

Chapter 6: Catholic practice of nonviolence¹

with Ken Butigan and John Dear²

Choosing Peace: The Catholic Church returns to Gospel nonviolence

Edited by Marie Dennis

Orbis Books, 2018

The practice of Gospel nonviolence in the Christian community over the centuries has not always been visible, yet the early Church resolutely placed nonviolence at the center of community and individual discipleship. Many Catholics throughout the years have believed that to be a disciple of Jesus has meant being comprehensively nonviolent.³ This chapter, based on a paper written for background in advance of the April 2016 Rome conference, highlights some of the many examples of nonviolence as practiced by the Catholic/Christian community.

It is important to note that nonviolent practices in Christian history have reflected the gendered roles in society. Men's nonviolent practices often took place in the sphere of abstaining from bearing arms and from participation in war. Women's nonviolent practices more often took place in the sphere of family, community, and religious orders as they resisted direct and structural gender violence and exploitation.

In the first centuries after Jesus, the Church nourished a culture of spiritually-grounded nonviolence through the corporal works of mercy, the practice of forgiveness and reconciliation, resistance to the culture of violence, and by preparing its members to face the consequences of their nonviolent resistance, including persecution and martyrdom. The witness of early Christian martyrs was often recorded and recited when the community celebrated Eucharist together as a way to encourage one another in their Gospel nonviolence.

Moreover, feminist scholars studying early writings like the Acts of Thekla are recognizing that women's resistance even then had a form of its own:

The Acts of Thekla are an outstanding document on women's resistance during early Christianity. Although they must be regarded as a novel-like story (similar to the other Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles) and not as historical reports, they are nevertheless not to be underestimated in their relevance to the reconstruction of historical reality ... Thekla is – so the story goes – a beautiful virgin from an upper class family in Iconium. She is engaged to Thamyras. From a neighboring house, she hears Paul's sermon on abstinence and resurrection,

¹ Dr. Ken Butigan and Rev. John Dear, originally published for April 2016 Conference on Nonviolence and Just Peace as "An Overview of Gospel Nonviolence in the Christian Tradition," www.nonviolencejustpeace.net.

² Dr. Ken Butigan, senior lecturer in Peace, Justice, and Conflict Studies at DePaul University, and Rev. John Dear, Catholic priest, Christian pacifist, author, and lecturer.

³ See Chapter 4, "Jesus and Nonviolence: Scriptural Evidence."

which addresses women in particular. She refuses to marry Thamyras and is punished ... sentenced to death because her refusal to marry is seen as a threat to public order ...

The Acts of Thekla are a unique document of the history of women's resistance. According to this text, women's resistance evolved by women refusing their role, which again and again is forced on them by agents of the patriarchal order.⁴

More familiar is the story of Christian apologist Justin Martyr who, in the second century, wrote, "We who were filled with war and mutual slaughter and all wickedness have each and all throughout the earth changed our instruments of war, our swords into plowshares, and our spears into farm tools, and cultivate piety, justice, love of humankind, faith, and the hope, which we have from the Father through the Crucified One."⁵ He was tried, convicted, and beheaded for his teachings by a Roman official in 165.

Many other saints and writers condemned Christian participation in killing. Among them were Tatian, Athenagoras, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Cyprian, Minucius, Felix, and Lactantius.⁶

Perhaps the most celebrated Christian in the first one thousand years of the Church was St. Maximilian. In 295, this 21-year-old son of a Roman veteran refused conscription into the Roman army and was beheaded. At his trial he said, "I cannot serve in the army. I cannot engage in wrongdoing; I am a Christian."⁷ His testimony was read as part of the Mass for centuries after his death.

When Christianity was legalized by Constantine in 313 CE and Christians, as Lisa Sowle Cahill says in the previous chapter, "gained access to and responsibility for government and political power," a just war tradition began to develop -- even a "crusade ideology, in which violence was claimed to serve the gospel itself."⁸ Yet ...thousands of Christians over the centuries have followed the path of Gospel nonviolence. They have been a remnant Church, a small movement.⁹

In the centuries after Constantine, pockets of Christian men and women retreated to the deserts to keep the nonviolence of Jesus alive. Later, monasticism developed with communities created for worship and study, service to the local community, and the

⁴ Luise Schrottroff, "Nonviolence and Women's Resistance in Early Christianity," in Harvey L. Dyck, editor, *The Pacifist Impulse in Historical Perspective* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966) 83 and 85.

