

# Building Nonviolent Bridges

## *Lenten Reflections*





## Ash Wednesday - March 5, 2025

### Reflection by Bishop (Em.) Marc Stenger, Co-President of Pax Christi International

Lent, which begins on Ash Wednesday, is a time of year when we are invited to become aware of our ephemeral and fallible nature and **the call to convert**, to turn toward others, to recognise the need for **reconciliation**, and to embrace the perfection of **charity**.

Very concretely, the Word of God sets out how to prepare for Easter: **to grow in the sincerity of our desire for peace, to strengthen our fraternity, and to do penance**. This penance can be summed up in three acts: *prayer, fasting, and almsgiving*.

**Prayer** unites us more closely to Christ and realigns us with the divine.

**Fasting** teaches us to detach from everything that distances us from God, offering a path of humility that deepens our awareness of the struggles many people endure daily.

**Almsgiving** is a symbol of sharing and of our commitment to reaching out to the poorest of the poor, witnessing to them God's mercy.

As Pax Christi International marks 80 years of peacebuilding, this Lent invites us to reflect on how **nonviolence** is not only a response to conflict but a **path to deeper conversion**, bringing just peace and reconciliation to our world.

During this season of Lent, **let us give ourselves the means to grow in holiness each day**.





## **First Sunday of Lent - March 9, 2025**

### **Reflection by Sr. Wamũyũ Wachira, Co-President of Pax Christi International - *Nonviolent Bridges for Healing***

*"The visitor heals the sick" (African proverb)<sup>1</sup>*

Lent is a very special time of the year when we get another opportunity to reflect not only on our lives but also on our relationship with the world around us. Allow me invite you to journey with me this First Sunday of Lent, 2025.

Today, we move to the continent of **Africa**, especially, Central and Eastern Africa where we, Pax Christi International members have been **serving communities** experiencing different forms of violent conflicts. We do this through **prayer, advocacy** and **training** in active nonviolence and peacebuilding.

As we continue **building these bridges of peace** it is important to have a glimpse of this immense, beautiful and unique continent. Africa is a beautiful, rich, vibrant, youthful, multi-cultural, multi-ethnic continent. It also has a variety of beautiful, unique wild life, and variety of natural resources. However, suffers sporadic droughts and famine especially in its arid and semi-arid areas. It also has her share of decades of deadly wars fought 'piece meal' which has led to loss of lives, untold suffering, torn families and friends apart, severed dreams of children and youth, destroyed oasis of wisdom – the elderly among the communities - damaged other forms of life and the environment, destroyed infrastructure and property.

Despite this, as we walk and work closely with men, women and youth, we witness and experience **resilience and determination to reject all forms of violence** through speech, advocacy and modelling the nonviolent way - love of all 'even the enemy' – the way exemplified by Jesus - we will humbly walk during this Lenten season and beyond.

*(1) This means that when a visitor comes to someone's home, the sick will heal and there will be restoration of peace in the home. The visitor brings new life.*



Our second reading reminds us that 'the Lord is the Lord of all and offers generosity to all' (Romans; 10:12).

In this unique journey, in the case of **South Sudan**, after encounters with some **youth militia**, they voluntarily disarmed and handed over their weapons to the elders; in similar meetings and trainings, **Youth** in the **Democratic Republic of Congo** have chosen the path of nonviolence and become ambassadors of peace assisting in, for instance, monitoring to ensure peaceful elections.

Among, the **Maasai** in **Kenya**, where we held one of the trainings, I partook of a ritual performed by some elders under a traditional 'Peace Tree' as one of the steps towards the termination of Female Genital Mutilation widely practised by their communities.

The 'peaceful holidays' in **Congo Brazzaville** and **Cameroon** is creating forums for the **youth** to unite and reconcile through Sports and activities in peace education. On the other hand, **young single mothers** in **Burundi** are utilising the knowledge and skills gained to network and engage in income generating projects as a way of addressing the violence they experience.

**Children** are also not left behind, as in the case of **Uganda** where they are now adopting the nonviolent ways to deal with conflicts both at school and home. The training also targets **Religious sisters** in Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya and Uganda equipping them to address their own conflicts and trauma, as well as those within their communities and among the youth they serve.

