

THE PROPHECY OF NONVIOLENCE: HOPE FOR THE FUTURE



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Pax Christi International's Catholic Nonviolence Initiative





“Violence does not build, it destroys. ...We need the prophecy of nonviolence...
We need the gentleness of nonviolence... Through the path of nonviolence, you reach
sincerity and reject all hypocrisy.”

– Pope Francis, *Synodal Exchange with University Students* (2022)



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Introduction



“...the consistent practice of nonviolence has broken barriers, bound wounds, healed nations.”

– Pope Francis, *letter to Cardinal Blase Cupich* (2017)

“‘Put your sword back into its sheath.’ The words of Jesus resound clearly today ...In the Gospel of Luke’s version of the story, Jesus tells his disciples, ‘Stop, no more of this!’ Jesus’ sorrowful and strong, ‘No more,’ goes beyond the centuries and reaches us. It is a commandment we cannot avoid. ‘No more’ swords, weapons, violence, war.”

– Pope Francis, *Peace on Earth: Fraternity is Possible* (2021)

“Violence is not the cure for our broken world ... May charity and nonviolence govern how we treat each other as individuals, within society and in international life ...especially in situations of conflict, let us respect this, our ‘deepest dignity,’ and make active nonviolence our way of life. ...To be true followers of Jesus today also includes embracing His teaching about nonviolence. ...I pledge the assistance of the Church in every effort to build peace through active and creative nonviolence.”

– Pope Francis, *2017 World Day of Peace Message*

From the beginning of his papacy, Pope Francis has provided hope to people everywhere by addressing the most serious challenges facing the world, by denouncing violence in its many forms and by shedding light on nonviolent pathways to a more just and peaceful future.

In what he has called the “third world war in installments,” a worldwide culture of violence is unleashing massive suffering in the lives of billions of people. With increasing clarity we also have come to see that the destruction of earth’s ecosystems and the suffering of the other creatures living on this planet are intrinsically interconnected with human violence.

A developing scriptural, theological, and ecclesiastical foundation for affirming and activating the Catholic Church’s commitment to Gospel nonviolence and peace rooted in justice locally and globally is encouraging deep reflection on the many expressions of violence – from ecological violence to gun violence, from racism to war – and inspiring the Church, the People of God, to a deeper understanding of and conversion to Gospel nonviolence, a commitment to shalom and a culture of peace.

Nonviolence enhances life-giving relationships among humans and with all of creation and is central to the survival of life on earth and to the healing of our planet. Conversion to nonviolence of humans addicted to violating the integrity of the natural world is at the core of ecological conversion. And, nonviolent strategies will be critical to the structural changes needed to mitigate the climate crisis and loss of biodiversity, creating a new order that turns from the destruction of the planet and competition over essential resources to a more constructive system aimed at the well-being of the planet and its inhabitants.

The following text explores the basic concepts of violence and nonviolence; an evolving and deepening reflection on nonviolence in the Catholic community; and many examples of applying the principles and practice of nonviolence in very different contexts. This collection of articles was written for Pax Christi International’s Catholic Nonviolence Initiative by Marie Dennis of Pax Christi International and Ken Butigan of DePaul University, who both serve on the CNI Executive Committee.

Part One:

The Power of Nonviolence

Nonviolence: The Way of Transformation

The Word and Its Meaning

Nonviolence names a core value of the Gospel, in which Jesus combined an unmistakable rejection of violence with the power of love and truth in action for justice, peace and integrity of creation. Nonviolence is broader than pacifism. It is much more than the absence of violence and it is never passive. Violence is utterly opposed to the Gospel; nonviolence is at the heart of the Gospel.

Nonviolence is a paradigm of the fullness of life. It is a spirituality, a constructive force, a method for social transformation, and a powerful way of life committed to the well-being of all.

In the early Church, there was no separate word for “nonviolence.” There didn’t need to be. The words “Christian” signified what today we call “nonviolent.” Being Christian meant rejecting violence and loving one another. Being Christian meant taking up the nonviolent life as part of a nonviolent community. Being a follower of Jesus meant all the things that today we recognize as facets of nonviolence, including praying “for those who persecute you,” performing the works of mercy, returning good for evil, refusing to support war, forgiving and reconciling with one another—especially when we have strayed from the nonviolent path. For the first 300 years, being a Christian meant saying “No” and saying “Yes”: “No” to violence in all its dimensions and “Yes” to the infinite worth and sacred dignity of every person.

The word “nonviolence” names this spiritual and practical path. A century ago, Mohandas Gandhi brought the world’s attention to this concept, which was an English translation of the Sanskrit term “ahimsa” (“non-harming,” “non-violence”). As nonviolence scholar Michael Nagler writes, “In Sanskrit abstract nouns often name a fundamental

positive quality indirectly, by negating its opposite. Thus, courage is conveyed by ‘abhaya,’ which literally means ‘non-fear;’ or we encounter ‘akrodha,’ ‘non-anger,’ for ‘kindness,’ and the Buddha’s ‘avera,’ ‘non-hatred,’ meaning ‘love.’ ... ‘Ahimsa,’ a kind of double negative, actually stands for something so original that we cannot quite capture it with our weak words.” (Michael Nagler, *The Search for a Nonviolent Future* [Inner Ocean Publishing, 2004]).

Nonviolence signifies the comprehensiveness of love in action while clearly naming the reality that undermines this fullness: violence.

Nonviolence is “the love that does justice” (Martin Luther King, Jr.), “integrative power” (Kenneth Boulding), “transforming power” (Alternatives to Violence), “cooperative power” (Jonathan Schell), and “love in action” (Dorothy Day).

In our own time, we have seen a growing effort to re-discover the nonviolence of Jesus and to put it at the center of the Church’s life.

The Culture of Violence

When we think about violence, we often have specific acts in mind, such as cases of sexual assault or killing. While this is true, we will never fully understand (or be able to fully respond to) such destructiveness without grasping how it is part of a much larger “violence system.”

Violence is a comprehensive reality that cruelly tears at the fabric of our lives and our world. It is any physical, emotional, verbal, institutional, structural, or systemic behavior, attitude, policy or condition that dominates, dehumanizes, diminishes, disrespects or destroys ourselves, our fellow beings, or our world.¹

¹ Pace e Bene Nonviolence Service, <https://paceebene.org/whynonviolence>

Violence does not come out of thin air. It has a history with deep roots, often over the course of years, generations, even centuries. It has a present, fueled by fear, hate and greed. And it has a future, marked by the half-life of trauma that violence often instills in both its survivors and perpetrators.

Violence is fostered and triggered by the patterns, beliefs, habits and assumptions of our families, our communities and our societies. It is nurtured by pervasive but-often invisible structures that shape and organize our world, including racism, sexism, homophobia, economic inequity, militarism and anthropocentrism. It is sustained by systems and institutions, such as nation-states, corporations, global media and religious traditions. In short, the single act of violence is not an isolated horror but part of a comprehensive framework of domination and destruction that inspires and legitimates it, what we can call “the culture of violence.”

Peace studies scholar Johan Galtung has succinctly illuminated this framework by proposing that violence is comprised of three interrelated and reinforcing realities: Direct Violence, Structural Violence and Cultural Violence. Discrete acts of violence are grounded in often-unseen structures of violence (racism, sexism, and so forth) and legitimated by “the cultural prevailing attitudes and beliefs that we have been taught since childhood and that surround us in daily life about the power and necessity of violence.”²

The paradigm of violence is ongoing and systematized, with interlocking structures of systemic inequity, political repression, armed conflicts, systemic racism and white supremacy, gender and domestic violence, gun violence and the growing climate crisis that threatens the end of life on this planet -- all reinforced by military systems and globalized power.

“In recent decades, the church has called this systemic injustice, institutionalized, legalized violence, whether in the form of economic exploitation, political domination or abuse of military might. These global systems of economic exploitation and political and military domination which cause and maintain poverty override all other forms of violence. Global systems of economic exploitation and political and military domination which cause and maintain poverty override all other forms of violence.”³

As individuals and as societies we are formed by this “culture of violence.” We undergo a relentless formation in the belief, allegiance to, support for and practice of violence. We are trained to see it as normal. Our violence training is so pervasive and effective that we rarely grasp how destructive it is.

We often adhere to what theologian Walter Wink calls “the myth of redemptive violence”: the belief that violence saves us. As Wink writes, “Violence is the ethos of our times. It is the spirituality of the modern world. It has been accorded the status of religion, demanding from its devotees an absolute obedience to death. Its followers are not aware, however, that the devotion they pay to violence is a form of religious piety. Violence is so successful as a myth precisely because it does not seem to be mythic in the least. Violence simply appears to be the nature of things. It is what works. It is inevitable, the last, and often, the first resort to conflicts.”⁴ Wink adds, “If a god is what you turn to when all else fails, violence certainly functions as a god. What people overlook, then, is the religious character of violence. It demands from its devotees an absolute obedience- unto-death.”⁵ Ironically, because violence seems to be the “nature of things,” we often don’t think about the “culture of violence.” It’s like the air we breathe. When we do glimpse it, we often simply say, “that’s just the way things are” and respond typically with one of three traditional scripts:

2 Rajkumar Bobichand, “Understanding Violence Triangle And Structural Violence,” July 30, 2012, <http://kanglaonline.com/2012/07/understanding-violence-triangle-and-structural-violence-by-rajkumar-bobichand/>.
3 John Dear, “Notes for a Theology of Nonviolence, unpublished manuscript, July 17, 2019.
4 Walter Wink. *Engaging the Powers*. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 26, 13.
5 Walter Wink, “Facing the Myth of Redemptive Violence,” Ekklesia, August 23, 2006, http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/content/cpt/article_060823wink.shtml

ignore it, accommodate it or use counter-violence. Often these responses do not resolve the problem, but reinforce the “violence system” by escalating it or by not addressing its roots.

“The total violence of today’s world occurs on many levels, from the violence within us, to interpersonal and societal violence, to the global, structural violence of war, nuclear weapons, hunger, sexism, racism, homelessness, torture, the death penalty, environmental destruction and the rampant poverty that leaves nearly four billion people in misery, surviving on less than two dollars a day.”⁶

A relatively new field of “violence studies” is developing a deeper understanding of the nature and complexity of violence and the power of non-violence.⁷

The Paradigm of Nonviolence

Nonviolence is a paradigm of the fullness of life that most faithfully challenges and transforms the “culture of violence.” Nonviolence not only offers a qualitatively different way of challenging specific forms violence and resolving particular conflict, but it is also a stance against the entire framework of the “culture of violence.” It does this in light of its four facets: nonviolence as a spirituality, nonviolence as a way of life, nonviolence as a strategy for systemic change, and nonviolence as a universal ethic⁸:

- Nonviolence is a spiritual principle that challenges the “spirituality” and “idolatry” of violence;
- Nonviolence is a way of life that “unlearns” the beliefs and ways of violence and “learns” and “practices” of our core identity as nonviolent beings;

- Nonviolence is a strategy for systemic change that mobilizes people-power to dismantle policies but also systems of racism and all the forms of structural violence; and
- Nonviolence is a universal ethic, a cross-cutting, essential dimension of all right relationships – among humans and with the rest of creation.

Michael Nagler, a renowned scholar on nonviolence,⁹ holds that nonviolent change is possible because it is the human default, not the exception. Nagler asserts with Gandhi that “nonviolence is the law of our species,” which means that, even deeper than our tendencies toward violence and the scripts that reinforce it, we have a profound unity from which flows our capacity for cooperation, collaboration and well-being for all. But it also means that we have constructed cultures and societies that upend this potential — privilege and reinforced violence, separation and domination.

The fact that “human beings have the potential to be nonviolent — and to respond to nonviolence when it’s offered — implies a much higher image of the human being than we are presented with in the mass media and throughout our present culture,” Nagler writes. “But because of that very culture, we can’t expect our nonviolent potential to manifest by itself.” To tap our nonviolent power means challenging a system of domination by neither flight nor fight — to identify a third way of proceeding, or what civil rights movement activist Andrew Young called “a way out of no way.” For Nagler, this involves unleashing what Kenneth Boulding calls our integrative power and what Gandhi dubbed *satyagraha* (“clinging to truth,” “soul-force” and “active nonviolent resistance”). We need this power because, as Nagler stresses, though nonviolence is natural, it does not achieve its goals easily. It often involves struggle. But it is

6 From: John Dear, “Notes for a Theology of Nonviolence, unpublished manuscript, July 17, 2019.

7 Bandy X. Lee, MD, MDiv, *Violence: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Causes, Consequences, and Cures* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2019)

8 “We need to mainstream nonviolence in the Church. We need to move it from the margins of Catholic thought to the center. Nonviolence is a spirituality, a lifestyle, a program of societal action and a universal ethic.” Bishop Robert McElroy of San Diego, Statement, “Path of Nonviolence: Toward a Culture of Peace,” symposium, Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, Vatican City, April 4-5, 2019.

9 Michael Nagler, *The Nonviolence Handbook: A Guide for Practical Action* (Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2014), <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/575046/the-nonviolence-handbook-by-michael-n-nagler/>. Ken Butigan, “A Way Out of No Way: The Nonviolence Handbook,” *Waging Nonviolence*, April 17, 2014.

this very struggle that is the source of nonviolent power. To confront injustice — everything that is *not* nonviolent — often unleashes anger and well-founded fear. Nonviolent struggle does not suppress our anger or fear but transmutes them into what Gandhi called “a power that can move the world.”

Jesus’s nonviolence signals a revolutionary shift. The love of enemies, as writer and peacemaker Angie O’Gorman puts it, is a powerful force by which Jesus meant “wanting wholeness and well-being and life for those who may be broken and sick and deadly. It was meant to be the cornerstone of an entirely new process of disarming evil; one which would decrease evil instead of feeding it as violence does.”¹⁰

Nonviolence challenges all forms of violence—direct violence, structural violence, cultural violence—from the violence being inflicted on the Amazon to the immense violence facing migrants; from the cataclysmic violence of war to the violence of economic inequality; from the violence of nuclear weapons to the violence of human trafficking and racism.¹¹ Even more, it fosters a culture for a more just, peaceful, and sustainable way forward.

Pope Francis and Nonviolence

Pope Francis has persistently called the Church and the world to undertake a revolution of tenderness, while at the same time prophetically urging us to carry out the difficult and courageous work of struggling for a world where the well-being of all, especially the most rejected, the most excluded, and the most under attack, is the top priority.

He has ceaselessly taught us that we are living in the midst of a global culture of violence that dominates, dehumanizes, and destroys our common home and human family, especially the most vulnerable at the margins, through rapacious economic, political, social, and military systems, structures, and policies.

But Pope Francis has also taught us that the answer to this violence is not more violence. He has sought to wean humanity from its tragic belief that violence is the solution. Rather than resolving the great challenges we face, violence often perpetuates and escalates them.

His Holiness has insisted that there must be another way than violence to resolve conflict, foster justice, heal the earth, safeguard immigrants, and end war. This “other way” is not avoidance, appeasement, aggression, or attack. It is a dramatically different way of being in the world, of working for peace, of building nonviolent movements and systems, and of being faithful to the vision of Jesus. In his 2017 World Day of Peace message, he called us to this other way: active nonviolence.

Violence is the power and logic of domination and retaliation. It is “power over.” Nonviolence is qualitatively different. It is “power with.” It navigates conflict in order to resolve root causes and to create options, unlike how violent antagonism often operates. Nonviolence says “no” to violence but also “yes” to safeguarding the sacredness and infinite worth of the opponent. It holds in creative tension loving regard for the other while disrupting the actions and systems that make their violence and injustice possible. Fortunately, we are living in a time when rigorous quantitative research has established that nonviolent strategies are twice as effective as

10 Angie O’Gorman, “Defense through Disarmament: Nonviolence and Personal Assault,” in Angie O’Gorman, ed. *The Universe Bends toward Justice: A Reader on Christian Nonviolence in the U.S.* (Philadelphia, PA and Santa Cruz, CA: New Society Publishers, 1990), 242.