⁵ Clive Barrett, *Peace Together: A Vision of Christian Pacifism* (James Clark & Co., 1987), 29-30.

⁶ Clive Barrett, *Peace Together: A Vision of Christian Pacifism* (James Clark & Co., 1987), 30-31. See also: Michael G. Long, *Christian Peace and Nonviolence: A Documentary History* (Orbis Books, 2011), 17-24.

⁷ Michael G. Long, *Christian Peace and Nonviolence: A Documentary History* (Orbis Books, 2011), 31.

⁸ See Chapter 5, Lisa Sowle Cahill.

⁹ The single best study of this tradition is *The Catholic Peace Tradition* by Ronald Musto, Orbis Books, 1986.

practice of peace and hospitality. (They were largely, but not universally, nonviolent. Bernard of Clairvaux, for example, is well known for having preached the Second Crusade.)

Other persons and movements also have pursued the path of Gospel nonviolence. An iconic example after the Constantinian shift is the witness of Saint Martin of Tours (316-397). Martin was an officer in the Roman army before his conversion to Christianity. After becoming a Christian he felt he could no longer remain a Roman soldier. Just before a battle in the Gallic provinces, Martin told his superior officer, "I am the soldier of Christ: it is not lawful for me to fight." The commander was furious. As the saint's contemporary biographer, Sulpicius Severus, recounted: "The tyrant stormed on hearing such words, declaring that, from fear of the battle, which was to take place on the morrow, and not from any religious feeling, Martin withdrew from the service. But Martin, full of courage...exclaimed, 'If this conduct of mine is ascribed to cowardice, and not to faith, I will take my stand unarmed before the line of battle tomorrow, and in the name of the Lord Jesus, protected by the sign of the cross, and not by shield or helmet, I will safely penetrate the ranks of the enemy.'"¹⁰ Baffled by Martin's offer to stand unarmed in front of the battle line, the commander put him in prison and considered taking him up on his offer. Then the unexpected happened: "The following day the enemy sent ambassadors to treat about peace and surrendered both themselves and all their possessions." Severus connects this turn of events to Martin's nonviolent resistance: "In these circumstances who can doubt that this victory was due to the saintly man?" After leaving the army, Martin lived as a hermit, founded a monastery, was installed as a bishop in Gaul, and spent his life serving the poor.

In the fifth century Pope Leo the Great saved the city of Rome by nonviolent dialogue when Attila the Hun invaded Europe¹¹ and Saint Severin mediated between the Germanic tribes who were threatening populations of fortified cities. He successfully asked the inhabitants to enter into dialogue with the enemy, and war and destruction were avoided.

In the Middle Ages, the Truce of God, was instituted by the Church as a measure to suspend warfare, especially the many private wars, during certain days of the week and during church festivals and Lent. The Peace of God was fostered by the Church and later by civil society to protect women, priests, pilgrims, merchants, other noncombatants, and Church property from violence.

In the 13th century, Francis of Assisi was an icon of Gospel nonviolence. He reclaimed the nonviolence of Jesus, pointed Christians back to the Gospel, and almost single-

¹⁰ Sulpitius Severus, *On the Life of St. Martin*, From: *A Select Library of Nicene And Post-Nicene Fathers of The Christian Church*, Second Series, Volume 11 (Buffalo: The Christian Literature Company, 1894).

¹¹ Hildegard and Jean Goss-Mayr, "The Gospel and the Struggle for Justice and Peace: Training Seminar (The Swedish Ecumenical Council and the International Fellowship of Reconciliation, 1990), 20.

handedly reimagined the Church. As an affluent youth fighting in his local military, he was imprisoned, experienced a profound conversion, embraced life at the margins of society, and began to live a radically nonviolent life. He formed a community of practitioners of Gospel nonviolence who refused to take up arms. They lived in poverty, served the poor, and greeted everyone with the phrase “Pace e Bene” (“Peace and Goodness!”), often being attacked as a result. Within a few years, their movement began to spread. Thousands joined.