Also, through the sharing sessions, some participants gave cases of **indigenous nonviolent ways** used in their communities to address wars/violent conflicts such as, the '*leketio*' (traditional belt worn by women, now commonly referred to as 'peace belt') among some communities in Kenya.

The shared examples above, exemplify the efforts to *metanoia*, the Lenten journey we are being invited to embrace.



In conclusion, I now invite us, our Pax Christi International friends and collaborators - especially in this year of our 80th anniversary celebration - to **continue nonviolently building bridges of healing among us, our families, communities and our global world.**

Let us remember that **we do not walk this journey alone**, for, as in the first reading today, we hear that the people called on Yahweh, and Yahweh saw their misery and responded to them 'with mighty hand and outstretched arm' brought them to a beautiful land 'flowing with milk and honey' (Deutonomy, 26; 7-9).

The God of our ancestors who has been with us since 1945 will do the same for us.

We rejoice that we are 'in the shelter of God the Almighty (Ps, 91:1). God has sent us angels to guard us wherever we go and these angels will carry us in their arms (11, 12) to ensure we are not harmed.

Therefore, as we continue this journey, we have another opportunity to resist, as Jesus did, the temptation to worship our own idols that invite us to a world of greed, false security and imaginary power (Mat; 4: 1-11).

**Today, God will speak to us, renew our broken spirit and heal our wounds anew.**



Nonviolent Bridges for **HEALING**



## **Second Sunday of Lent - March 16, 2025**

### **Reflection by Sr. Bridget Crisp rsm, Pax Christi Aotearoa New Zealand - *Nonviolent Bridges for Dialogue***

A **bridge** is a way to reach the other side without spending too much energy traversing difficult or dangerous terrain. Thus, it is considered **a tool of connection**.

**Dialogue** can also be seen as a tool of connection. Dialogue between individuals creates **relationships**, opens the possibility of **choices**, and allows for the opportunity to work closely together for a common cause. If done well, dialogue can **build trust** and bring about **enduring relationships** centred on **respect** and **dignity** of others.

Dialogue that is not done well grows misunderstanding and distrust. It tarnishes respect and dignity and enables the misuse of power within relationships to go unchecked.

To create **stable, enduring, good, nonviolent dialogue** between individuals and people, we must couple or bridge dialogue with **active and authentic listening**. That means going into the complex and dangerous terrain of relationships and staying there to listen and understand the pain, anger, and frustration that may be present. It involves **staying actively present** in the painful dialogue and **collaborating together** to address the pain, anger and loss that arises.

**The nations of our world have not had good relationships with the Indigenous peoples of their lands.** Colonisation has affected all parts of the world. In history, we have seen global powers conquer the world and take ownership of lands not their own, stripping First Peoples/Indigenous Peoples of their culture and values. **The dialogue with Indigenous peoples and governing bodies has often been one-sided and lacked active listening.**



In **Aotearoa New Zealand**, the current coalition government introduced a Treaty Principles Bill, with the intention that specific principles –taken from the English version of the **Te Tiriti o Waitangi/Treaty of Waitangi** (1840), the founding document on how British and Māori tribes would live side by side– be considered as the only principles to which all people would live.

The proposal and introduction of this Bill has undone **many years of hard work in dialogue and listening** to the pain and anger that the Colonial Government in the latter half of the 19th century, followed by successive New Zealand Government policies, enacted resulting in land being seized and cultural language, values, and way of life being suppressed for most of the 20th Century.

Submissions to parliament opposing this bill have been overwhelming, as have the marches opposing it and **supporting the Treaty of Waitangi as it is**. The number of non-Māori opposing the bill and marching is significant, as all New Zealanders are becoming more aware of colonisation's impact on the country.