11 Rose Marie Berger, Ken Butigan, Judy Coode, and Marie Dennis eds., *Advancing Nonviolence and Just Peace in the Church and the World: Biblical, Theological, Ethical, Pastoral and Strategic Dimensions of Nonviolence* (Pax Christi International, Brussels, Belgium; July 2020). p. 63; reference to Pope Francis, 2017 World Day of Peace message.

violent ones, as the work of Harvard University Professor Erica Chenoweth and scholar Maria Stephan and others have found.¹²

This is why nonviolence is the power and logic of those at the margins. Denied access to the power of domination—and, in fact, so relentlessly at the mercy of it—those at the margins have often lived the way of solidarity and mutual aid, but also the way of nonviolent resistance and social transformation. It is no accident that Gospel nonviolence emerged under Roman occupation, when Jesus called his disciples to live a fundamentally different way: without fear, without lording it over one another, without violence.

During its first three centuries, the Church practiced the nonviolence that Jesus taught and lived. Later, the spirit of Gospel nonviolence was maintained by particular individuals, communities, and movements within the Church. Over the past century, this tradition of nonviolent Christianity has increasingly re-emerged in Church documents, scripture scholarship, theology, Catholic social

teaching, and the lived experience of Catholics around the world. “Nonviolence brings all the

traditional topics of theology, spirituality and politics into a new focus for our age of global violence,” writes theologian Fr. John Dear. “It is a way of talking about the essential mystery of God as revealed and embodied in Jesus and about God’s active transformation of humanity into God’s nonviolent reign of peace and justice.”

Nonviolence is a spirituality, a way of life, a method for change, and a universal ethic. Pope Francis’ many documents, exhortations, statements, and actions have been imbued with the spirit and dynamic of nonviolence. This nonviolent spirit calls us to bring the power of Jesus’ nonviolence into every part of our lives, our Church, and our traumatized world. Nonviolence is more than an ideal or the final goal. It is more than aspirational. Instead, it is central to the process of peace, the journey to justice, and the way to reconciliation.

12 Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict* (Columbia University Press, 2011).

Nonviolence: An Effective Way Forward

Nonviolence is the way God calls us to live – ending the violence for which we are responsible, resisting all forms of violence, loving our enemies, building a just world, responding to evil with an excess of love.

Nonviolence is a spirituality, a way of life and a global ethic that nurtures right relationships among humans and between humans and the rest of the natural world - from the old way of domination and exploitation toward universal communion.

Nonviolence challenges structural violence and systemic oppression and searches tirelessly for ways to respond to evil with good. Nurtured and guided by the Holy Spirit, Gospel nonviolence is a way of discipleship—including conversion, community, service and action for social and ecological justice—that strives to engage, transform and resolve conflict and to foster reconciliation and unity.

At the same time, nonviolence is a proven-effective method for preventing or interrupting

Nonviolence: Deepening Reflection

Excerpt from: Fr. Emmanuel Katongole, “The Challenge, Complexity and Failure of Violence,” Path of Nonviolence: Towards a Culture of Peace Symposium, Dicastery of Promoting Integral Human Development, Vatican City, April 4, 2018:

...Africa is a predominantly Christian continent. Thus, in most of its wars and fighting, Christians are doing most of the killing! These are Christians who are generally peace-loving people, but who are stuck in the imagination of violence, believing the lie that we can rid the world of violence; and that we can do so through violence. This is what makes violence not simply a lie, but from a Christian point of view a blasphemy. It makes a joke – a parody, a laughingstock of Christianity. ...A commitment to violence makes all of us practical atheists.

We must begin in and with lament. For only lament allows us to see clearly the lie that we have subscribed to: that we can rid the world of violence through violence; that violence is inevitable. ...Only deep lament allows us to see this lie...

It is...through lament that we learn to see that, from a Christian point of view, nonviolence is a calling, not simply because it “works” but because it is the way of God: that this is the way that God creates, governs and redeems the universe. This is odd—that a powerful God would suffer and die on the cross; that he would respond to evil through love... that does not make sense. As Archbishop Christophe Munzihirwa reminded the people of Bukavu before he was assassinated, every Christian is invited to “enter” the way of Christ. For Munzihirwa the “way of Christ” is “God’s self-sacrificing love” – or as Monsignor Emmanuel Kataliko, Munzihirwa’s successor in Bukavu reminded the Christians, about the logic of Gospel, namely “the only response to evil (violence) is an excess of love.

See also [Video Reflection by Fr. Emmanuel Katongole](#), Retreat on Nonviolence December 2020.

See Fr. Joshtrom Kureethadam [video on nonviolence and ecological conversion](#), Retreat on Nonviolence December 2020

violence and for protecting vulnerable people and the earth. Nonviolence can often create possibilities for ending violence and for nurturing the seeds of peace and justice, as nonviolent engagement in contexts of enormous violence and injustice throughout the world has increasingly revealed.

To reaffirm the centrality of Gospel nonviolence does not mean retreating from conflict, violence or injustice. Indeed, it is often the most effective and robust response. Mohandas Gandhi said, “Nonviolence is as old as the hills.” Humanity has been exercising this power from its beginning and has therefore survived and transformed the destructiveness of escalating and retaliatory violence. In *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* and other texts, Gene Sharp illustrated how nonviolent action has been wielded throughout history. Other scholars have established that the use of this power has been increasing. As detailed in historian Jonathan Schell’s book, *The Unconquerable World: Power, Nonviolence and the Will of the People* (2003), organizing nonviolent people power for liberation and human rights has emerged and increased over the past several hundred years.

Beginning in the twentieth century this momentum accelerated with Gandhi’s application of nonviolence to win Indian independence and with the use of disciplined nonviolence by the US Civil Rights Movement. These and other pioneering campaigns have inspired countless nonviolent struggles. Some examples include successful pro-democracy movements in Spain and Portugal (1970s), the Philippines (1986), Chile (1980s), Argentina (1980s), Soviet bloc states, including the Singing Revolution in Estonia, the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia, Poland, East Germany, etc. (1989); the thwarted coup in the USSR (1991); South Africa (1980s-1990s); Indonesia (1998); East Timor (2000); Serbia (2000); Georgia (2003); Ukraine (2004); Liberia (2005); and Tunisia (2011) and Sudan (2019). These are not isolated cases. The Global Nonviolent Action Database has documented over 1000 nonviolent campaigns, with many of them successfully achieving their objectives.

According to research conducted by Maria J. Stephan and Erica Chenoweth, which culminated in their 2011 book, *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict*, nonviolent resistance against formidable opponents, including those with predominant military power, has been twice as successful as armed struggle. They examined 323 violent and nonviolent campaigns against incumbent regimes and foreign military occupations from 1900-2006 and found that the nonviolent campaigns succeeded, in terms of stated political objectives, about 54 percent of the time, compared to 27 percent for violent campaigns.

In addition, their study concluded that nonviolent campaigns resulted in more democratic and peaceful societies. Armed rebel victories almost never produce democratic societies (less than four percent resulted in democracy); worse, they are often followed by relapses into civil war. The data clearly show that the means by which peoples challenge injustices and oppression strongly influence the character of the societies that follow. For a Catholic faith community that places a premium on the avoidance of war and the protection of human life as the moral foundation of society, these are significant findings.

Nonviolent civil resistance has proven to be more successful than violence in part because it allows for much broader participation. Stephan and Chenoweth found that the average nonviolent campaign attracted 11 times the level of participants compared with armed campaigns. The physical, moral, informational and commitment barriers to participation in nonviolent campaigns are much lower compared with violent campaigns, which means that young and old people, men, and women, rich and poor, disabled, and able-bodied, peasants and professionals can all participate in nonviolent activism.

The range of nonviolent tactics is vast, facilitating participation: Sharp’s list of 198 nonviolent methods has greatly expanded with the rise of social media and new tactics invented by creative nonviolent resisters around the world. In *Civil*

Resistance Tactics in the 21st Century Michael Beer documents many of these new approaches.

When large numbers of people from diverse societal groups engage in acts of protest, non-co-operation and nonviolent defiance, their actions create social, political, economic and moral pressure for change. When violence is used against disciplined nonviolent protesters, the chances that the violence will backfire against the perpetrator, causing them to lose legitimacy and power, is much greater than when violence is used against armed resisters.

Although nonviolent movements contain elements of spontaneity and artistry, the chance of success increases significantly if participants adhere to basic principles of strategy. Those include achieving unity around achievable goals and nonviolent methods, building capacity to maintain nonviolent discipline, focusing on expanding the diversity of participation and innovating tactically. Nonviolence works because of the way it increasingly withdraws cooperation with violent and unjust structures and builds nonviolent people-power for an alternative. Gandhi asked, “Why do 100,000 British people rule us, a country of 250,000,000? The answer: because we let them.”

Spiritual belief and religious organizations and institutions have often played critical roles in nonviolent movements. Gandhi referred to Jesus as nonviolence *par excellence*. On the most practical level, it is extremely difficult for a nonviolent movement challenging entrenched and long-standing injustices to maintain morale and to sustain active participation over an extended period of time — especially without the support of their religious and moral leaders. Activists burn out. Sustained resistance becomes burdensome.

In such circumstances, activists and movement leaders need to be able to draw on resources that will inspire, encourage, and nourish. Their strength and resilience depend on it. Faith communities and institutions can provide that sense of community solidarity, spiritual nourishment, and the cultivation of virtuous habits.

It is difficult to imagine the US freedom movement sustaining its vibrancy and effectiveness without the spiritual and organizational power provided by the Black Churches. The iconic images of the Filipino nuns, rosaries in hand and kneeling in prayer in front of dictator Ferdinand Marcos’s soldiers, together with declarations by Cardinal Jaime Sin imploring justice over Radio Veritas, helped galvanize the popular nonviolent struggle for a democratic Philippines in 1986. Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa drew on faith-based beliefs grounded in justice and reconciliation in his insistence that the struggle for a free South Africa be nonviolent and that forgiveness be the guiding principle of the post-apartheid state. In East Timor, Catholic priests, and religious sisters from around the country spoke out against the atrocities committed by Indonesian forces and provided protection and material support to those youths and others who were fighting nonviolently for self-determination. In Liberia, a group of women of faith came together and organized a remarkable nonviolent direct action campaign that pressured

the warring parties to sign a peace agreement in 2003. Peace vigils, sex strikes and social pressure were a few of their tactics. In Guatemala, a broad-based coalition involving peasants, students, lawyers, and religious leaders used boycotts, strikes and protests to challenge entrenched government corruption, forcing a kleptocratic president to step down without violence in 2015.

We are living in a time when, despite the horrific violence and injustice around the world, nonviolent movements and campaigns are making a more just and peaceful world possible. Fr. Amado L. Picardal, CSsR, a long-time advocate for nonviolence in the Philippines shares a powerful example:

“...our team conducted missions in San Fernando, Bukidnon (1987-89). We lived and worked with the poor in the remote mountain parish. We were expecting it to be just a matter of evangelizing and strengthening the Basic Ecclesial Communities. However, the deforestation of the area by logging companies and consequent ecological crisis (floods, droughts) changed our priorities.

Our liturgies and bible-reflection became opportunities for the communities to reflect on what was happening to their environment and made them aware of their responsibility to care for the earth and to act to address the ecological crisis using peaceful and nonviolent means to stop the destruction of the forest. This included barricading the roads, making appeals to the government, etc. We trained the leaders in negotiating skills. Even when a platoon of constabulary troops dispersed the barricade violently the people did not fight back. When they tried to arrest the parish priest, the people also climbed on the trucks insisting to be arrested with him which forced the soldiers to release the priest.

Due to the mass media coverage, the president ordered the suspension of logging activities in the area. But the people were not satisfied. They wanted to stop logging in the whole province. After several months we mobilized them and the neighboring parishes to the provincial capital and picketed the office of the Department of Energy and Natural Resources which shut down operations. Finally, we were able to conduct a human barricade of the national highway and stopped the logging trucks from going through. A prayerful atmosphere prevailed as we conducted liturgical celebration in the barricade. I had a dialogue with the commanding officer of the army platoon and assured them that we will remain peaceful.

After ten days, President Cory Aquino sent the secretary of the Department of Natural Resources for a dialogue. The government finally acceded to our demands and declared a total log ban in the entire province. The communities were also mobilized in the reforestation projects. This total log ban was later extended to the whole country, making cutting of trees in the forest illegal. This experience made me realize that grassroots communities can stop the destruction of the environment using nonviolent means.”¹³

13 Fr. Amado L. Picardal, CSsR, *The Way of Peace and Nonviolence*,” unpublished manuscript.

Pope Francis has repeatedly stressed that nonviolent popular movements - what he calls social poets - “carrying out a struggle against structural causes of poverty and injustice, with courage, intelligence and tenacity and not with fanaticism and violence” are critical to constructing a new order that meets the needs of people everywhere.¹⁴

A Catholic embrace of nonviolence in the 21st century would continue the historical lineage of those in our tradition who have lived a costly nonviolent life—from the apostles and disciples of the first century, to the mothers and fathers of the desert, to Saint Martin of Tours and Saint Maximilian, to Saint Francis and Saint Clare in the thirteenth century, to Cesar Chavez, Dolores Huerta, Dorothy Day and Saint Oscar Romero of our own time. Over the past century this tradition of nonviolent Christianity has increasingly re-emerged in Church documents, scripture scholarship, theology, Catholic social teaching and the lived experience of Catholics around the world who have been consciously living the nonviolent life as a spiritual journey and as a courageous, risky witness for justice, peace and reconciliation.¹⁵

In 1963 Pope John XXIII published his historic encyclical, *Pacem in Terris*, a ground-breaking papal document that sparked and accelerated the Church’s work for peace throughout the world. Now, six decades later, more robust Catholic attention to Gospel nonviolence could harvest more than half a century of advances in peacebuilding and powerful nonviolent action for justice and liberation, calling on the Church and the world to tap the power of active nonviolence to engage conflict and promote a global paradigm based on socio-ecological justice and radically integral peace.

14 “Turkson: Popular Movements called to be protagonists of change,” Vatican News,” <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2021-07/turkson-popular-movements-meeting4-covid-injustice-indifference.html>. “Popular movements not only represent the people who suffer injustice, the cardinal said, they also seek to establish for themselves a just social and economic order.” “...”Solidarity among the victims of social and economic injustice is the foundation of a popular culture that promotes integration, equality, justice and peace. He noted that popular movements are making history by carrying out a struggle against structural causes of poverty and injustice, with courage, intelligence and tenacity and not with fanaticism and violence, as the Holy Father has indicated.”

15 This has included a growing number of papal statements. For example, Pope Benedict XVI spoke of nonviolence as a core Gospel value in a 2007 public address, “This Sunday’s Gospel has one of the most typical, yet most difficult, teachings of Jesus: Love your enemies (Luke 6:27). Jesus delivered this address in Galilee, at the beginning of his public ministry: It was something of a ‘manifesto’ presented to everyone, which Christ asked his disciples to accept, thus proposing to them in radical terms a model for their lives... This page of the Gospel is rightly considered the ‘magna carta’ of Christian nonviolence; it does not consist in surrendering to evil—as claims a false interpretation of ‘turn the other cheek’ (Luke 6:29)—but in responding to evil with good (Romans 12:17-21), and thus breaking the chain of injustice. It is thus understood that nonviolence, for Christians, is not mere tactical behavior but a person’s way of being, the attitude of one who is convinced of God’s love and power, who is not afraid to confront evil with the weapons of love and truth alone. Loving the enemy is the nucleus of the ‘Christian revolution.’”

Adopting Active Nonviolence and Inclusive Love in Our Commitment to a Just Peace

Bishop Kevin Dowling

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I begin with the well-known text from Micah (6:8):
“... this is what Yahweh asks of you: only this, to act justly, to love tenderly, and to walk humbly with your God...”

Who will ever forget the witness of over 1 million Filipinos, accompanied by priests and nuns kneeling on the ground in prayer (and soldiers who refused to intervene or act against them) – a peaceful protest leading to the downfall of the dictator Ferdinand Marcos in 1986? How did this happen? Firstly, the International Fellowship of Reconciliation, an ecumenical Christian organization dedicated to nonviolent social change, led dozens of [nonviolent action workshops](#) across the Philippines. After attending a workshop, Cardinal Jaime Sin of Manila joined with the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines in calling for a “nonviolent struggle for justice.” These training workshops, along with a sophisticated election-monitoring mission led by nuns and priests, paved the way for the mass “people power” movement that prevented Marcos from stealing the 1986 presidential elections. The people challenged violence with nonviolent resistance – and won, and Marcos and his wife left the country.