During the Fifth Crusade, Francis took bold action. He crossed contested territory and met with the Sultan Malik al-Kamil, the leader of the “enemy,” to make peace. Along with Clare of Assisi and her sisters, Francis and his early community offered a Christian witness of nonviolence that historians now believe helped end feudal violence.

A well-known story about Clare describes her decision to have the Blessed Sacrament placed on the walls of the convent when an attack by invading “Saracens” was imminent. To her sisters she said, “Don’t be afraid. Trust in Jesus.” The “Saracens” fled.¹²

Francis forbade any follower to own a weapon, support war, or kill others. St. Francis is widely regarded as the greatest, most beloved saint in history, but he was first of all a practitioner of a deeply holistic and integral form of Gospel nonviolence.

In the centuries after Francis, religious orders and communities focusing on the works of mercy and charity proliferated. Moreover, after the Protestant Reformation and Counter-Reformation, small “peace churches” blossomed which explicitly espoused the nonviolence of Jesus, including the Anabaptists, Brethren, Mennonites, and the Society of Friends (Quakers). These peace churches advocated for nonviolent social change. Along with powerful Christian anti-slavery and anti-war leaders such as Sojourners Truth and Frederick Douglass, the “peace churches” contributed vision and organization to the abolition movement that led to the end of slavery in the US. Many of the most powerful and well-known suffragists were from these peace churches, including Susan B. Anthony, Lucretia Mott, and the Grimke sisters; and their actions and writings have helped inspire and sustain other nonviolent social movements around the world.

At the beginning of World War I, the International Fellowship of Reconciliation was established as one expression of a renewed attention to Gospel nonviolence. As Hildegard Goss-Mayr writes, “It was the first organized and ecumenical expression of Christians who, in following Jesus Christ, are not only saying ‘no’ to the use of violence as a means of conquering injustices and resolving conflicts, but at the same time are rediscovering the creative force of the nonviolence of God.”¹³

¹² Fr. Don Miller, OFM, “Saint Clare of Assisi,” www.franciscanmedia.org

¹³ Hildegard and Jean Goss-Mayr, “The Gospel and the Struggle for Justice and Peace: Training Seminar,” The Swedish Ecumenical Council and the International Fellowship of Reconciliation (1990): 20.

In the United States, Ben Salmon from Denver, Colorado, gained notoriety as a Catholic conscientious objector during the First World War. Ben, who was married with four young children, believed that the war was immoral and an abuse of political power. “The Germans,” he said, “are my brothers. I will not train to kill them.” He was arrested, tried in a military court, though he was not in the military, and convicted of treason. Sentenced first to death and then to a reduced sentence of 25 years of hard labor, Salmon was sent to seven different federal prisons where he was often paraded in chains and kept in solitary confinement. In prison he was refused access to the sacraments; was eventually ruled insane; and was sent to St. Elizabeth’s Hospital in Washington, DC. On Thanksgiving Day in 1920, two years after the war ended, thanks to pressure from the newly established American Civil Liberties Union and Father John Ryan, a professor at Catholic University, Salmon was released.¹⁴

Also in the United States, Dorothy Day founded the Catholic Worker movement, a network of houses of hospitality, now present in many countries, where Catholics welcome the poor and the homeless to live with them, and where they also publicly denounce and resist war and preparations for war in obedience to the nonviolent Jesus. Day engaged many times in nonviolent civil disobedience for peace and justice.

During World War II, Franz Jägerstätter of St. Radegund, Austria was another powerful, faithful witness for nonviolence. A Catholic, Jägerstätter was ordered to join the Nazi military in 1943 but refused on the grounds that this would disobey Jesus’ teachings in the Sermon on the Mount. He was arrested, brought to Berlin, tried, and beheaded. After the war his action and writings became known and have influenced thousands of people around the world; many who have become involved in grassroots movements for peace have cited his witness as a motivation. Jägerstätter was beatified by the Catholic Church on October 26, 2007.