During this time of Lent and our reflection on 80 years of nonviolent dialogue and action by Pax Christi members worldwide, **let us reflect on how we (Pax Christi) are in our relationships of dialogue and listening with Indigenous peoples.**

Have we actively chosen to **understand and listen** to the pain Indigenous peoples have suffered at the hands of colonisers? Can we find **ways to connect and build relationships of trust, respect, and equality?**



Nonviolent Bridges for **DIALOGUE**





## Third Sunday of Lent - March 23, 2025

**Reflection by Martha Inés Romero, Secretary General of Pax Christi International** - *Nonviolent Bridges for Socio-Environmental Justice*

**Latin America: Walking with Hope implies build nonviolent bridges for Socio-Environmental Justice from a personal, communal and transcendent, eco-spiritual approach**

*"That is why, as I listen all during the week to the cries of the people and behold so much horrible crime and such shameful violence, I ask the Lord to give me appropriate words for consoling, for denouncing, and for calling to repentance." St Oscar Romero, Lent - 23 March 1980*

Pope Francis has invited us to "*Walk Together in Hope*" in this Jubilee Year, with a special attention to the spiritual, ecclesial, and social focus. Recalling the words of St. Romero, one day before his martyrdom, we remember communities in Latin America and the Caribbean affected by the extractivist economic model, whose rights are constantly violated, and those damages caused to the Mother Earth, the nature. **The model generates violence and inequities**, it is not an ecological transition but an "ecological dispossession".

For the past 13 years, Pax Christi International has accompanied those communities in their process of resistance of this model and to strengthening their capacity to care and live their ecological spirituality (eco-spirituality) from a nonviolent approach.

Our response involves a **Cultural Transformation**, which builds bridges, from peacebuilding with an active nonviolence approach to ways of understanding the best way to deal with violence, creating safe, trusting, resilient, healing spaces.

Our response is made from a **Sense of Community**, because it is the entire community that is being affected...





Understanding this moment of "ecological transitions/dispossessions" implies strengthening the community capacity to analyze, plan and act (skills, capacities, tools) from collective actions, with the option of promoting societies in equity, accompanying processes in which the role of **women** and **young people** are necessary and important in these processes.

In our work on **Nonviolence**, central to everything we do as a global Catholic peace movement, we have built some bridges for Hope in a Latin America that resists predation, with a Spirituality of Active Nonviolence:

- The **Global Community** must respond from **solidarity** and **co-responsibility**, in the face of governments and regional and global actors with decision-making power.
- **Collective actions** imply exchange of experiences, learning ways of resisting, of building, from creativity, with a view to the response in crisis, and at the same time, with heart and action in the desired future.
- **Eco-Spirituality poses the question: how to build and care for hope?** From our richness in biodiversity – the notion of poverty and wealth is challenged by the ancestral concept of **living in harmony, the Buen Vivir or Sumak Kawsay**.

The third Sunday of Lent reflects on Luke 13, 8: *'Sir, leave it for this year also, and I shall cultivate the ground around it and fertilize it; it may bear fruit in the future. If not, you can cut it down.'* The fruit of Hope must not cease in these moments of uncertainty and depletion of the planet. God allows us to pay every day for our lives, for resilience, for resistance and for the collective construction of our present and our future. **Our communities in Latin America and the Caribbean are resurrected, acting nonviolently!**



Nonviolent Bridges for **SOCIO-ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE**



## **Fourth Sunday of Lent - March 30, 2025**

**Reflection by Nicolás Paz, Director of the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative** - *Nonviolent Bridges for Transformation*

### **The Prodigal Son, Nonviolence, and the Disruptive Answer to Violence**

The Fourth Sunday of Lent, also known as *Laetare Sunday*, is **a moment of joy and hope** amid the Lenten season. One of the central Gospel readings for this day is the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32), a story that speaks to the transformative power of mercy, forgiveness, and love. It is also a powerful lens through which we can **reflect on nonviolence as a bridge of personal, communitarian and international transformation**. Nonviolent action disrupts cycles of violence, harm and destruction in our daily lives, from family realities to contexts of war and armed conflicts. **But how does nonviolence work? Where does its power come from?**

In the parable, the younger son expects rejection when he returns home, but instead, his father welcomes him with open arms, love, joy and even celebration. This story mirrors precisely **the transformative power of nonviolence**. The father's response is disruptive, unexpected. He does not seek retribution or demand compensation. **His answer is revolutionary, most of the time, it is even difficult to understand**. In fact, the older brother, unable to understand such an answer, embodies today's logic of symmetrical response, of an eye for an eye, as if that could produce any kind of justice but full blindness.

In a world where violence – whether physical, verbal, psychological, cultural or structural – is often met with retaliation, Jesus teaches a different way. “I am the way and the truth and the life” (John 14:6). He teaches us the **nonviolent bridges of transformation**, the **active nonviolent answer to resist others and our own violence**, offering more life in the middle of a world that answers destruction with more destruction.