Fast forward to 2014. In mid-2014, women living in the Bentiu Protection of Civilians area in South Sudan alerted the Nonviolent Peaceforce team living there that women were being raped and sometimes gang-raped by soldiers when they went out to gather firewood and water. The women reported that sometimes the soldiers would describe the assaults as part of their job. Often older women took on these jobs to protect the younger ones, and hopefully to decrease the likelihood of attack. So, these women

had to choose between their personal safety and providing for their families’ basic needs. Nonviolent Peaceforce began accompanying the women when they left the camp, sending 2 or more trained civilian protectors along with them. In the year after this accompaniment was offered to the people, no woman was attacked when accompanied. Instead, the soldiers looked the other way.

In the past year Nonviolent Peaceforce has provided over 1,000 accompaniments for vulnerable people, primarily women and children, throughout South Sudan. Currently, twelve international and many more local organizations are using unarmed civilian protection (UCP) to effectively protect civilians and deter violence in at least 17 areas of violent conflict. (UCP was cited and recommended in two major UN Reviews last year, “Peace Operations and Women,” “Peace and Security”). Notably over 40% of unarmed civilian protectors in the field are women, compared to 4% of armed UN peacekeepers.

But the wars and violence go on in Sudan and South Sudan – after years of terrible suffering. In early 2002 I flew into the remote community of Kauda in the Nuba Mountains during the vicious war and oppression of the Bashir regime in Khartoum. I stood at a little shrine in the Holy Cross Church compound where an Antonov plane had flown over the village and dropped 3 barrel bombs on the compound. The children and their teachers were sitting under the trees to shelter from the sun. One bomb hit right next to a tree and 14 children and their teacher were killed. Over the years, the Sudan Ecumenical Forum, which I chaired for 11 years, together with our

partners on the ground, engaged in a massive campaign to accurately document and verify such atrocities, and we then took up relentless international advocacy to stop the bombing; and we succeeded ... but, sadly, only for a time. This year, at the very same place, the Antonov bombers came over again and dropped their deadly bombs. No wonder Pope Francis stated: “We are now undergoing a Third World War in installments.”

It was accounts and stories like these from all over the world which we shared before, during and after the Rome Conference from 11-13 April 2016 and which, we hope, will place our ideals and goal of promoting active non-violence and just peace at the centre of ongoing reflection and commitment in the Church through what I hope will be an ongoing relationship with the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, and especially through all the partnerships of our Pax Christi sections and organisations and local co-workers in contexts of violence, war and atrocities.

But a challenge for all of us remains ... where can we find the *inner strength* to keep going, because the forces opting for war, oppression and violence are indeed great? The UN High Commission for Refugees released its report in June 2016. By the end of 2015, 65.3 million people had been displaced; the first time the number has exceeded 60 million. This means that one in every 113 people globally is now either an asylum-seeker (3.2 million), internally displaced (40.8 million) or a refugee (21.3 million). The report stated that more and more people are being displaced by war and persecution; people fleeing war are finding their way blocked by closed borders; and politics is gravitating against asylum in some countries. Yes, we are truly up against powerful forces.

What I wish to reflect on, while taking inspiration from the stories and indeed heroism we all know so well (who among us will ever forget the witness of the two Jesuits from Syria in Sarajevo?), is the spirituality which we need for our calling and ideals, and which we should also share with those who are present in situations of great stress so that we and they can find the inner strength

to continue giving witness to the possibility that there is another viable option to wars and violence.

Given that we, our partners and co-workers almost always work in an interfaith context or in one where there might not be any concept of a God, what we share in terms of the spirituality which motivates us needs to be sensitive to the objective of finding a “meeting of minds and hearts” with others, whomever they may be. That should not be perceived as a problem, but rather an invitation to “find” each other and what can sustain us in working together for goals we believe in or share.

Our inspiration comes, above all, from the person of Jesus and the message of the Gospels, especially the Sermon on the Mount, as we reflect on Jesus’ nonviolent approach to issues in his context – which was Palestine in the first century. This enables us to affirm that the spiritual foundation for our vision and policies, and the way we try to respond to the complex contexts in which we are present and active, is the life and witness of the nonviolent Jesus in his context. We are able to discern from the Scriptures that nonviolence was not only central to the life and message of Jesus, but that nonviolence was taken up as a committed strategy in the lives of the early Christian community in the way those Christians understood their faith and what it called for.

What the scholars have revealed to us – very well described for us by Professor Terrence Rynne who was in my reflection group in Rome which has inspired me in this reflection – was that, much like our present world, Jesus spent his life in a context of real violence. The people among whom Jesus lived and ministered were truly oppressed, were very angry, and they were kept under control by threats of violence being used against them by the Roman occupying power. But Jesus clearly discerned that the experience of meeting violence with violence by Judas the Galilean soon after he was born, and the various uprisings which continued during his life, would only lead to destruction – as happened after his death and resurrection. We remember how he wept

over Jerusalem and could foresee what would eventually happen ... “not a stone will be left on a stone” (Matthew 24).

Jesus gives us and all our co-workers a clear and inspiring vision with which to interrogate the current paradigm of war and violence in our age – and the countless local examples like the killings in Orlando, and the murder of the young UK mother and parliamentarian, Jo Cox. Jesus showed that there was and is a powerful alternative to the option for war and violence; but that was not the only option he took up. Like us today, Jesus identified and worked also to transform the *causes* of the suffering and injustice his people experienced – which made people so angry that some groups chose the way of violence ... as happens around the world today also. As we know only too well, there are several structures or systems of injustice which are the root causes of war and violence today ... and it was the structures, institutions, policies and systems which oppressed the people of Jesus’ time, opening the way to the real possibility of violence.

Therefore, living out an alternative way to war and violence must go together with the commitment to deal with and gradually transform the underlying causes which lead to war and violence today so that hopefully these can be limited and even prevented; and then, in the aftermath of war and atrocities, to commit to the long process of healing and transformation required by what is termed “transitional justice” and its different facets.

The people of Jesus’s time took up three options in response to the oppression they were experiencing. The Essenes, about whom we learned from the Dead Sea Scrolls, chose *flight*. They fled into the desert to protect their understanding of the Jewish religion and by refusing to have any dealings with anyone who did not belong to them. The priests and the Herodians of Jesus’ time chose *accommodation*: they collaborated with the Romans and in this way, they were able to continue practicing their religion, and they were able also to build up some wealth for themselves. The Pharisees, and

later the group which chose the way of violent resistance, chose to resist. They opted to preserve their identity against the Roman pagans, regarding them as enemies, and eventually they moved to the decision to *fight*.

Jesus, in what he proclaimed and lived, offered a *fourth way* to the people of Israel ... the goal of building an *inclusive community*, which would include those perceived to be the enemy, by using the power of nonviolent love of others ... and also, to engage in action which involved being open to risk, to take risks and even being willing to suffer for others for the common good, as so many of our co-workers and communities do in very difficult contexts. So, Jesus challenged the way of exclusion, excluding other people: “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you...” (Matthew 5:44). As Albert Nolan wrote in *Jesus before Christianity* (13): “Jesus’s message was to persuade the Jews that their present attitude of resentment and bitterness is suicidal ... the only way to be liberated from your enemies is to love your enemies...”

Jesus reflects further on this insight in the Sermon on the Mount when he says: “You have heard it said, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, but I say to you: ‘Do not violently resist one who does evil to you. If anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the left; if someone goes to court to take your coat, give him your cloak as well; and if anyone presses you into service for a mile, go a second mile” (Matthew 5:39-41).

This has sometimes wrongly been interpreted as a call to *passivity* in response to violence ... to be passive, and neither show nor give *any form* of resistance. The scripture scholars through their exegesis show that what Jesus was actually promoting was creative, nonviolent resistance — not passivity. What I have found very helpful is the way the scripture scholars explain the background to that text from Matthew. Jesus is using 3 examples which his disciples at the time would have been aware of. Firstly, the abusive superior insulting an inferior with a backhand slap on the face, on the right cheek; then, secondly, a person taking another to court to sue for the last

bit of security that unfortunate person has, viz. the cloak that a poor person, who is homeless, wrapped himself in at night to keep out the cold; and thirdly, the Roman soldier demanding that a Jew must carry his service pack, which weighed 60 pounds or more, for a mile.

Pope Benedict XVI reflected: “Love your enemies ... it does not consist in surrendering to evil – as claims a false interpretation of ‘turn the other cheek’ (Luke 6:29) – but in responding to evil with good (Romans 12:17-21), and thus breaking the chain of injustice” (Address in Vatican City, 18 February 2007).

“(Jesus) was always a man of peace ... he came in weakness. He came only with the strength of love, totally without violence, even to the point of going to the Cross. ... This is what shows us the true face of God, that violence never comes from God, never helps bring anything good, but is a destructive means and not the path to escape difficulties. ... He strongly invites all sides to renounce violence, even if they feel they are right. The only path is to renounce violence, to begin again with dialogue, with the attempt to find peace together, with a new concern for one another, a new willingness to be open to one another. This is Jesus’s true message: seek peace with the means of peace and leave violence aside” (Good Friday sermon, 2011).

So, following reflections like this from Pope Benedict, it is clear that Jesus is not asking that if we experience violence we must just submit to violence passively. Jesus is calling us to respond reflectively and to act as he did, which Jesus affirmed was the same as that of the Father who “sends the rain on the just and the unjust alike”.

What he is asking for is that we respond in the awareness of our dignity which no one or nothing can take away; he is asking that we stand *against* any hurt or indignity or violence or injustice, but do not respond to that violence with violence. It is a response which does not allow oneself to be infected with the violence one must stand against; and then to be creative by imagining the myriad ways to act against and

overcome oppression and violence in a way which can hopefully transform the situation by not perpetuating an endless cycle of violence. The scholar Gene Sharp has identified 198 methods of nonviolent action by people and communities – so creativity in choosing the way of nonviolence is what is called for.

Therefore, the [*final document produced by the Rome conference*](#) called on the church to “promote nonviolent practices and strategies,” including “nonviolent resistance, restorative justice, trauma healing, unarmed civilian protection, conflict transformation, and peacebuilding strategies.”

So, this is a call to inclusive love because that is the way of God who loves all unconditionally, who sends the rain on the just and unjust alike. Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount is calling on people to live and act in a different way — reaching out to others in an inclusive love for everyone. Jesus constantly revealed this in the way he reached out to all the outcasts of his time, even to the so-called enemy — because for him there were/are no enemies. This approach of Jesus calls on everyone to come together in a search for collaborative action in the pursuit of active nonviolence and just peacemaking which will transform the lot of the poor and the victims through implementing all the facets of what is termed “transitional justice”... which, if implemented fully, may truly bring about a *sustainable peace* which promotes the common good of all, and indeed hope for a better world.

(Among these facets of “transitional justice” are the search for truth, e.g. Truth and Reconciliation Commissions, documentation of the stories of the victims, public testimonies of the victims, the issue of offering amnesty to perpetrators in the hope that they will provide evidence to trace mass graves etc.; the question of retribution – retributive justice versus the call to restorative justice, trauma healing, the pursuit of reconciliation in affected communities with the use of cultural methods of bringing reconciliation between perpetrators and victims, e.g. in Uganda, and then the transformation of the effects of war and violence through the pursuit of economic justice based on Catholic Social Teachings such as

the preferential option for the poor, solidarity, the common good, and distributive justice ... that the goods of the earth belong to all and need to be shared equitably ... these and other dimensions of “transitional justice” are integral to our pursuit of active nonviolence and just peace.)

What is so important in our option for creative and active nonviolence and in our commitment to work for just peace, in contrast to the option to justify war, is the witness this can give to others, the witness of a community of disciples which can inspire and encourage and support others to make the option for the alternative way of Jesus, i.e. nonviolent peacemaking.

As I shared on the first morning in Rome, this option for nonviolent peacemaking comes with a cost; it costs sometimes a great deal on a personal level. That is why it is essential that we and all our co-workers live out of a spirit, a spirituality which gives and renews constantly the inner energy we will all need for the long journey – because nonviolent peacemaking is not something that will be achieved quickly, as we all know. I trust that our source of strength, viz. our personal, prayerful relationship with the nonviolent Jesus whose Sermon on the Mount was and is indeed a challenge to adopt his alternative way of active nonviolent and inclusive love, will also inspire and encourage all our co-workers to search for and live out of their own faith tradition, or their own higher power.

Part Two:

Nonviolence and the Life of the Church

An Appeal to the Catholic Church to Re-Commit to the Centrality of Gospel Nonviolence

The following statement was affirmed by most of the participants at the 2016 Conference on Nonviolence and Just Peace cosponsored by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace and Pax Christi International:

As Christians committed to a more just and peaceful world, we are called to take a clear stand for creative and active nonviolence and against all forms of violence. With this conviction, and in recognition of the Jubilee Year of Mercy declared by Pope Francis, people from many countries gathered at the Nonviolence and Just Peace Conference sponsored by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace and Pax Christi International on April 11-13, 2016 in Rome.

Our assembly, people of God from Africa, the Americas, Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and Oceania included lay people, theologians, members of religious congregations, priests, and bishops. Many of us live in communities experiencing violence and oppression. All of us are practitioners of justice and peace. We are grateful for the message to our conference from Pope Francis: “your thoughts on revitalizing the tools of nonviolence, and of active nonviolence in particular, will be a needed and positive contribution”.

Looking at our world today

We live in a time of tremendous suffering, widespread trauma and fear linked to militarization, economic injustice, climate change, and a myriad of other specific forms of violence. In this context of normalized and systemic violence, those of us who stand in the Christian tradition are called to recognize the centrality of active nonviolence to the vision and message of Jesus; to the life and practice of the Catholic Church; and to our long-term vocation of healing and reconciling both people and the planet.

We rejoice in the rich concrete experiences of people engaged in work for peace around the world, many of whose stories we heard during this conference. Participants shared their experiences of courageous negotiations with armed actors in Uganda and Colombia; working to protect the Article 9, the peace clause in the Japanese Constitution; accompaniment in Palestine; and countrywide peace education in the Philippines. They illuminate the creativity and power of nonviolent practices in many different situations of potential or actual violent conflict. Recent academic research, in fact, has confirmed that nonviolent resistance strategies are twice as effective as violent ones.

The time has come for our Church to be a living witness and to invest far greater human and financial resources in promoting a spirituality and practice of active nonviolence and in forming and training our Catholic communities in effective nonviolent practices. In all of this, Jesus is our inspiration and model.

Jesus and nonviolence

In his own times, rife with structural violence, Jesus proclaimed a new, nonviolent order rooted in the unconditional love of God. Jesus called his disciples to love their enemies (Matthew 5: 44), which includes respecting the image of God in all persons; to offer no violent resistance to one who does evil (Matthew 5: 39); to become peacemakers; to forgive and repent; and to be abundantly merciful (Matthew 5-7). Jesus embodied nonviolence by actively resisting systemic dehumanization, as when he defied the Sabbath laws to heal the man with the withered hand (Mark 3: 1-6); when he confronted the powerful at the Temple and purified it (John 2: 13-22); when he peacefully but determinedly challenged the men accusing a woman of adultery

(John 8: 1-11); when on the night before he died he asked Peter to put down his sword (Matthew 26: 52).

Neither passive nor weak, Jesus' nonviolence was the power of love in action. In vision and deed, he is the revelation and embodiment of the Nonviolent God, a truth especially illuminated in the Cross and Resurrection. He calls us to develop the virtue of nonviolent peacemaking.

Clearly, the Word of God, the witness of Jesus, should never be used to justify violence, injustice or war. We confess that the people of God have betrayed this central message of the Gospel many times, participating in wars, persecution, oppression, exploitation, and discrimination.

We believe that there is no "just war". Too often the "just war theory" has been used to endorse rather than prevent or limit war. Suggesting that a "just war" is possible also undermines the moral imperative to develop tools and capacities for nonviolent transformation of conflict.