When German troops occupied northern Italy in 1943, Italian men were conscripted into Hitler’s army in violation of international conventions. Among them was a young man, Josef Mayr-Nusser, who was enlisted into the SS in September 1944. Deeply influenced by St. Thomas More’s letters from prison and the challenge of taking a stand based on conscience, he, at the end of his training, refused to take the oath of loyalty to Hitler. He was arrested, imprisoned, and condemned to death for undermining military morale. Severely weakened by prison starvation and dysentery, he died on February 24, 1945 in the cattle wagon on his way to Dachau, where he was to be shot. Josef was beatified on March 18, 2017.¹⁵

As the Second World War drew to an end, in March 1945, Pax Christi, a Catholic

¹⁴ Jack Gilory, “Imprisoned War Resistor Rooted in Catholic Faith,” *National Catholic Reporter*, July 16, 2016.

¹⁵ Pax Christi UK, “Martyr for nonviolence Josef Mayr-Nusser to be beatified on 18 March,” www.nonviolencejustpeace.net.

movement for reconciliation between the French and the Germans, was founded in France by a Catholic lay woman, Marthe Dortel Chaudot, and the Bishop of Montauban, Pierre Marie Théas. Bishop Théas had just returned from the detention camp at Compiègne after being arrested by the Gestapo for speaking out against the persecution of Jews. The Pax Christi International movement spread quickly in post-war Europe and later throughout the world, promoting reconciliation and active nonviolence, demilitarization, social justice, and human rights.

With the atomic destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the United States during World War II, the threat of global nuclear annihilation became a possibility. With the development of grassroots movements and the widespread legacy of Gandhi, millions of people began to awaken to the teachings and methodologies of nonviolence, helping to build a global movement that succeeded in making possible nuclear arms control agreements, including the 1962 Partial Test Ban Treaty, the 1968 Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, and the 1993 Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty signed by 183 nations that ended most nuclear testing worldwide.

Thomas Merton, the celebrated Trappist monk and author, called for the abolition of war and nuclear weapons. His book, *Peace in a Post-Christian Era*,¹⁶ which was banned by the Abbot General of his Trappist community and finally published by Orbis Books over 40 years later in 2004, was (in mimeographed form) an important influence on the Second Vatican Council. Jim Forest's foreword to the Orbis edition gives an excellent account of the impact of Merton's writing on millions of people around the world.

Following the Second Vatican Council, many Catholics including laity, clergy, and religious communities became more deeply involved in political activism for social justice and peace. For example, "while the Catholic Church as an institution never played a leading role in the civil rights movement, those black and white Catholics who participated in demonstrations and spoke out concerning Catholic social teachings helped promote the cause of equality."¹⁷

Encouraged by encyclicals like *Pacem in Terris* (1963), the Vatican Council documents such as *Gaudium et Spes*, and other Church documents, including the 1971 Synod of Bishops' statement, *Justice in the World*, many Catholic religious communities of women and men made corporate commitments to nonviolence, peace, and social justice and implemented those commitments through community action.

Dolores Huerta and Cesar Chavez, co-founders of the United Farm Workers, led carefully orchestrated nonviolent campaigns in the United States for farmworker justice, including the Delano Grape Strike of 1965. The farmworkers' strategies reflected the

¹⁶ Thomas Merton (Patricia A. Burton), *Peace in a Post Christian Era* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004).

¹⁷ Catholic University of America, "The Civil Rights Movement," online history of the American Catholic experience. <http://libraries.cua.edu/>.

dominance of the Catholic tradition among the workers and fully integrated symbols of the faith and liturgical expression into the heart of most actions.

In many Latin American countries where assassinations and disappearances in the 1970s and 1980s were a frequent occurrence, the mothers of the disappeared – the CoMadres in El Salvador, the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina, the Mothers and Relatives of the Kidnapped and Disappeared in Nicaragua, the Grupo Apoyo Mutuo (GAM) in Guatemala – led powerful, persistent, public acts of resistance to brutal violence.

During the same period, the leadership of Father Miguel D'Escoto, MM as foreign minister of Nicaragua decidedly emphasized nonviolence, which he considered to be the “essence of the Gospel.” During Lent in 1985, as the war between the Contras and the Sandinistas intensified, he initiated a month long fast, which he called an “evangelical insurrection.” Then he led a 200 mile, two-week-long Via Crucis (Way of the Cross) across Nicaragua to promote reconciliation and an end to the violence.¹⁸

In El Salvador and around the world, the example of Blessed Archbishop Oscar Romero inspired a new generation of Catholic peacemakers. He was assassinated on March 24, 1980, the day after he preached that Christians were forbidden to kill and that members of the military and death squads should disobey orders to kill, quit their positions, and stop the repression in his country.¹⁹ [See Bishop Kevin Dowling's reflections, *Choosing Peace*, Chapter 1.]