Nonviolence is Jesus' way, truth and life. **It is an embodied, active force that resists evil without becoming evil itself. It is love in action** – the father's response to his son's failure.



## Building Nonviolent Bridges

Lenten Reflections



That answer is a model of creativity, of cultural transformation: it refuses to perpetuate cycles of exclusion, anger, and rejection, and **it breaks violence with nonviolence**. He offers us the bridges of transformation, building reconciliation and organizing hope.

Jesus' nonviolent, disruptive answer to violence **transformed history**. It showed that true power is not power over but power *with*.

Founded in 2016 as a program of Pax Christi International, the overall goal of the **Catholic Nonviolence Initiative** has been and is to see the Catholic Church embrace nonviolence as a core part of its identity and to see well-prepared Catholics be effective nonviolent peacemakers. As Pope Francis stated, *"To be true followers of Jesus today also includes embracing his teaching about nonviolence."*

Nonviolent, disruptive, effective answers to violence **can be taught and learned to transform relationships and change the world**. We know the tools, the strategies, its effectiveness and the power of faith and spirituality.

As we journey through Lent, we are invited to reflect: **How do we respond to the brokenness and violence in our lives and in the world?** Do we cling to resentment like the older brother, or do we embrace the transformative power of nonviolence? Do we perpetuate cycles of violence, or do we choose the nonviolent way of Jesus?

This Sunday calls us to **disrupt violence with love**, to **break cycles of vengeance with forgiveness**, and to **let God transform our hearts and lives**. Let us walk together the way, the truth, and the life of Gospel Nonviolence to Organize Hope and **bridge personal, communitarian, and international transformations**.



Nonviolent Bridges for **TRANSFORMATION**





## **Fifth Sunday of Lent - April 6, 2025**

### **Reflection by AEI Pax Christi Bethlehem** - *Nonviolent Bridges for Just Peace*

As we journey through Lent, we are invited into **a time of prayer, reflection, and renewal**. This season calls us to examine our hearts, deepen our commitment to justice, and embrace the transformative power of nonviolence and peace. For us at **AEI Pax Christi Bethlehem**, this is not only a spiritual exercise but also a lived reality—one that demands **courage, faith, and steadfast hope**.

This year, as Pax Christi International marks its 80th anniversary, we honor a movement that has tirelessly worked for just peace, security, and reconciliation across the world. It is a legacy that inspires us in **Bethlehem**, where the cry for justice continues to echo through our streets, churches, mosques, homes, and communities. **Our mission is rooted in the belief that bridges—not walls—will pave the way for freedom, liberation, and a just and lasting peace in the Holy Land.**

To build these bridges, we must first **recognize the humanity in one another**, as expressed in the *Document on Human Fraternity* by His Holiness Pope Francis and Sheikh Ahmed Al-Tayeb, Grand Imam of Al-Azhar. **The Holy Land is often spoken of as a land of division, but it is also a land of encounters**—where Jesus and the prophets called for justice. In our work, we witness **the beauty of Christians and Muslims standing together, learning from one another, and building a shared future of dignity and respect.**

Inspired by *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis' encyclical on our "common home," we at AEI Pax Christi Bethlehem recognize that **justice and peace are inseparable** from caring for both our land and our people.



We have also been teaching nonviolence through a method we have developed called **“Read, Reflect, Communicate, and Act” (RRCA)**. This approach is taught using selected quotes, sayings, and verses from sacred texts such as the Gospel and the Quran. For example, we draw from the *Sermon on the Mount* and Qur’anic verses on peace. Additionally, we incorporate wisdom from leaders of nonviolence, such as Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr.

1. **Read:** This first step involves silent and then loud reading of the selected texts.
2. **Reflect:** The second phase is a time of reflection and meditation on the meaning and implications of the reading.
3. **Communicate:** The third step involves discussion and training in communication skills—focusing not only on hearing but truly listening, as well as engaging in constructive and respectful dialogue.
4. **Act:** The final step is action, where participants plan personal or public initiatives rooted in nonviolence.

The goal of this approach is to transform individuals’ mindsets from a violent mentality to a nonviolent one, fostering a change in thinking, behavior, and attitude. We also emphasize building **inner peace** as the first step toward fostering peaceful relationships and external peace with others.