We need a new framework that is consistent with Gospel nonviolence. A different path is clearly unfolding in recent Catholic social teaching. Pope John XXIII wrote that war is not a suitable way to restore rights; Pope Paul VI linked peace and development, and told the UN "no more war"; Pope John Paul II said that "war belongs to the tragic past, to history"; Pope Benedict XVI said that "loving the enemy is the nucleus of the Christian revolution"; and Pope Francis said "the true strength of the Christian is the power of truth and love, which leads to the renunciation of all violence. Faith and violence are incompatible". He has also urged the "abolition of war".

We propose that the Catholic Church develop and consider shifting to a Just Peace approach based on Gospel nonviolence. A Just Peace approach offers a vision and an ethic to build peace as well as to prevent, defuse, and to heal the damage of violent conflict. This ethic includes a commitment to human dignity and thriving relationships, with specific criteria, virtues, and practices to guide our actions. We recognize that peace requires justice and justice requires peacemaking.

Living Gospel Nonviolence and Just Peace

In that spirit we commit ourselves to furthering Catholic understanding and practice of active nonviolence on the road to just peace. As would-be disciples of Jesus, challenged and inspired by stories of hope and courage in these days, we call on the Church we love to:

- continue developing Catholic social teaching on nonviolence. In particular, we call on Pope Francis to share with the world an encyclical on nonviolence and Just Peace;
- integrate Gospel nonviolence explicitly into the life, including the sacramental life, and work of the Church through dioceses, parishes, agencies, schools, universities, seminaries, religious orders, voluntary associations, and others;
- promote nonviolent practices and strategies (e.g., nonviolent resistance, restorative justice, trauma healing, unarmed civilian protection, conflict transformation, and peacebuilding strategies);
- initiate a global conversation on nonviolence within the Church, with people of other faiths, and with the larger world to respond to the monumental crises of our time with the vision and strategies of nonviolence and Just Peace;
- no longer use or teach "just war theory"; continue advocating for the abolition of war and nuclear weapons;
- lift up the prophetic voice of the church to challenge unjust world powers and to support and defend those nonviolent activists whose work for peace and justice put their lives at risk.

In every age, the Holy Spirit graces the Church with the wisdom to respond to the challenges of its time. In response to what is a global epidemic of violence, which Pope Francis has labeled a "world war in installments", we are being called to invoke, pray over, teach and take decisive action. With our communities and organizations, we look forward to continue collaborating with the Holy See and the global Church to advance Gospel nonviolence.

April 2016

Path of Nonviolence: Towards a Culture of Peace

The following statement was affirmed by most of the participants at the 2019 Path of Nonviolence: Towards a culture of peace workshop, sponsored by Pax Christi International and held at the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development.

As Christians committed to faithfully following in the footsteps of Jesus, we are called to take a clear stand for active nonviolence and against all forms of violence. In this spirit, people from many nations gathered for *Path of Nonviolence: Towards a Culture of Peace*, a consultation held at the Holy See's Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development on April 4-5, 2019 in Rome. This was an important follow-up to the [Nonviolence and Just Peace conference](#) held in Rome in April 2016 co-sponsored by the then-Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace and Pax Christi International.

Our recent gathering of people of God from Africa, Asia, the Middle East, Oceania, Europe, and the Americas included lay people, theologians, members of religious congregations, priests, bishops, and cardinals. Many of us live in communities experiencing violence and oppression. All of us are practitioners of justice and peace.

We are grateful for the special focus that Pope Francis has placed on the spiritual and practical power of active nonviolence to promote integral human development and cultures of peace, including through the 2017 World Day of Peace message on "Nonviolence: A Style of Politics for Peace," where he proclaimed: "To be true followers of Jesus today...includes embracing his teaching about nonviolence." We know that Jesus consistently practiced nonviolence in a context that was extremely violent, but "nonviolence was not just a response to particular situations in the life of Jesus – it was the whole life of Jesus" (Cardinal Peter Turkson, University of San Diego, October 7, 2017).

Signs of the times in the light of faith

The Second Vatican Council taught us to see and respond to "the signs of the times" so that the Church can discern how we are called to live the way of Jesus in our lives and our world today. Our recent two-day gathering in Rome urgently called our attention to two critical "signs of the times:" the global crisis of violence with the unspeakable suffering it unleashes and, by the grace of God, the spread of active and powerful nonviolence. Violence, which includes killing, is not in accord with human dignity. Rejecting the legitimization, reasoning, and actualization of violence and war, we need a new path – a paradigm shift to full-spectrum nonviolence – to take us into the future.

Just peace is the goal, nonviolence is the way. A sustainable culture of peace can only be established by nonviolence that absolutely respects human dignity. Rooted in the interconnectedness of God's creation, it also opens the way to an "integral ecology," as expressed by Pope Francis in [Laudato si'](#). Violence undermines this interconnectedness. Nonviolence sustains it. Nonviolence teaches us to say "no" to an inhuman social order and "yes" to the fullness of life.

This is a spiritual reality, but also a practical truth. Over the past century nonviolent practice has increasingly been applied successfully inside and outside the Church to transform lives and to create change. We rejoice in the rich concrete experiences of people engaged in work for just peace around the world, many of whose stories we heard during this gathering. They illuminate the creativity and power of nonviolent practices in many different situations of potential or actual violent conflict. Moreover, credible empirical research into nonviolent and violent conflict in the twentieth century has confirmed that major

nonviolent resistance campaigns were found to be twice as effective as violent (or armed) campaigns. And even when they fail, the consequences of their failure are not as disastrous as the consequences of violent approaches.

For the Church, alleviating human suffering is not a pretext, but a moral duty. As Christians we must not “stand idly by the blood of a neighbor” (Leviticus 19:16). We have a duty to protect the life of our neighbor with every tool of nonviolence available to us. In the same way, we have a duty to prevent violence, preserve just peace, and promote reconciliation.

Actively embracing the nonviolent way in the Church and the world

We encourage the Church as institution and people of God to a deeper understanding of and commitment to active nonviolence – following Jesus, embodiment of the nonviolent God, crucified and risen, who taught us to love our enemies (Matthew 5: 44), to put down our sword (Matthew 26: 52), to offer no violent resistance to the one who does evil (Matthew 5: 39), and to not kill. This commitment to nonviolence is formed of compassion and nourished by Eucharist, enabling a nonviolent encounter with the broken heart of God. Through him we discover and apply concrete ways to embrace nonviolence as a core teaching of our faith; to resist violence without violence; to put the power of love into action; and to develop the virtue of nonviolent peacemaking.

In this kairos moment, we strongly urge the Church to bring nonviolence from the periphery of Catholic thought on war and peace to the center – to mainstream nonviolence as a spirituality, lifestyle, a program of societal action, and a universal ethic.

As we recommit ourselves to furthering Catholic understanding and practice of active nonviolence on the road to just peace, and challenged again by stories of hope and courage in these days together, we call on the Church we love:

- to recognize that the Church – ordinary

people, saints and martyrs – have done much to promote peace and nonviolence, while confessing the past and present complicity of our Church with cultural, structural, and direct violence; to restructure relationships in the Church to just partnerships; and to embrace an ethic of nonviolence as the pathway to genuine and enduring reconciliation, in fidelity to the consistent call of Christ in every situation of conflict;

- to root our conversion to nonviolence in the intense experiences of those most affected by violence – women, youth, migrants and the earth itself – and to recognize that their sufferings are an urgent call to that conversion process;
- to integrate Gospel nonviolence at every level of the Church – dioceses, parishes, families and the “domestic Church,” religious orders, seminaries, universities, and schools – through formation, preaching, pastoral life, advocacy, research, and education, with particular attention to developing nonviolence and peace studies programs in all Catholic universities;
- to commit to a nonviolent just peace ethic for Catholic teaching on sustainable peace and conflict, violence and war; to include in the Catechism of the Catholic Church a definition of nonviolence, key nonviolent practices, and the norms of a just peace ethic;
- to advocate for increased public and private, intellectual and financial investment in education for nonviolence and in key nonviolent practices such as restorative justice, nonviolent communication, unarmed civilian protection, trauma-healing, nonviolent resistance, and nonviolent civilian-based defense;
- to consider poor and suffering people, especially those in violent conflicts, as the first persons to be protected by nonviolence and a theology of peace, even as we will seek to protect all people;
- to promote integral disarmament for humanitarian purposes – eliminating weapons already banned and nuclear weapons, continuously reducing all arms and weapons, and ending the development and production of new weapons systems;

- to consider nonviolence as a necessary condition of integral human development, as well as an ecological and social way of mutual relationship and mutual hospitality;
- to initiate a global conversation on nonviolence within the Church, with people of other faiths, and with the larger world to respond to the crises of our time with the vision and methodology of nonviolence;
- to contribute to an ecumenical theology of peace, promoting dialogue between believers and all people working for a peaceful world.

In every age, the Holy Spirit graces the Church with the wisdom to respond to the challenges of its time. In response to what is a global epidemic of violence, we are being called again and again to invoke, pray over, teach, and take decisive action in the spirit of Jesus' nonviolence. Nonviolence is at the heart of the Gospel. It is the calling of the Church. It is not passive or naïve. It is a way

of faith and action. It is an effective alternative. It is a constructive force to protect all people and our common home. It includes a broad spectrum of approaches and activities. It is the core of a new moral framework. It is essential to integral human development and at the heart of a culture of peace. It is at the core of the witness and action of Jesus and many who have come after him, including Saints Francis and Clare of Assisi, Mohandas Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr, Dorothy Day, Beatus Franz Jägerstätter, Saint Oscar Romero, Berta Caceres, Lanza del Vasto, Wangari Muta Maathai, and the many people involved in nonviolent social movements.

In a violent world, nonviolence nurtures hope. Actively embracing the way of nonviolence can renew the Church and invite the entire world to discover the powerful hope of creative nonviolent solutions to the monumental challenges of our time.

April 2019

Pope Francis' Teaching About and Practice of Nonviolence

Pope Francis himself has frequently modeled nonviolent practices. For example, in April 2019, he hosted a two-day “spiritual retreat” for the president of South Sudan and the opposition leaders of that country. The previous Fall, an historic peace agreement had been signed between them, but the parties had been having difficulty implementing it. There was grave danger that this new country would be plunged again into civil war, a conflict that had already cost nearly 400,000 lives. The encounter at the Vatican was an opportunity for dialogue and renewing the task of working for peace for the 13 million people of South Sudan.

At the end of this gathering, Pope Francis pleaded with the leaders to honor the armistice they had signed and to work together as one government. In unscripted remarks, he said, “I beg you as a brother to stay the course of peace. I appeal to you with all my heart: move ahead as one.” Then, unexpectedly, he stooped down and, kneeling on the floor, kissed the feet of President Salva Kiir and those of the opposition leaders. He stunned his guests with this altogether surprising gesture. “I was shocked, and I trembled when His Holiness the Pope kissed our feet,” the president told the South Sudanese parliament a month later. While there have continued to be serious ups-and-downs in South Sudan since then, the following February the parties finally formed a unity government. In this one act, building on long-term Church-led efforts for peace in South Sudan, Pope Francis unleashed a creative tension that risked looking foolish, yet played a role in bringing enemies together and nurturing hope for reconciliation.

This is one of many nonviolent actions Pope Francis has taken during his papacy. The pope’s countless statements on peace and nonviolence have been backed by nonviolent action, from gestures of unity and solidarity (washing the

feet of non-Christians, detained immigrants, and the incarcerated during Holy Thursday services) and making a surprise visit to a refugee camp in Greece—where he arranged to bring three Muslim families to Rome, to his pilgrimage seeking reconciliation with the First Nations in Canada who were deeply harmed by boarding schools run by Catholic religious communities.

His public symbolic actions reach out creatively to people of many faiths, span divisions that spawn violence and show that another way is truly possible. One example is the well-publicised prayer vigil for peace in Syria that Francis held in St. Peter’s Square in September 2013. He was joined by 100,000 peace advocates, even as international leaders debated the possibility of military action. Another example is his prayer like that of Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI at the Western Wall or “Wailing Wall” in Jerusalem, representing Christian repentance for suffering caused to the Jews, as well as his additional visit to the “wall of separation” in Bethlehem – both representing his hope for peace between Israelis and Palestinians. Similar pleas for peace were conveyed by Pope Francis’ by his visits to the Central African Republic and Iraq in the midst of war and violence.

Praying for peace in Egypt, Francis reiterated that “the true force of the Christian is the force of truth and love, which means rejecting all violence. Faith and violence are incompatible!” The way of Jesus is the way of peace, reconciliation, “living for God and for others”. The strength of the Christian is “the force of meekness, the force of love” (Angelus Address, 19 August 2013).

In 2013, when Francis was confronted by the prospect of a military intervention in Syria by US and French “superpowers”, he insisted that “war brings on war! Violence brings on violence”.

Expanding on these themes, he added, “My Christian faith urges me to look to the Cross ... *violence is not answered with violence*, death is not answered with the language of death. In the silence of the Cross, the uproar of weapons ceases and the language of reconciliation, forgiveness, dialogue and peace is spoken. This evening, I ask the Lord that we Christians, and our brothers and sisters of other religions, and every man and woman of good will, cry out forcefully: *violence and war are never the way to peace!* War always marks the failure of peace, it is always a defeat for humanity. Let the words of Pope Paul VI resound again: ‘No more one against the other, no more, never! ... war never again, never again war!’. ‘Peace expresses itself only in peace, a peace which is not separate from the demands of justice but which is fostered by personal sacrifice, clemency, mercy and love’. Forgiveness, dialogue, reconciliation – these are the words of peace, in beloved Syria, in the Middle East, in all the world!”

In 2014, he declared that “war is never a necessity. In 2016, he clearly stated, “The commandment, ‘Thou shalt not kill’ has absolute value, and concerns both the innocent and the guilty, and even criminals maintain the inviolable right to life, the gift of God”.

After the publication of *Laudato Si’*, in which he connected war and ecological destruction (LS 56), Pope Francis urged the United Nations in New York to support sustainable development while protecting the environment. He decried the hypocrisy of talking about peace while manufacturing arms; and rebuked international leaders for failing to find peaceful solutions to global conflicts, especially in the Middle East).

As described previously, Pope Francis’s World Day of Peace message issued on 1 January 2017 went beyond previous papal statements in laying out a robust substantive theological and pastoral articulation of nonviolence. Rather than using natural law theory as the basis of the Church’s teaching on war and violence, Francis went straight to the Gospels. The Sermon on the Mount is described as the “manual” for this approach to peacemaking. Such a shift enables a clearer

statement by Pope Francis that “peacebuilding” is expressed “through active nonviolence”. And we might extend this to say clearly that constructive “peacebuilding” is distinct but complementary to nonviolent resistance.

Another source of inspiration for Pope Francis is the living witness of believing, nonviolent Christians across the world. He reflects on the lived tradition of the early Church and how they confronted persecution with courageous nonviolence and how they stunned the world, prompting massive conversions to Christianity. He also says: “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.’” (Rynne)

As the Pope reclaims Jesus’s teaching on nonviolence, he is saying that in the face of violence and war: no more quiescence, no more anguished acceptance, no more standing on the side wringing hands. Instead get in the middle of the fray and fight violence with the “weapons of truth and love”. (Rynne) He underlines the teaching with the penetrating words of Benedict XVI: “Love of one’s enemy constitutes the nucleus of the Christian revolution.”

Additionally, the pope’s message is not a simply “religious” appeal. The title of the message is “Nonviolence: A Style of Politics for Peace”. The Pope is making nonviolence not just the keynote of a Christian’s faith in Jesus, he is saying that nonviolence is effective in the real world of politics — and is superior to and more effective than violence. The world never gets to peace through violence and war but only begets more violence and war. Since publishing the 2017 World Day of Peace message, Pope Francis has used the word

“nonviolence” in various statements and interviews. Even more substantively, the pope has promulgated historic, nonviolent positions, including making the death penalty inadmissible and condemning the possession, as well as the use, of nuclear weapons.

In *Fratelli Tutti* Pope Francis offers a clear foundation for developing and integrating the theology and practice of nonviolence in the teaching of the Church. In particular, Francis’ analysis of global violence, including structural violence, sets the stage for a deeper understanding of nonviolence and responds to the reality of our unjust and violent world with key themes grounded in a primordial spiritual vision, which is also the basis of the universal ethic of nonviolence: that all beings everywhere are interrelated.