Catholic religious and lay people around the world, with Justice and Peace departments, commissions, and committees in bishops' conferences, dioceses, and parishes, were involved in nonviolent efforts to end the Vietnam War, the military dictatorships in South America, the extremely violent wars in Central America, apartheid in South Africa. Catholics led the Solidarity movement in Poland, were involved in the peace communities in Colombia and peace zones in Mindanao, Philippines. Catholic President Julius Nyerere was the first president of Tanzania, where his vision cemented a peaceful identity for a new nation. Followers of Jesus in Northern Ireland, including Nobel Peace Prize laureates Mairead Corrigan Maguire and Betty Williams, finally brought the “troubles” to an end. Catholics in East Timor, including Bishop Carlos Belo, recipient with Jose Ramos-Horta the 1996 Nobel Peace Prize, weathered a vicious occupation by Indonesian forces and denounced horrific human rights abuses until East Timor achieved full sovereignty in 2002.

Just as the global anti-nuclear movement has applied nonviolence to the struggle for a world without weapons of mass destruction, thousands of other movements involving

¹⁸ Paul Wehr, Heidi Burgess, Guy Burgess, editors. *Justice Without Violence* (Boulder: Lynne Reiner Publishers, 1994), 90.

¹⁹ Oscar Romero, *Homily*, March 23, 1980. <http://www.romerotrue.org.uk/>.

followers of Jesus have been proliferating for more democratic societies, human rights, economic justice, and environmental sustainability over the past half-century using the power and methods of nonviolence for effective change. Forming broad coalitions with people of many traditions and faiths, they have successfully banned anti-personnel landmines and cluster munitions, and generated significant international efforts to cancel unjust and unsustainable foreign debt, promote fair trade, and end human trafficking and destructive mining practices.

Nonviolence also has characterized the courageous and important movements working within the Church for an end to the violence of sexual abuse and thorough accountability for the abuse of power and the violation of confidence pervading that horrific crime against children. Also courageous and creatively nonviolent are those many women and men in the Church who have been working against racism and for the full inclusion of women in the life and leadership of the Catholic community.

At the same time, followers of Jesus have played pivotal roles in developing positive, innovative approaches to addressing violence, injustice, human rights violations, and war. These include restorative justice (Victim Offender Reconciliation Program; Peace Circles); forgiveness and reconciliation training; third-party intervention and unarmed civilian protection and accompaniment (Witness for Peace, Christian Peacemaker Teams, Nonviolent Peaceforce, Operation Dove); nonviolent communication; conflict transformation programming; trauma healing; antiracism training; and innumerable initiatives for interfaith dialogue.

Also important in recent decades is a dramatic increase in academic degree programs in peace studies in Catholic universities around the world, along with research on the core values of nonviolent change, including forgiveness, creativity, love, compassion, and empathy, as well as nonviolent civil resistance, movement-building, and the dynamics and infrastructure for a culture of peace and nonviolence. Lisa Sowle Cahill's reflections in Chapter 5 [of *Choosing Peace*] refer to the Catholic Peacebuilding Network formed by many of these universities.

Mahatma Gandhi, who read the Sermon on the Mount every day for 40 years, concluded that Jesus was the greatest person of nonviolence in history, and that everyone who follows him is called to be a person of nonviolence. Many Christian saints, martyrs, and holy people for over 2,000 years have affirmed, like Gandhi, that Gospel nonviolence is the way of Jesus and have sustained a commitment to follow him in that way.

The story of the people power movement in the Philippines is one clear example of when the official Catholic Church led the wider Catholic community to understand active nonviolence and to put the principles and practices learned into effective action at a critical time. Under the US-backed regime of Ferdinand Marcos there was much corruption, poverty, widespread human rights violations, and a lack of democracy.

