis*

4. Pour out on us the power of your love,  
that we may protect life and beauty.  
Fill us with peace, that we may live  
As brothers and sisters, harming no one...  
Bring healing to our lives  
that we may protect the world and  
not prey on it,  
that we may sow beauty  
not pollution and destruction.  
Touch the hearts of those who look only for gain  
at the expense of the poor and the earth.  
Encourage us, we pray, our struggle for justice, love and peace  
*(Adapted from Laudato Si, Pope Francis, 2015)*

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Send responses or summary reports – individual or group based – to the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative, a project of Pax Christi International at [nonviolence@paxchristi.net](mailto:nonviolence@paxchristi.net).

*Thank you!*

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