In the encyclical, a series of themes logically follow from this. If we are all related, if we are all one family, then we must challenge everything that destroys this unity by: showing radical care for one another; building a culture of authentic encounter; making dialogue central to our way of being; and putting solidarity into action with those most excluded, dispossessed, dehumanized and systematically under attack. Pope Francis is here relentlessly calling us to the nonviolent life, especially illuminated by his extended analysis of the story of the Good Samaritan.

Fratelli Tutti reiterates the inadmissibility of the death penalty and emphasizes how the just war tradition fails in the face of modern warfare, Pope Francis writes, “We can no longer think of war as a solution, because its risks will probably always be greater than its supposed benefits. In view of this, it is very difficult nowadays to invoke the rational criteria elaborated in earlier centuries to speak of the possibility of a ‘just war.’” In footnote #242, he is even more direct: “Saint Augustine, who forged a concept of ‘just war’ that we no longer uphold

in our own day, also said that ‘it is a higher glory still to stay war itself with a word, than to slay men with the sword, and to procure or maintain peace by peace, not by war’ (Epistola 229, 2: PL 33, 1020).”

In his in his newly published book, *Peace on Earth: Fraternity is Possible*, Pope Francis noted that when Jesus was about to be arrested, he did not claim a right to self-defense and even told the disciple who drew a sword to defend him, “Put your sword back into its sheath.” “The words of Jesus resound clearly today, too,” he wrote. “Life and goodness cannot be defended with the ‘sword.’” In the Gospel of Luke’s version of the story, Jesus tells his disciples, “Stop, no more of this!” “Jesus’ sorrowful and strong, ‘No more,’ goes beyond the centuries and reaches us. It is a commandment we cannot avoid,” Pope Francis wrote. “‘No more’ swords, weapons, violence, war. In that ‘No more’ there is an echo of the ancient commandment, ‘Thou shall not kill.’” “How can there be Christians with a sword in their hand?” he asked. “How can there be Christians who manufacture ‘swords’ that others will use to kill?” “Listening to the passionate plea of the Lord means to stop selling weapons and considering only one’s own economic interests,” the pope said. “There are no justifications for this, even if jobs will be lost with the end of arms sales.”

Most recently Pope Francis has called on the parties at war in Ukraine, to seek peace through dialogue, reconciliation, negotiation and compromise. While he has condemned the Russian aggression and said that “to defend oneself is not only lawful but also an expression of love of country” he has called war “a mistake,” said there is no such thing as a just war and pointed to manifold conditions on the morality of delivering weapons to Ukraine. He called the arms business “a store of assassins” and has appealed repeatedly for nonproliferation and disarmament, especially, but not only of nuclear arms.

Catholic Church Teaching on War, Peace and Nonviolence Since Vatican II

Since the 1960s official Catholic teaching has uniformly deplored the destruction and disaster of war, pressing the point that it always represents a moral failure. No pope since the Second Vatican Council has approved a war, or even mounted a defence of the justice of war in principle. The use of violent force for humanitarian purposes—in cases of horrific threats to human life, human security and social order—is still acknowledged by Catholic teaching. Yet the focus of recent official statements has been increasingly on nonviolence, and on the incompatibility of violence with transformational justice. Popes John XXIII, Paul VI, John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Francis have repeatedly denounced the savagery of war. John Paul, Benedict and Francis have all echoed Paul VI's cry, "No more war, war never again!"

- *Pacem in Terris* (1963) John XXIII¹⁶
- *Gaudium et Spes* (1965) Second Vatican Council¹⁷
- *Populorum Progressio* (1967) Paul VI¹⁸
- "If you want peace, work for justice" (1972 World Day of Peace message) Paul VI¹⁹
- "Reconciliation, the way to peace" (1975 World Day of Peace message) Paul VI²⁰
- *Evangelii Nuntiani* #37, 1975, apostolic exhortation, Paul VI: "The Church cannot accept violence, especially the force of arms – which is uncontrollable once it is let loose – and indiscriminate death as the path to liberation, because she knows that violence always provokes violence and irresistibly engenders new forms of oppression and enslavement which are often harder to bear than those from which they claimed to bring freedom."²¹
- "The real weapons of peace" (1976 World Day of Peace message) Paul VI: "[H]as not our own time had an example of what can be done by [one person], Gandhi – armed only with the principle of nonviolence – to vindicate for a nation of hundreds of millions of human beings the freedom and dignity of a new people?"²²
- Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, no. 496, 2006 John Paul II: "Violence is never a proper response."²³
- *Caritas in veritate*, 2009, Benedict XVI²⁴
- *Laudato Si'*, 2015, Francis²⁵
- 2017 World Day of Peace Message, 2017, Francis²⁶
- *Fratelli Tutti*, 2020, Francis²⁷
- Pope Francis, *Against War: Building a Culture of Peace* (New York: Orbis Books, 2022)

16 https://www.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_11041963_pacem.html

17 https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html

18 https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_26031967_populorum.html

19 https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_p-vi_mes_19711208_v-world-day-for-peace.html

20 https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_p-vi_mes_19741208_viii-world-day-for-peace.html

21 https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi.html

22 https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_p-vi_mes_19751018_ix-world-day-for-peace.html

23 https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html

24 https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html

25 https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html

26 https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/peace/documents/papa-francesco_20161208_messaggio-l-giornata-mondiale-pace-2017.html

27 https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html

Pastoral Letters and Statements

Perhaps the most effective “official” teachers of Gospel nonviolence in local contexts are the bishops, accompanied by clergy, religious, pastoral ministers, catechists, community workers and members of base communities, who see that nonviolence is the most effective “weapon” of people on the periphery. Their existential perspective is frequently very different from that of high-level heads of state and international leaders who have the power and prerogative to deliberate about unleashing their considerable military arsenals against aggressors.

For example, in Medellín, Colombia (1968)²⁸, the Conference of Latin American Bishops named the support by political authorities of an oppressive elite as a major source of violence, and recognised structural injustice as a form of “institutionalised violence”. They called for a Church that is not only nonviolent, but in solidarity with those who are poor. Other examples:

Africa

- Do not be afraid; rise above adversity.²⁹ This “message of encouragement and hope” was released by the Catholic bishops of South Sudan on 16 June 2016.
- Bishop Kevin Dowling C.Ss.R., Rustenburg, South Africa: A Catholic vision on nonviolence for Africa,³⁰ 5 December 2016.
- Bishop Kevin Dowling, C.Ss.R., Rustenburg, South Africa: Nonviolence and peacemaking: Lessons from Oscar Romero, Denis Hurley and Pope Francis³¹ 25 January 2017.

Asia-Pacific

- “Fiji archbishop advocates nonviolence to help stabilize social unrest”,³² National Catholic Reporter, October 8, 2019.

- The bishops’ conference of Japan endorsed³³ the Appeal to the Catholic Church to recommit to the centrality of Gospel nonviolence and sent a letter to Cardinal Peter Turkson.
- Ten Days for Peace³⁴ (2017), a message from the president of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Japan.
- Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) bishops oppose arming priests in response to the killing of priests,³⁵ 12 June 2018: “We are men of God, men of the Church and it is part of our ministry to face dangers, to face deaths if one may say that way. But we would do it, just what Jesus did.” ‘
- CBCP: Statement on Marawi, terrorism and dialogue, 10 July 2017: “We all cry from our hearts: War in Marawi, never again! War in Marawi, no more! We therefore call for the return to normalcy and peace in Marawi and its environs as soon as possible. ... The basis for peace and understanding already exists. It is part of the very foundational principles of both faiths: love of the One God and love of neighbor.”
- CBCP: Pastoral on deaths and killings, 30 January 2017: “We, your bishops, are deeply concerned due to many deaths and killings in the campaign against prohibited drugs. This traffic in illegal drugs needs to be stopped and overcome. But the solution does not lie in the killing of suspected drug users and pushers. ... Every person has a right to be presumed innocent until proven guilty. Society has ways and processes to catch, prove guilty and punish perpetrators of crimes. This process must be followed, especially by agents of the law.”
- CBCP: Ethical guidelines on proposals to restore the death penalty, 14 September 2016: “To every man and woman is open, by the Saviour, Jesus Christ, the invitation to the fullness of life. Every man and woman is a person redeemed

28 <https://www.geraldschlabach.net/misc/medellin-1968-excerpts/>

29 <https://nonviolencejustpeace.net/2016/06/28/a-message-from-the-bishops-of-south-sudan-do-not-be-afraid-rise-above-adversity/>

30 https://nonviolencejustpeace.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/A-Catholic-Vision-on-nonviolence-for-Africa_Pax-Christi-Africa-Conference.pdf

31 <https://paxchristipeacestories.com/2017/01/25/nonviolence-and-peacemaking-lessons-from-oscar-romero-denis-hurley-and-pope-francis/>

32 <https://www.ncronline.org/news/fiji-archbishop-advocates-nonviolence-help-stabilize-social-unrest>

33 <https://nonviolencejustpeace.net/2016/08/02/japanese-bishops-endorse-appeal/>

34 <https://www.cbcj.catholic.jp/2017/07/06/14095/>

35 <https://cbcpnews.net/cbcpnews/bishops-oppose-arming-priests/>

by God's own Son, made an adopted son or daughter of God, and heir to the promise of the Resurrection. This is the dignity of the human person. It is this dignity that the death penalty transgresses."

- CBCP: Pastoral appeal to our law enforcers: Appeal to reason and humanity, 20 June 2016: "To kill a suspect outright, no matter how much surveillance work may have antecedently been done on the suspect, is not morally justified. Suspicion is never the moral equivalent of certainty, and punishment may be inflicted only on the ground of certainty."
- CBCP: On the killing of voiceless and defenceless humans, 11 September 2015, Your Brother's Blood Cries Out to Me from the Ground! (Gen 4:10)
- CBCP: Striving for a Just Peace, the moral road, 11 July 2015: "All-out war is not the answer to the Mindanao situation. ... We want a Bangsamoro Basic Law that is rooted in social justice..."
- CBCP: Statement on torture, 23 June 2015
- CBCP: The many names of God and the blessing of peace, 30 April 2015: "To kill in God's name – this is one of the most painful contradictions of our time! ... Jesus is the incarnation of the supreme welcome of the other."

Europe

- Belgian bishops endorsed the "Appeal to the Catholic Church to Recommit to the Centrality of Gospel Nonviolence".
- German Bishops Conference: "Gerechter Friede" ("A Just Peace"),³⁶ 27 September 2000
- East German (GDR) Catholic Bishops' pastoral letter on peace (1983)³⁷

North America

- If Just War theory is inadequate, let's think Just Peace,³⁸ Bishop Anthony Taylor, Little Rock,

Arkansas, 1 March 2022.

- Living in the Light of Christ's Peace,³⁹ Archbishop John C. Wester, Santa Fe, New Mexico, 11 January 2022.
- Baltimore's Archbishop William Lori's pastoral letter on nonviolence⁴⁰ (February 2018) begins a dialogue in his archdiocese on nonviolence, racism and the struggle for justice based on the principles of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
- "The Church is in the midst of a fundamental reappraisal of how to balance the Christian obligation to nonviolence with the need to resist evil in the world. ... The power of nonviolence, once relegated to the category of romantic idealism, has emerged as a potent force for social transformation and the building of lasting peace." — Bishop Robert McElroy of San Diego, speaking after Pope Francis's remarks at a Vatican conference on nuclear disarmament held in November 2017.
- A statement to the Muslim community, Catholic bishops of Saskatchewan, 2017: "condemning violence, particularly violence in the name of God, whose name is peace"⁴¹, 30 January 2017.
- The harvest of justice is sown in peace,⁴² US Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1993.
- The challenge of peace, US Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB),⁴³ God's promise and our response, a pastoral letter on war and peace, 3 May 1983.

Latin America

- "I See Violence and Strife in the City"⁴⁴ Archbishop José Luis Escobar Alas, San Salvador: Pastoral Letter (24 March 2016)
- Que en Cristo Nuestra Paz México tenga Vida Digna,⁴⁵ Episcopal Conference of Mexico (2010)
- Fifth General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops' Conferences at Aparecida⁴⁶, #541-543: peace and violence

36 <https://www.dbk.de/fileadmin/redaktion/veroeffentlichungen/deutsche-bischoefe/DB66en.pdf>

37 https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/rc1/11-2_214.pdf

38 <https://www.arkansas-catholic.org/columns/column/7306/If-Just-War-theory-is-inadequate-lets-think-Just-Peace>

39 https://archdiosf.org/documents/2022/1/220111_ABW_Pastoral_Letter_LivingintheLightofChristsPeace_Official_Reduced.pdf

40 <https://www.archbalt.org/kingpastoral/>

41 <https://www.skeparchy.org/wordpress/catholic-bishops-of-saskatchewan-a-statement-to-the-muslim-community-tragic-events-in-quebec-city/>

42 <https://www.usccb.org/resources/harvest-justice-sown-peace>

43 <https://www.usccb.org/upload/challenge-peace-gods-promise-our-response-1983.pdf>

44 http://www.romerotrue.org.uk/sites/default/files/Transl.%20-%20Mgr.%20Escobar%20Ltr_0.pdf

45 https://cem.org.mx/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Que_en_Cristo_nuestra_Paz_Mexico_tenga_vida_digna-1.pdf

46 <http://www.celam.org/aparecida/Ingles.pdf>

issues are addressed; the power of love is contrasted with violence (May 2007)

- Archbishop Oscar Romero, El Salvador, “The Church’s Mission Amid the National Crisis”⁴⁷ Fourth Pastoral Letter (6 August 1979)
- Archbishop Oscar Romero, El Salvador, “The Church and Popular Political Organizations”⁴⁸ Third Pastoral Letter co-authored by Bishop Arturo Rivera y Damas, Bishop of Santiago de María (6 August 1978)
- Conference of Latin American Bishops, Medellín, Colombia (1968); excerpts on justice, peace and poverty from final document⁴⁹, 6 September 1968 (Excerpted by Gerald Schlabach)
- Dom Helder Camara, 1968 Essential Writings⁵⁰ (Orbis Books, 2009)

Suggestions for Advancing Gospel Nonviolence in the Local Church

Jesus taught his disciples to love their enemies (Mt 5:44) and to turn the other cheek (Mt 5:39). When he stopped her accusers from stoning the woman caught in adultery (Jn 8:1-11), when he called us to be peacemakers (Mt 5:9), and when, on the night before he died, he told Peter to put away his sword (Mt 26:52), Jesus marked out the path of nonviolence.

Nonviolence is a spirituality, a way of life, a method for change, and a universal ethic. It is at the heart of the Gospel, in which Jesus combined the rejection of violence with the power of love and reconciliation. As followers of Jesus, we are summoned to the way of faithful nonviolence, especially as we face the realities of violence in our communities and around the world.

We are grateful for all you are doing to deepen and advance Gospel nonviolence in the parishes, families, religious orders, seminaries, universities, and schools in your diocese through education, formation, preaching, pastoral life, and advocacy.

The Challenge of Violence

“Violence is self-destructive and self-defeating. Nothing is gained by violence and so much is lost.”
– Pope Francis (Twitter)

Violence is physical and emotional harm, but also the harm that unjust systems do to people and our planet. We experience this harm in our lives, our relationships, our communities, and our societies. We suffer when the world is structured and organized to normalize the violence of harm and all the ways it dehumanizes, dominates and destroys. “The inalienable human rights must be safeguarded in every circumstance. It is not permissible to kill in order to impose a solution.” (1979 World Day of Peace Message).

As Pope Francis wrote, “we find ourselves engaged in a horrifying world war fought piecemeal. ...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.” (2017 World Day of Peace Message) And so much more.

Violence is utterly opposed to the Gospel; it will only complicate, not solve, the monumental challenges of our time. Nonviolent approaches, on the other hand, are key to the survival of life on earth and to the healing of our planet.

But for those to work, it is important to be clear about the violence we face. Nonviolent strategies and solutions are first rooted in identifying, investigating, and analyzing the realities of violence and injustice. What forms of violence are around us? How do they impact on the most vulnerable in our world? What are their roots? How are they maintained? How can they be changed? What

47 <http://www.romerotrue.org.uk/sites/default/files/fourth%20pastoral%20letter.pdf>

48 <http://www.romerotrue.org.uk/sites/default/files/third%20pastoral%20letter.pdf>

49 <https://www.geraldschlabach.net/misc/medellin-1968-excerpts/>

50 <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/view/19077/dom-helder-camara>

specific nonviolent practices are appropriate for addressing the violence around us?