Systematic violence by the government was aimed at destroying the opposition, including community-based organizations and movements working for change. There was little hope for social transformation. There was a growing armed struggle led by a group called The New People's Army. At the same time, however, the Catholic Church in this predominantly Catholic country was casting about for an alternative. Was there an option to passivity on the one hand and violence on the other?

Many people were not too sure. A bishop was quoted at the time as saying, "I used to believe in nonviolence, but Marcos is too cruel; only a bloody revolution will work against him."²⁰ When he was asked how long such a revolution would take, he said, "Ten years." The 1983 assassination of opposition leader Benigno Aquino seemed only to confirm the bishop's gloomy assessment.

It was then that the church's leader in the Philippines, Cardinal Jaime Sin, decided to see if an alternative was possible. He put the full weight of the church behind an exploration of Gospel nonviolence and how it could be applied to change the situation in his country.

Ultimately in Manila, over one million unarmed human beings joined the self-described People Power movement and demonstrated how nonviolent people power can trump tanks and circling bombers. There were many factors to its success, but two of those included a call from the Church to take nonviolent action, and the role of the Church in organizing nonviolence trainings, many with Hildegard and Jean Goss-Mayr, whose account of that experience follows.

Personal experiences of nonviolence in practice

Colombia and the Philippines

In 2001 Pax Christi Flanders arranged an interview of Hildegard Goss-Mayr by journalist Mark Deltour. Translated by Annemarie Gielen, General Director of Pax Christi Flanders, in 2015, the interview reveals the deep wisdom and experience of active nonviolence that Hildegard and her husband Jean Goss shared with the world through their many trainings and leadership. Excerpts follow:

When Hitler entered Vienna in 1942, all the school children had to welcome him. I felt lost in the crowd. Suddenly came the convoy. I felt how a force took possession of the crowd. I saw how that crowd cheered the man who was responsible for this unjust regime. I said to myself, "No, you don't have the right. You have to refuse to bring the greeting and to shout" - even if they would lynch me. I was 12 years old then and I didn't realize the extent of my deed yet. Later I

²⁰ Ken Butigan, "The Philippines' People Power revolution wins new victory," WagingNonviolence.org, February 28, 2013.

discovered that only from such a moment do you realize that you are a real human being, when you refuse to take part in injustice.

In nonviolence everybody is invited to take part. Elderly, young people, children, ill people. There are so many tasks – of praying, of joining rallies, of being taken into custody. There is something to do for everybody. But every participation demands discipline. People decide together and then they stick to what has been decided. People cannot execute nonviolent actions or big projects if there is no structure – if there is no plan that is commonly elaborated.

We worked relatively long in South America in the 70s and 80s. We worked in the slums of Medellin in Colombia. In that particular slum, where there was no water or electricity, worked a Colombian priest. There was an indescribable poverty, unemployment was high, and many children died in these circumstances. The priest had created small base communities. There started the preparation already. In such a group two things need to happen: to discover their dignity, their power. They understood they were not slaves. The priest helped them discover God's power. It was he who invited us to help them walk the path of Jesus' liberation, the path of nonviolence. The second task for the group is to look at the reality. By making an analysis of injustice, by seeing the pillars that support the injustice, and how we, through passivity and fear, keep the injustice going...

So we worked in the slum. A group of women undertook action. They first made the analysis. From the many different ways of suffering and injustice they chose the worst: the absence of drinkable water. Many children died because of that. The women wanted to address this through a meeting with the council of this city of one million people. This city had a modern, luxurious, and well-developed center; around it are districts full of suffering. So they went to talk to the council but they were treated like dogs. They meant nothing in the eyes of the rich, who were not prepared to share their wealth. The women said, "We have to approach it differently. We have to make sure there is solidarity that will make us strong." You see how nonviolence is creative?

Illiterate women decided to go with their babies in groups of 10 to the main square in the city center. There was a large fountain where water flooded day and night. The wind blew some of the water over the edge of the fountain so there were puddles in the square. One day they went to wash their babies, not in the fountain but in the muddy water in the puddles. There were always a lot of people in the square. When rich women saw these poor women do that they said they were crazy. A conversation started. The rich women became more aware of the problem. The police came to chase the poor women away in a violent way. But after 10 minutes a new group came. And another. Four, five groups did the same thing. Every time more rich women stopped. When they

saw how the police behaved brutally, one of the rich women stood up for them and said, "If your wife would live in the same situation, she would be part of this group."