We cultivate these nonviolent bridges through **awareness, education, and dialogue—especially the “dialogue of life”—as well as cultural exchange**. We empower children, youth, educators, women, and community leaders to be agents of just peace, to challenge injustices with wisdom, and to root their activism in the principles of nonviolence. Through storytelling, heritage preservation, and interfaith initiatives, we weave together narratives of hope that resist the forces of despair and trauma.



## Building Nonviolent Bridges

*Lenten Reflections*



On this Fifth Sunday of Lent, we reflect on Jesus' journey toward Jerusalem—the sacred city for the three monotheistic faiths—a path marked by suffering yet ultimately leading to resurrection. His witness calls us to walk a similar path: to persist in hope even in the face of suffering, violence, displacement, starvation, and the violation of basic human rights; to extend a hand even when we are rejected; and to trust that peace is possible, even when the world tells us otherwise.

May this season of **Lent and Ramadan** renew our resolve and determination to be bridge-builders, to work for an end to wars in our country and across the world, to stand firm and steadfast in our commitment to just peace, and to embody the spirit of nonviolence in all that we do. As we look toward the **Feast of the Resurrection, Easter**, may we be reminded that true and lasting peace is not the absence of struggle but the presence of justice, rooted in the unwavering belief that love will always have the final word.

**A world of friends is a world of peace.**

***"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God."***  
**(Matthew 5:9)**



Nonviolent Bridges for **JUST PEACE**





## **Palm Sunday - April 13, 2025**

### **Reflection by Marie Dennis, Director of the Catholic Institute for Nonviolence** - *Bridges of Gospel Nonviolence: The Way of the Cross*

In the coming week we will re-enact some of the most powerful moments of Jesus' journey. Following **the Way of the Cross** we will reflect on the meaning of his crucifixion. Nailed to a tree, experiencing in his own body an especially cruel form of execution, Jesus, we believe, **overcame the power of evil with an ultimate act of nonviolent resistance**, offering **forgiveness** and **mercy** even in the face of suffering and death, rather than responding to violence with violence.

**Jesus' entry into Jerusalem** on a colt, which introduces this Holy Week of high drama, was **a powerful public liturgy** loaded with political and social significance and culminating his long and deliberate journey toward the center of religious and political power in first century Palestine.

In sharp contrast to the military extravaganza that might have been staged by the Roman occupiers – and probably disappointing some of his followers who expected him to be an earthly ruler with power and authority, the arrival of Jesus, the King, “*meek and riding on an ass*,” as Zechariah predicted, **highlighted his reign as one of peace, service and nonviolence**, rather than military might.

The profound threat to an unjust status quo levied by Jesus' message and ministry and his persistent call for a welcoming discipleship community that rejected the exclusionary practices of both political and religious authorities made **his deliberately nonviolent and triumphal approach to Jerusalem unbearably threatening to those in power**. The plot to kill him thickened.



Yet, all the way to the cross, **Jesus demonstrated the power of nonviolence and insisted that his followers do the same.** When his disciples moved to defend him with the sword as he faced his betrayer and arrest, he said, according to Luke, *"No more of this!"* and according to Matthew, *"Put your sword back into its sheath, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword."*

**In a world overwhelmed by violence, we are invited to follow in his footsteps:** *"... love your enemies, do good to those who hate you."* (Luke 6:27)

Active nonviolence is **a positive and powerful force for social change, a bridge to just peace;** a process for ending violence without lethal force; for transforming conflict; and for protecting the vulnerable.

People throughout the world have used active nonviolence to **end injustice** and **foster reconciliation**, to **resist war** and **build peace**, to **safeguard** the infinite worth of **the human person**, and to **care for creation**.

What is **the message of the Cross** now? What does it mean **to follow Jesus' way of life** – a way of life that got him killed? **How do we repeat his pattern** of active, nonviolent, persistent, risky, creative peacemaking?

During this Holy week, pay close attention to the news about our broken world. Celebrate the dramatic liturgies of these days conscious of the context in which we live and listening for the ways that **Jesus' example might guide our contemporary response.**



Bridges of Gospel Nonviolence

**THE WAY OF THE CROSS**