The development of nonviolent spiritualities and practices in your diocese will depend on a recognition of the reality and nature of the violence at hand. What is the violence that you see? What do you and the people in your diocese long to transform and heal? What realities call for nonviolent strategies, tools, training, formation, catechesis, preaching and ministry?

The Way of Gospel Nonviolence

Nonviolence is at the core of the Gospel and a way forward to meet the crises of our time. It is a force for unity and reconciliation that mobilizes goodness, imagination, humility, courage and tenderness. It is agape love and the sanctity of life in action. It decolonizes the mind. It challenges cruelty. It rehumanizes the traumatized. It fosters trust and connection. It is a healing response to the cry of the earth, the cry of the poor, and the cry for peace. It is key to a *Laudato Si'* future.

When Pope Francis calls us to embrace Jesus' teaching about nonviolence, he is reminding us that the Church and all disciples have been commanded to reject the temptation of violence, to love even our enemies, and to nurture peace in its richest sense: *shalom*, the fullness of peace and justice for all (2017 World Day of Peace Message). Doing this means grappling with violence and conflict, not passively or violently, but with the spirit and methods of Gospel nonviolence: responding to evil with good (Romans 12:17-21), breaking the spiral of violence, and creating the potential for reconciliation.

We live nonviolently because this is how God wants us to live. The results are ultimately in God's hands. At the same time, living the way of nonviolence – in our lives, our Church, and our world – can open powerful opportunities for just and peaceful alternatives. With nonviolence, we stand against the violence in our lives and communities, but also against destructive systems that directly affect millions of migrants, marginalize billions of people, and seriously damage the earth's ability to sustain life.

Broader than pacifism, nonviolence is a proven-effective method for preventing or interrupting violence and for protecting vulnerable people. Empirical research has demonstrated that nonviolent strategies are twice as effective as violent ones (Chenoweth and Stephan, *How Civil Resistance Works*). Nonviolent methods have been mobilized to champion human rights, struggle for economic justice, respond to humanitarian crises, build more democratic societies, and strive to heal the planet.

Central to the Gospel and the life of the Catholic Church, nonviolence has been increasingly affirmed anew in papal and episcopal statements, biblical exegesis and theological research, ministries and pastoral practices, and the lived experience of Catholics worldwide. Each document of the Church relating to peace and war since Pope John XXIII's groundbreaking encyclical *Pacem in Terris* (1963)—from the Council document on *The Church in the Modern World* to the US bishops' letters *The Challenge of Peace* (1983) and *The Harvest of Justice is Sown in Peace* (1993)—has progressively given more space to Gospel nonviolence. Saint Paul VI, Saint John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis have each deepened the call for nonviolent peace and widened the Church's understanding of nonviolence. Most recently, *Laudato Si'* and *Fratelli Tutti* resound with the spirit of nonviolence.

The Church is increasingly returning to the way of Gospel nonviolence.

Examples of the Local Church Living Gospel Nonviolence

Catholic communities around the world are bringing Jesus' nonviolence alive today:

- *South Sudan*: People of different ethnicities and religious backgrounds adopted intentional practices to reduce communal violence and to live in harmony and fellowship in Kuron Peace Village.
- *The Philippines*: The Philippine Ecumenical Peace Platform in Mindanao implemented

nonviolent communication strategies and restorative justice practices to foster effective interfaith dialogue for peace in an area of political violence, identity-based armed conflict, ethnic and clan divisions, and rebel violence.

- *Democratic Republic of Congo*: 40,000 election provided nonviolent unarmed civilian protection to observe the voting process and conduct a backup vote count during the 2019 presidential election.
- *Fiji*: The Church helped to scuttle a coup by publicly calling for nonviolent responses across the country.
- *Colombia*: International collaboration and unarmed civilian accompaniment helped to sustain and enhance the nonviolent campaign of farmers in Las Pavas who were facing threats of violence from a foreign palm oil corporation.
- *Croatia*: In a post-war context of violent nationalism and xenophobia, communities organized public actions to show unity among those separated by nationalism and to foster conversations across Hrvatska/Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia, enabling communities to learn from one another.
- *Kenya*: Training of pastoralist communities in nonviolent communication and conflict transformation interrupted political manipulation by armed militias and disrupted lethal raids that had become the norm.
- *Syria/Lebanon*: Operazione Colomba volunteers accompanied Syrian refugees in Lebanon in daily life; worked with refugees to create a peace proposal for Syria and with refugees to open humanitarian corridors throughout Europe.
- *Central Africa Republic*: Catholic Relief Services (CRS) helped to rebuild social cohesion and implement anti-genocide measures during several years of civil war.
- *United States*: Catholic leaders helped organize a nonviolent campaign to challenge the separation of immigrant children from their parents at the US-Mexico border.
- *Mexico*: The Movement for Peace and Justice with Dignity (MPJD), a mass nonviolent civil resistance movement, brought together thousands of relatives of the murdered

and disappeared in response to killings and disappearances.

- *Ukraine*: Women's groups have played a key role in calling for nonviolent democratic change, working with internally displaced persons and looking for common security solutions to the conflict.

In the footsteps of these courageous women and men, the Universal Church is now being called to embrace anew the way of nonviolence in every dimension of the life and mission of the Church.

Advancing Gospel Nonviolence in Episcopal Conferences, Dioceses, Parishes

In this Kairos moment of global violence and injustice, the Church is being called to advance nonviolent solutions. As part of this, dioceses and episcopal conferences can play a key role in bringing Gospel nonviolence more fully into the life of the Church.

Deep connections with the local people, who suffer most during violence and war, can stir this spirit of renewal in powerful ways. Steps for nurturing a more nonviolent Church working for a more nonviolent world might include:

- Modeling human dignity, civility, nonviolent communication, and nonviolent resistance in response to dehumanizing behavior, rhetoric, or outright violence
- Promoting restorative justice, mediation, arbitration, and trauma healing as tools for conflict transformation
- Establishing Gospel nonviolence curricula in seminaries and Catholic schools
- Assessing the violence in your diocese and explore specific effective nonviolent strategies in response
- Hosting diocesan or regional conferences on nonviolent responses to local issues
- Holding seminars, workshops, and trainings for clergy serving in the dioceses on how to communicate the message of the Gospel on nonviolence

- Integrating Gospel nonviolence catechesis and resources in new or existing peace and justice commissions
- Ensuring that diocesan investments are consistent with a commitment to Gospel nonviolence
- Exploring ways in which Gospel nonviolence can support synodality in diocesan processes
- Advocating for nonviolent strategies in the local, national, and global spheres
- Integrating Gospel nonviolence at every level of the Church — dioceses, parishes, families, religious orders, seminaries, universities, and schools — through education, formation, preaching, pastoral life, and advocacy
- Publishing a pastoral letter on Gospel nonviolence reflecting the concerns and realities of the diocese:

In his message for the World Day of Peace (1 January 2017), Pope Francis invites the People of God as a whole, political leaders, administrators, families, educators and all Christians to make nonviolence their “way of life” in the face of the violence that has free rein in local or international relations, an invitation that the bishops are responsible for relaying through their pastoral letters.

- Inviting Christians to convert their hearts to Gospel nonviolence
- By promoting nonviolent communities that care for the common home: their members must be human beings who banish violence from their hearts, thoughts and actions
- By highlighting the suffering caused by violence
- By integrating nonviolence as a fundamental value in diocesan life

Potential Impact of Integrating Nonviolence into the Life of the Church

In April 2016, the Vatican hosted the landmark “Nonviolence and Just Peace” conference in Rome, co-sponsored with Pax Christi International, the global Catholic peace movement, which brought together participants from around the world. Central to the conversation were voices of people living in the midst of acute violence. The conference concluded by issuing *An Appeal to the Catholic Church to Recommit to the Centrality of Gospel Nonviolence*, which made a series of recommendations for integrating nonviolence throughout the Church.⁵¹ In 2017 Pope Francis shared with humanity the World Day of Peace message entitled, “Nonviolence: A Style of Politics for Peace.”⁵² In this first ever papal World Day of Peace message on nonviolence Pope Francis proclaimed: “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.”⁵³ This powerful declaration accelerated the growing recognition of the centrality of nonviolence to the vision of Jesus and to the life and work of the Church. To support this growing recommitment to nonviolence, the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative began in 2017 to organize an international research project on the biblical, theological, ethical, pastoral, and strategic dimensions of nonviolence. Encouraged by the Vatican, this process involved 120 theologians, scholars, and peace practitioners from around the world. In April 2019 these findings were shared at the second Vatican consultation on nonviolence in Rome entitled “Path of Nonviolence: Towards a Culture of Peace,” where we joined with participants from across the globe—including scholars and peacebuilders from contexts of extreme violence, as well as cardinals and archbishops.⁵⁴

51 *An Appeal to the Catholic Church to Re-Commit to the Centrality of Gospel Nonviolence*, Final conference statement, Nonviolence and Just Peace: Contributing to the Catholic Understanding of and Commitment to Nonviolence, Rome, April 11-13, 2016.

52 Message Of His Holiness Pope Francis For The Celebration Of The Fiftieth World Day Of Peace, 1 January 2017, “*Nonviolence: a Style of Politics for Peace*” http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/peace/documents/papa-francesco_20161208_messaggio-l-giornata-mondiale-pace-2017.html

53 Ibid.

54 “Faith leaders, peace practitioners deepen Church’s commitment to nonviolence and peace,” <https://nonviolencejustpeace.net/2019/04/03/path-of-nonviolence-toward-a-culture-of-peace/>

Were the Church to fully integrate active, challenging, and transformative nonviolence at every level, it could have a powerful impact on the world, if only because of its size and scale. Catholics make up 18 percent of the world population, with 1.3 billion people; the Catholic Church is the largest nonprofit organization in the world. The Church runs nearly 100,000 elementary schools and 50,000 secondary schools. It operates 5,000 hospitals and has a diplomatic presence in nearly every country. By mobilizing its resources, the Church could help the entire global community to step back from the brink of catastrophic violence and begin to move in a more just and peaceful direction, including by fostering intercultural dialogue.⁵⁵ In this spirit, Pax Christi's Catholic Nonviolence Initiative has urged the Church to:

- Integrate nonviolence throughout the life of the Church—in preaching, sacraments, ministries, spirituality, formation processes—in every diocese, parish, religious order, seminary, school and university.
- Create ways for Catholics from the beginning of their lives to understand and appreciate the connection of nonviolence to the heart of the Gospel, practical ways to promote and live

nonviolence in a violent world and the power of active nonviolence to promote social justice and respect for the integrity of creation.

Train Catholics to transform conflict and prevent violence in their families, their neighborhoods, their workplaces, their cities and even in their churches.

- Encourage Catholics everywhere to study and consciously join, even organize, strategic nonviolent campaigns to achieve the just and peaceful world and the healthy planet for which we all long.
- Empower Catholics to advocate actively for less spending on war and preparations for war and for increased investment in diplomacy, unarmed civilian protection, early warning systems, trauma healing, trauma-informed programs and training in conflict transformation, as well as on just and sustainable development, education, environmental healing—efforts that we know can make a difference.
- Support a dramatic increase in discussions within the Church, with people of other religious traditions and with the larger world about the power of active nonviolence.

55 Marie Dennis, "Healing a Broken World," Pax Christi Illinois Assembly, October 20, 2018.

Part Three:

Gospel Nonviolence Applied in Different Contexts

Nonviolence: The Path to a *Laudato Si'* Future⁵⁶

With increasing clarity we have seen that the cry of the earth and the suffering of the creatures living on this planet are intrinsically interconnected with human violence. Humans, instead of caring for the earth that nurtures us, have damaged its ability to sustain life. The Sermon on the Mount, Jesus' blueprint for nonviolence, and our growing understanding of nonviolence essential to the future envisioned by *Laudato Si'*. Gospel nonviolence is much more than a political strategy; it is a spirituality through which we see and interpret life, a set of virtues and principles for personal and social change. To treat the earth nonviolently is to ensure the survival and well-being of the whole earth community.

But this unprecedented global transformation will depend on mobilizing worldwide people-power movements for change using active nonviolence that is "strategic, courageous, love-centered and organized."⁵⁷ Without a committed and systematic advance of the vision, principles, strategies, practices and tactics of nonviolence, humanity will remain under-equipped to meet this historic challenge.

Nonviolence and the *Laudato Si'* Action Platform

The following offers a brief explanation of why nonviolence is essential to reaching each of the seven goals and suggests how "Gospel nonviolence for a *Laudato Si'* future" might be concretely advanced in each sector, assuming cultural and contextual differences.

The theology and practice of nonviolence are at the core of the Gospel. Nonviolence combines unconditional love in action with a constant effort to oppose violence. It is a spirituality, a way of life, a strategy for changing the world, a method for protecting the vulnerable and a universal ethic. Key to achieving a *Laudato Si'* future is grounding our efforts in the power of active nonviolence.

Goal 1. Response to the Cry of the Earth (greater use of clean renewable energy and reducing fossil fuels in order to achieve carbon neutrality, efforts to protect and promote biodiversity, guaranteeing access to clean water for all, etc.)

The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life. (LS2)

The Cry of the Earth is a global, anguished call for nonviolent solutions to the violence of climate change, loss of biodiversity, destruction of habitat, the lack of access to clean water, and the enormous impact of human violence on the biosphere. Violence in every form—direct, cultural and structural—is assaulting our common home and compounding the growing crisis that threatens the very survival of our planet. The earth is suffering from the violence of indifference and domination, war and militarisation, and destructive extractivism. In many countries, violence is also used to suppress environmental

56 See Marie Dennis, "Gospel Nonviolence and a *Laudato Si'* Future" in *Laudato Si' Reader* (Rome: *Laudato Si'*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Dicastery for Integral Human Development, 2021) p. 83-86.

57 In an interview with *Vatican News*, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s daughter Bernice King said that, if he were alive today, he would urge us "to embrace nonviolence, which is strategic, courageous, love-centered and organized, in order to realize the Beloved Community, which includes the eradication of what he called the Triple Evils of racism, poverty, and militarism." Alessandro Gisotti, "Bernice King: The Pope and my father, united in the same dream," *Vatican News*, June 6, 2020. <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/world/news/2020-06/interview-bernice-alberti-ne-king-george-floyd-discrimination.html>

defenders, thus disrupting our capacity to respond to the Cry of the Earth. Ecological destruction is systemic and structural violence.

Research has shown that war, preparations for war and other military activities are particularly fossil fuel intensive, contribute very substantially to climate change and have a tremendous negative impact on the physical environment. Vast areas of planet earth have been rendered uninhabitable and unproductive during war and violent conflict by landmines, bombs, pollution, destruction of forests and the destruction of habitat as well as many diverse species of plants and animals.

A single nuclear warhead could cause devastating climate change, resulting in widespread drought and famine that could cost a billion lives. At the same time, around the world nuclear weapons facilities have already contaminated land and water with radioactive waste lasting 100,000 years. The dangerous legacy of nuclear weapons testing and the disposal of nuclear waste have impacted people of colour, particularly indigenous people and Pacific Islanders, in a clear and tragic illustration of environmental racism.

At the same time, extractive projects imposed on communities for example, in Latin America, have increased the criminalisation of communities protecting their land and water. As of June 2020, the Latin American mining conflict observatory (OCMAL) recorded 277 socio-environmental conflicts associated with mining in the region, of which five are transnational.

Response to the Cry of the Earth must be characterised by a conversion to nonviolence that accompanies ecological conversion to encourage sustained and courageous actions to bind up the wounds we have inflicted on the earth. Because this profound shift will require unprecedented unity and unparalleled cooperation in addition to conversion of heart, well-prepared nonviolent struggle and the fullness of nonviolent love will be necessary to heal our wounded planet and nourish a “civilisation of love.” (LS 231) Such a response to the Cry of the Earth actualizes the just peace norm of ecological sustainability.

Goal 2. Response to the Cry of the Poor
(defence of human life from conception to death and all forms of life on Earth, with special attention to vulnerable groups such as indigenous communities, migrants, children at risk through slavery, etc.)