That meant the end of the manifestation and a small committee was formed of rich and poor women. A few weeks later they went together to the city council. The difference in power wasn't so great anymore. Dialogue became possible. The poor women asked their unemployed husbands, "Why don't you offer your labor in order to help with the building of the water system? That way it will cost less money and the city council will understand that we are prepared to make efforts to solve the problem. We will share the costs." When we came back six months later there was water on the hill. On a big memorial stone was written: "In honor of the women of our district. They had the courage to fight for water."²¹

Of their work in the Philippines, Hildegard remembered in particular the significance of the sacrifice of Aquino, the leader of the opposition to Ferdinand Marcos. She describes Aquino as a "christic" figure who was prepared to give his life so that the people could become free. He was assassinated in 1983. When he gave his life, millions of people stood up and accompanied his body to be buried.

From that moment on a nonviolent movement was created, but in the beginning it was not organized. That's why we were invited to give a structure to this resistance. We gave seminars and made preparations with people on all levels – grassroots, intellectuals, even bishops. The Church played a significant role in that situation. We realized together a strategy to take support from the dictatorship. Finally, the entire population was ready to say "no." A dictatorship can only exist as long as it is supported. If millions of people organize strikes and manifestations and if the church collaborates -- this was the case in the Philippines where the bishops encouraged people to resist in a nonviolent way -- the dictator becomes isolated and he has to go. Most beautiful were the soldiers, who were overwhelmed by the charms of the women who brought them flowers, cigarettes, Coca-cola and who said to them: "You are the sons of our country come down from the tanks and join us." This power of the people was really a moral force and at the same time a political force. This showed me the political dimension of the gospel in favor of liberation.²²

United States and Guatemala

During the [2016] conference, Nathanael Bacon, who now works with InnerChange in Guatemala, spoke about a powerful experience of working with gangs in California:

²¹ Pax Christi Flanders interview with Hildegard Goss-Mayr. Reprinted with permission of Pax Christi Flanders.

²² Ibid.

One of the first things that Pope Francis did really grabbed my attention. On his first Holy Thursday, if you recall, rather than celebrating at St. Peter's Basilica, he went to a juvenile hall, a juvenile prison, and washed the feet of the inmates there, including a Muslim girl. Part of the reason this impressed me is due to a personal experience which I think relates really deeply to this, to how we look at Jesus and nonviolence. My wife and I worked for 15 to 20 years with gang members, Latino gang members in San Francisco, California. Many came to live with us, which was a tricky thing, with a young daughter and a small apartment. But God moved us to bring one young man in particular, named Antonio, into our home. After he was with us for a month, the priest at our parish very kindly suggested that we have him be one of the 12 to have his feet washed at the liturgy on Holy Thursday. We were delighted, and thought it was a great idea. And then the day came, and he was having a bad day, so he decided not to show up. It was a bummer, but right after we got home he burst through the door looking pale, and said, "I just got shot!" He'd been out on the street where the gang hangs out when enemy gang members had opened fire with an automatic weapon. He dove behind one of those big metal garbage dumpsters, which saved his life. But one bullet caught him in the foot. So I took his shoe off, and the bullet had only grazed off the thick part of the flesh on the bottom of his big toe. He was very lucky. So guess what I end up doing? Washing his foot! Thinking, this is odd. Holy Thursday...he was supposed to...and I look at him and say, "Antonio, this would have been a lot better in church!" And then I'm in tears and I say, "Mijo, son, thank God you're alive." But what he said cut us to the heart; he said, "I wish they would have killed me."

Antonio grew up in Mexico in an abusive home; he was abandoned at seven years old and was on his own since eight; he crossed the border at 11; ate out of garbage dumpsters; made his way northward; and finally a man offered to take him into his home ...but then severely mistreated him. All of that pain inside came pouring out in a group that invited him to be part of their family, a street gang.

We sat for the longest time, trying to understand this strange Holy Thursday message, and what we finally grasped is very core to Jesus and nonviolence: we all carry wounds. This young man had very deep wounds, like almost all the kids we worked with in the gangs. Jesus calls us to wash those wounds, communally, as family, to wash those wounds with his love. And he calls us to be the instruments of that love.