Today, however, we have to realize that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor. (LS 49)

The Cry of the Poor calls us to engage in a vast, nonviolent struggle for the well-being of the most marginalized people and communities of life around the world. This effort requires us to recognise and address the structural and cultural violences that threaten human life, perpetuating poverty and exclusion, cruelty to animals, and loss of critical biodiversity.

For example, the violences of racism, xenophobia and discrimination attack the core of a person’s dignity, divide the human family, and result in negative economic, social and cultural consequences including poverty, marginalisation, social exclusion and economic disparities. Too often political and legal structures or institutions perpetuate marginalisation and, in many cases, constitute an important factor of discrimination in the exclusion of migrants and people of colour.

The violent subjugation of indigenous people, whose worldview honours alternative possibilities for existence based on right relationships between humans and nature, has contributed to unsustainable ways of life and led to ongoing, destructive militarism. A globalisation of solidarity rooted in nonviolence is urgently needed to promote sustainable communities based on economies of “enough” and to foster inclusive human security based on social, economic and ecological justice.

Furthermore, massive investments in arms and preparations for war by rich countries and poor countries alike; economies that depend on the

development, production and sale of weapons; and companies and countries that profit from marketing arms and the tools of war illustrate the human community's appalling failure to hear or respond to the Cry of the Poor who so often lack the most basic necessities of life, including food, clean water, safe housing, meaningful employment/a basic income and health care. Nonviolent strategy encompasses the social weapons of the powerless or "the weapons of the weak," all tools that will be needed for a revolution of values for a *Laudato Si'* future.

Violence is also evident in the exploitation and mistreatment of animals, whether for food or pets, research or entertainment and up to one million species currently face the threat of extinction, more than at any other time in human history. Human imposition on other species has had huge ecological consequences that have long been of deep concern to people of conscience, including Buddhists and Jains.

The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals represent important steps toward a just, peaceful and nonviolent planet. But the transformation they represent will only be achieved through the mobilisation of vast political will, spiritual commitment, nonviolence education, training and skill-building in the philosophy and strategies of active nonviolence and grassroots organizing at every level of every society. Such responses to the Cry of the Poor actualize the just peace norms of economic justice, racial justice, ecological justice, relationality and education in key nonviolent skills.

Goal 3. Ecological economics (sustainable production, fair-trade, ethical consumption, ethical investments, divestment from fossil fuels and any economic activity harmful to the planet and the people, investment in renewable energy, etc.)

"... an economy that gives life and does not kill, includes and does not exclude, humanizes and does not dehumanize, takes care of creation and does not plunder it." Economy of Francesco (19 to 21 November 2020)

Ecological economics is a nonviolent economic order rooted in right relationships within the whole earth community that promote sustainable communities and economies of "enough" and foster inclusive human security based on social, economic and ecological justice. Ecological economics breaks the logic of violence and exploitation that has been characteristic of a profit and consumption-driven, economic model based on the assumption of unlimited economic growth and the externalisation of environmental and labour costs.

Learning nonviolence and practicing to live nonviolently will help us to understand and accept such a major shift in economic life. Nonviolence stands against violence, but is also the antidote to violence. In these times of crisis, it is important to expand exponentially our understanding of and ability to use nonviolence by applying it in our own lives, building its infrastructure, creating a constructive nonviolent alternative economic system designed to safeguard humanity and the earth – and generating the people-power to bring these systems into being. The field of Nonviolent Political Economy has much to teach here, with particular wisdom from Buddhist traditions.

Ecological economics will also of necessity be demilitarised at a local, national and global level. It will not invest in preparations for war or militarised security, the production and marketing of military equipment or weapons, including nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass

destruction. A sustained, long term campaign for economic conversion from militarised economies is essential to addressing the climate crisis.

Catholic workers and owners involved in the production of weapons and related businesses should be encouraged to examine the ethical and moral dimensions of that work based on a universal ethic of nonviolence and to develop a strategy for shifting to alternative work in the green economy. The deep experience of many Catholic religious communities, organisations and dioceses with socially and environmentally responsible investment could facilitate investment in projects that align with a nonviolence/integral ecology ethical perspective.

Goal 4. Adoption of simple lifestyles
(sobriety in the use of resources and energy, avoid single-use plastic, adopt a more plant-based diet and reduce meat consumption, greater use of public transport and avoid polluting modes of transportation, etc.)

Many things have to change course, but it is we human beings above all who need to change. We lack an awareness of our common origin, of our mutual belonging, and of a future to be shared with everyone. This basic awareness would enable the development of new convictions, attitudes and forms of life. A great cultural, spiritual and educational challenge stands before us, and it will demand that we set out on the long path of renewal. (LS 202)

The path of renewal must include a conversion to nonviolence. “Violence is a tendency that pulls us back, away from the recognition of unity; nonviolence pulls us forward, toward the recognition of unity... Nonviolence is connected with higher consciousness or love ... Nonviolent behaviour is central to who we humans are ... Nonviolence is not only at home in this new story of unity. Nonviolence is the new story and the way to get there.” (Michael Nagler, Third Harmony) Nonviolence is a spirituality and a courageous way of life that actively challenges violence and

all forms of injustice with creativity, imagination and love. Nonviolence is a path for conversion, for deep personal and societal transformation from the “old story” of domination and exploitation to the “new story” of universal communion.

Nonviolence is a constructive process applicable at a personal, interpersonal, and social-structural level. It includes nonviolent resistance and nonviolent action for social change. It also activates everyday techniques and practices, including nonviolent communication, compassionate listening, restorative justice peace circles, peaceful parenting, trauma healing, anti-racism training and nonviolent community-building. It is an essential basis for simple living. Such movements toward simplicity actualize the just peace norms of forming nonviolent communities and spiritual disciplines.

Goal 5. Ecological education (re-think and re-design educational curricula and educational institution reform in the spirit of integral ecology to create ecological awareness and action, promoting the ecological vocation of young people, teachers and leaders of education etc.)

There is a nobility in the duty to care for creation through little daily actions, and it is wonderful how education can bring about real changes in lifestyle. (LS211)

Humans, instead of caring for the earth that nurtures us, have damaged its ability to sustain life. Thus, we are now faced with ecological problems that threaten the destruction of the earth’s life support systems. We must learn to become good, nonviolent partners with the earth to ensure the well-being of our ecological whole.

To build the capacity globally for nonviolent lives, relationships, strategies and movements for social change, which are needed to navigate the climate crises, promote ecological economics and foster simple lifestyles, will require massive conscientisation as well as the mobilisation of

nonviolent people power worldwide to support national and international policies establishing a just, nonviolent sustainable global economy. This conscientisation begins by including the term “nonviolence” and the terminology of nonviolence strategy, ethics, and spirituality in all *Laudato Si’* teaching. The term invites inquiry and is a key to opening a rich treasury of wisdom and practice from within the Church and other traditions.

Fundamental formation, education, training and skill-building in the philosophy and strategies of active nonviolence is urgently needed in every corner of the world. Bring the margins, where nonviolence is practiced out of necessity or choice, to the centre of Catholic education. Education in the principles and practices of Gospel nonviolence for Catholic parishes, religious communities, Catholic universities, Catholic organisations and 1.3 billion Catholics worldwide, could make a tremendous contribution to a new way of being in relationship with other humans and with the earth in lieu of entrenched violences, including ecological violence, that too often define our societies.

Such training advanced by the Church could build the capacity of civil society and popular movements to comprehend and spread the principles, strategies and methods of nonviolent social change that are necessary for a future envisioned in *Laudato Si’*. Careful, often long-term, preparations and planning are fundamental to effective nonviolent people power movements. This includes developing the skills to transform conflict, to interrupt environmental violence, violence against non-human species and violence against environmental defenders, and to organise systems, structures and policies that contribute to cultures of nonviolence for the well-being of the whole earth community. Such education actualizes the just peace norm of training in key nonviolent skills.

Goal 6. Ecological spirituality (recover a religious vision of God’s creation, encourage greater contact with the natural world in a spirit of wonder, praise, joy and gratitude, promote creation-centred liturgical celebrations, develop ecological catechesis, prayer, retreats, formation, etc.)

An integral ecology is also made up of simple daily gestures which break with the logic of violence, exploitation and selfishness. In the end, a world of exacerbated consumption is at the same time a world which mistreats life in all its forms. (LS 230)

The human community is facing a spiritual, ecological and social crisis inflamed daily by a worldwide culture of violence and war. As articulated in *Laudato Si’*, ecological conversion “entails a loving awareness that we are not disconnected from the rest of creatures, but joined in a splendid universal communion.” (# 220) Nonviolence is a process for nurturing such an ecological conversion to right relationships among humans and between humans and the rest of the natural world – from the old way of domination and exploitation toward a “civilisation of love.” (*Laudato Si’* #231) It is personal, interpersonal, social-structural and ecological.

“Gospel nonviolence is not simply a subtopic in the field of ethics or a significant tactic in the politics of peace and revolution.” Instead, “nonviolence is a way of talking about the essential mystery of God as revealed and embodied in Jesus Christ and about God’s active transformation of humanity into God’s nonviolent reign of peace and justice...”

In addition to being a practical method for confronting violence, and fostering justice, without violence, nonviolence is a paradigm of the fullness of life that reaches into all the dimensions of life. Bishop Robert McElroy said, “We need to mainstream nonviolence in the Church. We need to move it from the margins of Catholic thought to the centre. Nonviolence is a spirituality, a lifestyle, a programme of societal action and a universal ethic.”

As a universal ethic, nonviolence offers the Church a theological, pastoral and strategic foundation for the long-term work of struggling for and building the future envisioned in *Laudato Si'*. It is a paradigm of the fullness of life with which we are called to respond to monumental contemporary challenges, from the destruction of the Amazon to the threat of nuclear weapons and climate change; from the systemic oppression of migrants to the unspeakable suffering caused by human trafficking; from the violence of rampant poverty and excessive consumption to the catastrophe of war and the destruction of our beautiful planet. Nonviolence is a theological and practical framework that cuts across these and many other forms of violence.

At the core of Christian nonviolence stands the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus' blueprint, vision and instruction for mature Christlike discipleship, with its new commandments of nonviolence. Gospel nonviolence is much more than a political strategy; it is a spirituality through which we see and interpret life, a set of virtues and principles for personal and social change. Nonviolence is not passive. It is not only the cessation of killing, although that is a clear starting point. Rather, nonviolence speaks truth in a global struggle for integrity, just peace and ecological sustainability. It is transformation and healing of our lives and our world. Such a shift actualizes the just peace norms of sustaining spiritual disciplines and virtuous habits.

Goal 7. Emphasis on community involvement and participatory action to care for creation at the local, regional, national and international levels (promote advocacy and people's campaigns, encourage rootedness in local territory and neighbourhood ecosystems, etc.)

People and their movements are called to cry out, to mobilise and to demand – peacefully, but firmly – that appropriate and urgently-needed measures be taken. I ask you, in the name of God, to defend Mother Earth. Pope Francis, World Meeting of Popular Movements address, 2015

The unprecedented global transformation that is urgently needed to achieve a *Laudato Si'* future will depend on mobilising worldwide people-power movements for change using active nonviolence that is “strategic, courageous, love-centred and organised.” The universal ethic of nonviolence can provide a clear and stable foundation for that “cultural revolution” (*Laudato Si'* #114) toward “justice, peace, love and beauty.” (*Laudato Si'* #246)

The Catholic Church, with its religious and civil society partners around the world, can play an extremely important role in support of this shift by energising nonviolent people-power movements for structural change (including in the areas of climate change, biodiversity and ecological sustainability) as well as nonviolent social organising skills and decision-making practices that make it possible to build up a new world in the shell of the old. The Church can provide critical training in the theology and philosophy of nonviolence and in a wide spectrum of nonviolent approaches to social transformation, encouraging people's movements to prepare well and to develop the discipline necessary for sustained engagement.

Rooted in the life and teachings of Jesus, nonviolence is the most faithful and effective way forward in our turbulent and violent world. Nonviolence clearly rejects violence; creates

openings for lament, confession, forgiveness, reparation, and reconciliation; and applies strategies for critically-needed structural and systemic change. Nonviolence is key to our journey toward a *Laudato Si'* future.

In urging us to respond to the harrowing challenge of the climate crisis, the pope has underscored the spirit and dynamic of nonviolence. Pope Francis demands that we defend Mother Earth, and to do so in a powerful, nonviolent spirit: “peacefully, but firmly.” Nonviolence is not simply a stance or an ideal; it is a relentless process of struggle and transformation that resolutely challenges violence without using violence; transforms and resolves conflict; and seeks justice, peace and reconciliation for all.

This will require setting in motion an unprecedented global movement for change. This initiative will succeed to the extent that community involvement and participatory action for integral ecology at the local, regional, national and international levels are nonviolent. Explicit nonviolent strategies are twice as effective as violent ones because they are more likely to generate and sustain the people-power required for social change. Such emphasis actualizes the just peace norms of participatory processes, robust civil society and nonviolent direct action.

This shift to a nonviolent future will not be easy or quick. It requires enormous organizing, training and discipline over time. But it is not only possible—it is likely to be the most effective path forward to meet the huge challenges over the next decades.

All sectors of the Church can integrate nonviolence into their commitment to *Laudato Si'*:

1. Nonviolence and Families

Families are the building blocks of integral ecology, especially when they are rooted in the vision and practice of Gospel nonviolence. *Laudato Si'* families will deepen and enrich their commitment and action to heal our common home rooted in and applying the vision and tools of active nonviolence, including in the following ways:

- Emphasize at all stages of family life the transformative power of Gospel nonviolence in all of our relationships, including with planet Earth.
- Support the development of right relationships within the family, the parish, the larger community, with the Earth, and with the self.
- Foster ways of living nonviolently within the family, the parish, the community, and the larger world.
- Learn together how to communicate nonviolently.
- Learn nonviolent parenting skills to foster conflict transformation.
- Engage in and support nonviolent peace education within the family, schools and the parish.
- Reflect on the Church’s teachings on nonviolence and how they can move us to respond to the climate crisis and protect biodiversity in persistent and constructive ways
- Discuss in developmentally appropriate ways the great challenge of violence to the earth and our calling to create nonviolent solutions.
- Do projects together that contribute to nonviolent solutions to the climate crisis.

2. Nonviolence and Dioceses

Bishops and episcopal conferences can play a key role in integrating Gospel nonviolence into the life of the Church to support the healing of the earth. Following are steps dioceses could take to spread the power of active nonviolence for challenging the climate crisis and promoting ecological conversion:

- Host diocesan conferences on “Gospel nonviolence for a *Laudato Si'* future”.

- Integrate courses on “Gospel nonviolence for a *Laudato Si’* future” in diocesan educational systems, including universities, schools, seminaries, catechesis etc.
- Hold seminars on “Gospel nonviolence for a *Laudato Si’* future” for the clergy and lay leaders serving in the diocese.
- Provide formation in Gospel nonviolence for priests, deacons, sisters or other ministers so that they in turn form congregations and communities, especially the young, with the nonviolent Jesus at the heart of their faith, a just peace ethic to shape moral reasoning and effective nonviolence skills, practices, habits and approaches for transforming conflict, protecting the Earth and promoting environmental justice.
- Promote restorative justice, arbitration and mediation at the diocesan level to show that conflicts can be transformed in a nonviolent way. Appropriately transparent conflict transformation processes should be normalised within all Church institutions and organisations.
- Bishops’ *Ad Limina Apostolorum* visits to the Vatican that also involve meetings with the various dicasteries could include on their agenda an exchange on “Gospel nonviolence for a *Laudato Si’* future.” This may apply in particular to the meetings with representatives of the Secretariat of State and the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development.
- Issue statements or pastoral letters that include not only clear Catholic teaching, but also examples of nonviolent practices in local communities and actions the Church plans to take to promote the nonviolent transformation of a given conflict, including conflicts related to environmental destruction, environmental racism and eco-justice.
- Develop advocacy positions and language consistent with nonviolent approaches and the well-being of the environment, as well as illustrating their intersectionality. Focus on just peace norms in supporting such positions.
- Model civility, nonviolent communication and respect at all times, clearly indicating that respect for the dignity of the other can accompany differences in beliefs.
- Talk with and join Catholics and others involved

in frontline nonviolent campaigns for care for the earth; be willing to support or promote ethical obstructive tactics such as strikes, boycotts, civil disobedience.