If wounds don't get washed, they get infected and the wound begins to look like all the symptoms that you see on the outside - the violence, the gangs, the addictions, and all of that. We recognized that he would have been just a gang member, a statistic, a newspaper item -- something, someone to be put in a jail or deported. But we had opened the door and let him be part of our family, so

now he was our son. And so his wounds became our wounds. When he said that he wished he had been killed, we had to sit in the pain with him. Then we recognized that those wounds aren't just his and ours, they're also the wounds of Jesus.

This whole process of nonviolent compassion is just a pouring out of this love as a salve to heal these wounds that are wounds of others, but which in solidarity become our wounds, and mystically in prayer and experience become the very wounds of Jesus.²³

I carry the bullet that we removed from his shoe everywhere to remind me of the challenge to love those who appear to be enemies, coming close enough to recognize their wounds and to be instruments of peace in washing them.

Philippines

In the reflection paper she submitted prior to the conference, Jasmin Nario-Galace, Pax Christi-Pilipinas' president described the invitation to active nonviolence that she identifies with the Catholic faith tradition:

As a Catholic community, there is a need to highlight that our faith tradition has always motivated us to embrace nonviolence as a pathway to peace. We can invest our energy in interfaith education, in supporting and accompanying peace processes around the world, in efforts to challenge deeply held biases against minorities, and in building bridges of friendship and understanding amongst people of differing faiths and cultures. To move towards a wider practice, we can all help popularize the Catholic social teachings related to peace and nonviolence. We can continue to organize and join nonviolent initiatives and campaigns in spaces where we are. We can write and publish stories or make video documentation of nonviolence experienced by our members worldwide. Most importantly, as members of the Pax Christi community, we must bring to light that nonviolence is not only a political tool for change but a philosophy to be lived. It is when we live it that we can convince others that there is no other way to peace but peace. As Gandhi had put it, let our life be our message.

Iraq

Language specific discussion groups met between the plenary sessions of the 2016 Rome conference. During those conversations, Nazik Matty, a member of the Dominican Sisters of St. Catherine of Siena in Iraq, whose whole community was displaced from their center in Mosul said:

When you are in trauma and pain you think others will not understand. But after this morning I understand that so many others are living this pain but they are

²³ Nathanael Bacon, Session 2 on "Jesus' Way of Nonviolence" during Conference on Nonviolence and Just Peace, Rome, April 2016

fighting for peace. I liked what the bishop said - to be among people, with people, for people. After Daesh/ISIS, the Church took responsibility for all of us. It was encouraging to see such active presence of the Church, not passive, but active. We can't respond to violence with worse violence. This encourages the spiral of violence up and up. And the people are so exhausted because they don't know what's happening. It's like a dragon with seven heads. You cut one and two others come up ...²⁴

South Sudan

Bishop Paride Taban:

The weapon of the church is love. The church is a mother and has a strong weapon: It is love for everybody. In South Sudan, the church has been with all the people but never ever advocated for weapons. I destroyed all my guns that I use for hunting birds. The church has to be a place where there are no guns, and no fear. Not Just War, but Just Love. Love everybody by name. Hatred jumps into our heart from the son who is not called by name. The church must call people sons and daughters, not rebel or president. When the BBC asked if I was with the SPLA, I said no, the SPLA are with me. The church should be a mother. Never advocate for weapons and call everyone by name.

Later Bishop Taban added the following 17 words to his vocabulary of nonviolence:

Understanding. Discernment. Wisdom. If you are right, then you need not get angry. And if you are wrong, then you have no right to get angry. Patience with family is love. And patience with others is respect. Patience with self is Confidence. Patience with God is Faith. Never think hard about the past, it brings tears. And don't think more about the Future in brings fear. Live this moment with a smile, it brings cheers. Every test in our life makes us bitter or better. Every problem breaks us or makes us. The choice is ours, whether we become victims or victorious. Beautiful things are not always good but good things are always beautiful. Do you know God created gaps between fingers so that someone who is special to you will come to fill those gaps forever?

²⁴ Sr. Nazik Matty, Nonviolence and Just Peace Conference small group discussions.