3. Parishes

- Integrate “Gospel nonviolence for a *Laudato Si’* future” throughout the life of the parish through formation, catechesis, education, bible study, liturgy, preaching, sacraments and ministry.
- Renew the Church by exploring an explicit commitment to Jesus’ nonviolence and to living the nonviolent life (rejecting violence; promoting restorative justice; creating openings for forgiveness and reconciliation; and applying strategies for peacebuilding) as a basis for the journey to a *Laudato Si’* future.
- Develop Gospel nonviolence guilds at the local level that intentionally respond to the Cry of the Earth and the Cry of the Poor
- Create opportunities to learn about ecological violence and active nonviolence from the lived experience of the local community.
- Support training in parenting skills, including to help children understand their own value and dignity and to equip them with the capacity to cope nonviolently with the challenges of life on a threatened planet.
- Educate parishioners about the different forms of violence, including direct violence, cultural violence, structural violence, ecological violence.
- Always include in intercessory prayers victim and perpetrator, those in unarmed civilian accompaniment and people protecting the earth in dangerous situations, as well as the Cry of the Earth.
- Lift up nonviolent peacemakers as heroes, heroines and saints of the Church, including those who have taken nonviolent action to care for the earth.
- Organise forums, community-based training and popular education programmes on “Gospel nonviolence for a *Laudato Si’* future,” illuminating how nonviolence is a spirituality, a way of life in harmony with nature and an effective approach to conflict transformation and social change.

- Collaborate locally to create peace teams which can deploy unarmed civilian protection units in situations where efforts to protect the earth are threatened.
- Create an information hub on local, national and international nonviolent actions for responding to the climate crisis and loss of biodiversity where knowledge and information can be shared quickly about successful civic organizing in different contexts.
- Offer safe meeting spaces for people to come together, begin organizing, exchange ideas, conduct fundraising and come up with approaches for nonviolent civil resistance actions.
- Make people aware of the advantages of nonviolent civil resistance in situations when resignation/passivity, violence or even methods of conflict transformation alone are unlikely to be effective or may be counterproductive for the safety and long-term well-being of a group.

4. Sacraments and Liturgy

- At the heart of the life of the Church, liturgical celebrations can be a powerful expression of the way to embrace our mission to follow in the footsteps of the nonviolent Jesus in confronting the great challenges of our time, including the climate crisis, loss of biodiversity and other forms of ecological violence.
- In the lectionary, the celebration of the Eucharist and other sacraments and prayers of the Church, give witness to the centrality of the teaching and actions of Jesus as a nonviolent leader. In homilies, written reflections and study groups, highlight examples of nonviolence in the Gospels and in other scriptural passages.
- Develop a martyrology of nonviolent defenders of the earth and honour them liturgically.
- Develop the Sacrament of Reconciliation to include a deep examination of conscience relating to our personal, communal and societal obligation to care for creation.
- Allow more freedom in the composition of liturgical texts and Eucharistic prayers, especially examples with more direct mention

of Jesus's rejection of violence in relation to violence against the non-human natural world.

- Encourage liturgists, musicians and authors to reference nonviolence and care for creation in prayers and songs and to share their creative work with parishes, dioceses, religious communities and others.
- Contribute the power of prayer, liturgical and sacramental witness to nonviolent actions in defence of Mother Earth.

Essential to the paradigm shift needed to heal our common home is infusing the vision and tools of Gospel nonviolence as integral to care for creation in all forms and levels of Catholic education—from seminaries and universities to secondary and primary schools as well as in catechesis and the formation of religious. Explicit training in the spirituality and practice of Gospel nonviolence for healing the earth is critical to this Kairos moment.

5. Nonviolence and Educational Institutions Schools

- Make peace and nonviolence education, including "Gospel nonviolence for a Laudato Si' future." a priority, beginning with the rediscovery of and recommitment to Jesus's nonviolence and including Catholic teaching on just, integral peace as necessary to healing the earth.
- Include programmes on nonviolence as well as on nonviolence and integral ecology in the basic curriculum and required courses.
- Model nonviolent practices in the school's institutional life and connect those practices to respect for the integrity of creation.
- Centre the wisdom of Indigenous communities in Catholic teaching on nonviolence and integral ecology.
- Give social media more importance as a tool for nonviolence education; use it to make more visible the relationship between violence and climate change, violence and loss of biodiversity, violence and destruction of the planet, as well as between nonviolence and defence of Mother Earth.

Universities

- Integrate nonviolence and peace in the mission and values of the university, in order to concretely guide the decisions about programming and curricula in light of advancing nonviolence across the university and to be a nonviolent institution for a *Laudato Si'* future. Explicitly establishing nonviolence and peace as a core value of the university can have wide impact on the corporate identity of the institution and create a foundation for educational priorities, programming, and a culture attuned to formation, research and training. It also prepares all people associated with the university to be part of local, national and global initiatives for confronting violence, including ecological violence.
- Develop a “Gospel nonviolence leadership corps for a *Laudato Si'* future” that would include both an academic program on integral ecology and nonviolence skill-training, such as nonviolent communication, bystander intervention, restorative circles and nonviolent resistance to ecological violence.
- In Catholic moral theology and ethics courses explore a new moral framework for just peace that rejects war and violence and consistently promotes integral ecology.
- Organise a global conference on peace and nonviolence education, including “Gospel nonviolence for a *Laudato Si'* future.”
- Encourage global educational organisations such as the International Federation of Catholic Universities to make “Gospel nonviolence for a *Laudato Si'* future” the theme for their global conferences.
- Make a preferential option for traditional peoples to centre and support within the university their teaching, culture, and practices and concretely support their efforts for preservation of language, culture and land.
- Look for close collaboration with the most influential Catholic organisations in the field of education, discussing with them the best methods to integrate nonviolence and its link to integral ecology in the life and work of Catholic educational institutions.
- Encourage academic research and dialogue about the connection between different forms

of violence and environmental destruction as well as between nonviolence, care for the earth and integral ecology. Shift investments and research away from developing weapons technology and fossil fuels.

- Offer skills-based training in nonviolence and conflict transformation for the broader community, both religious and secular, that includes a focus on ecological violence. Publicise the results of this training using radio, TV, newspapers and social media so that the whole community can utilise nonviolent language, alternative dispute resolution, and develop a working knowledge and vocabulary in nonviolence, just peace and the integrity of creation.
- Explore how Catholic aid and development agencies, such as Caritas, Catholic Relief Services and Jesuit Refugee Service, working with others, could develop and implement a nonviolent peacebuilding curriculum that focuses on “Gospel nonviolence for a *Laudato Si'* future.”

6. Nonviolence, Hospitals and Health Care Centres

COVID-19 has demonstrated clearly that a healthy ecosystem and well-resourced healthcare systems are essential to protecting humanity from the threat of communicable diseases that readily transcend borders and boundaries. Yet, preparedness to respond to COVID-19 has been hindered by war and ongoing violence, including direct attacks on health care facilities and workers, and by annual spending on weapons and preparations for war.

Research is also revealing connections between violence to the earth and trauma or climate anxiety, adding to the long list of diseases associated with environmental destruction. Furthermore, violence itself transmits, clusters, and spreads just like a contagious disease and can be stopped using the same strategies employed to fight epidemics.

Hospitals and health care centres could:

- Promote trauma-informed practices at every level of health care, especially practices that recognize ecological stress disorder and the personal and collective trauma emerging from human violence toward the earth.
- Study the potential for nonviolent communication and other nonviolent practices to mitigate conflict over climate change and loss of biodiversity and improve a community's response to the Cry of the Earth.
- Educate health care professionals, political decision-makers and the general public about the impact of war and violence, and the resulting environmental destruction, on a community's health and on its health care system.
- Support calls for ceasefires and disarmament as essential to overcoming disease and promoting a healthy planet.
- De-link medical research from military research.
- Invest in ecologically sound medical infrastructure and architecture to promote human and environmental healing.
- Help peacebuilders understand protocols for arresting the spread of communicable diseases in order to apply that knowledge to stopping and preventing violence, including ecological violence.

7. Nonviolence, Businesses, Cooperatives and Farms

Work or job-related violence robs the worker of human dignity or life itself; it destroys or unsustainably exploits the earth's resources, whether minerals, soil or water. Work-related violence is visible in jobs that fail to pay a living wage or provide benefits; in work that is demeaning, that exploits other people, that promotes or perpetuates violence and war, that is destructive to the earth and the natural world.

The universal ethic of nonviolence (including its foundations of interconnectedness, human

dignity, "right" relationships and resistance to injustice) can strengthen societal values, policies and practices that guarantee decent work within an ecological paradigm for the post-pandemic context.

In addition to respecting the integrity of creation in their business practices and products, business people, including farmers, could learn about and adhere to Catholic social teaching on the dignity of work and nonviolent jobs. They could:

- Identify marks of a nonviolent *Laudato Si'* economy based on "*techo, tierra, y trabajo*" to prioritise in their business practices.
- Study and apply to their business practices Catholic social teaching on the dignity of work and nonviolent jobs that promote integral ecology.
- Invest in research on and the development of green energy; shift their businesses to green energy. Move money away from investments in fossil fuels, natural gas, and nuclear energy. (LS 165)
- Learn about and support the ILO Decent Work agenda⁵⁸ and nonviolent jobs that promote integral ecology in the post pandemic process.
- Examine the ethical and moral dimensions of producing and marketing of weapons; develop a strategy for shifting to alternative production in the green economy based on a universal ethic of nonviolence.
- Examine the ethical and moral dimensions mining and extractive industries; rigorously adhere to ILO Convention 169,⁵⁹ learning from indigenous communities how to establish a nonviolent relationship with Mother Earth and adjust business plans accordingly.
- Study ILO Convention 190⁶⁰ and Recommendation No. 206⁶¹ that recognise the right of everyone to a world of work free from violence and harassment. Learn about the impact on workers of engaging in work that is destructive to the earth and the non-human natural world.

58 <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/decent-work/lang--en/index.htm>

59 https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C169

60 https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C190

61 https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:R206

- Learn about nonviolent witnesses like Chico Mendes (Brasil)⁶², Sister Dorothy Stang, SNDdeN (USA/Brasil)⁶³, Berta Caceres (Honduras)⁶⁴ and Ken Saro-Wiwa (Nigeria)⁶⁵, whose lives weave together a commitment to the dignity of the person, respect for the planet and nonviolent approaches to dialogue and change in the world of work.

8. Nonviolence and Organisations

The *Laudato Si'* Action Platform envisions an unprecedented global movement for change. This initiative will succeed to the extent that community involvement and participatory action for integral ecology at the local, regional, national and international levels are nonviolent. It will require enormous organizing, training and discipline over time.

Catholic organisations, movements, networks and foundations are extremely important and can make a vital contribution to the future envisioned by *Laudato Si'*. Catholic organisations with nonviolence expertise and Catholic organisations with ecological expertise could work together on a consistent and ever-deepening basis to promote a *Laudato Si'* future in local communities, nationally and internationally. They could:

1. Create resources and educational materials that explicitly make the link between violence, climate change, loss of biodiversity and other forms of environmental destruction, as well as between nonviolence and rebuilding respect for the integrity of creation.
2. Develop an integrated long-term strategy for working together that is rooted in grassroots experience and the wisdom of communities struggling at the intersection of violence and environmental destruction.
3. Create workshops, webinars and other resources to help parishes, religious communities, dioceses and educational institutions integrate a deeper understanding

of ecological violence and the role of nonviolence in their commitments to heal the earth and care for creation.

4. Build advocacy campaigns that bring together broad-based coalitions to support nonviolent strategies, programs and investments along with ecological justice, such as green energy, nonviolent civilian-based defence, reducing military spending, integral disarmament and the call from Vatican II to outlaw war.

9. Nonviolence and Religious Communities

Religious communities have tremendous transformative potential in promoting Gospel nonviolence in the life of the Church and in helping the Catholic community to understand the essential link between nonviolence and care for the earth. With their global reach and the depth of their networks they touch the lives of the faithful in significant and formative ways. In ways appropriate to their own charism and context, religious communities could:

- Integrate nonviolence and integral ecology together into formation and ongoing formation programmes.
- Encourage members and affiliates living in areas of conflict and/or violence to share their stories about the human and environmental impact of violence and about effective nonviolent efforts to transform conflict, protect vulnerable communities and heal the earth.
- Prioritise Gospel nonviolence and care for creation in outreach and promotional materials being sent to prospective members and benefactors.
- Advocate consistently nonviolent approaches to protecting and healing the earth in the local, national and international spheres.
- Be present to, take part in or support community acts of resistance and nonviolent witness in response to ecological violence or threats of violence, offering solidarity and accepting the consequences of such actions.

62 <https://www.edf.org/chico-mendes-living-legacy>

63 <https://www.sndohio.org/sister-dorothy/expanded-story>

64 <https://www.goldmanprize.org/recipient/berta-caceres/>

65 <https://www.ihrb.org/other/on-the-life-and-legacy-of-ken-saro-wiwa-iii>

Pope Francis has called the Church and the world to nonviolence in many statements and documents, including the 2017 Word Day of Peace message, *Nonviolence: A Style of Politics for Peace*⁶⁶ (see above). The spirit of nonviolence is at the heart of the great themes of Pope Francis' papacy, including solidarity, fraternity, mercy, encounter, peace, reconciliation and care of creation.

Nonviolence rejects the way of violence and unleashes the power of love in action. It is at the heart of two realities that must be at the centre of the great shift toward a healed world and a transformed humanity: conversion and organizing. What is needed now is a deep change of heart and commitment to a new way of life (conversion) and a comprehensive emergence of organised people-power worldwide to put that change of heart

into concrete practice for initiating a more just, peaceful and sustainable process (organizing).

Active nonviolence is core to both of these because nonviolence is not simply a stance or an ideal; it is a process that can actively transform the challenges we face and can create openings for life and healing. Nonviolence is an ongoing metanoia from the lie of violence and injustice to the way of truth and justice all. It is a force for good that can propel the crucial, historic shift to a world where the infinite worth of every person is valued and where our common home is honoured and protected. Nonviolence—rejecting violence; struggling for restorative justice; creating openings for forgiveness and reconciliation; and applying strategies for peacebuilding and integral human development—is the journey to a *Laudato Si'* future.

66 https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/peace/documents/papa-francesco_20161208_messaggio-l-giornata-mondiale-pace-2017.html

Nonviolence and Nuclear Disarmament

We are called to confront the existential threat that nuclear weapons pose to humanity by clearly and wholeheartedly embracing the universal ethic of nonviolence—rejecting violence and killing, returning good for evil, healing divisions, responding to the cry of the poor, loving enemies and putting sacrificial love into action for a just, peaceful and reconciled world. Such a paradigm shift is essential if we are ever to counter the profoundly destructive spiritual impact and pervasive menace of nuclear weapons.

Many years ago, Jesuit peacemaker Rev. Richard McSorley, SJ wrote, “The taproot of violence in our society is our intention to use nuclear weapons. Once we have agreed to that, all other evil is minor in comparison.”⁶⁷ Consent to the presence of nuclear weapons in our world not only accepts the risk of a nuclear conflagration in the future, but also undermines the ethical foundations for the common good here and now.

To retain nuclear weapons escalates the possibility of their use, which would unleash suffering on an unimaginable scale. “War always does grave harm to the environment and to the cultural riches of peoples, risks which are magnified when one considers nuclear arms and biological weapons.”⁶⁸ Further, the production and testing of nuclear weapons in themselves have enormous environmental consequences and social costs, including the theft of critically needed resources from the poor and the development of complex and authoritarian national security systems to maintain them.

Nonviolence: A Theological Foundation for Nuclear Disarmament

Nonviolence is a paradigm of the fullness of life, a spiritual orientation, a way of life, and a practical method for confronting violence and fostering just peace. We know that “it is truly a formidable undertaking to work for peace by living the practice of nonviolence.”⁶⁹ Yet, active nonviolence is critical to healing our world. Nonviolence calls us to be persons of integrity who as social beings and members of a global community share in a universal responsibility for the common good.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. called nonviolence “the love that does justice.”⁷⁰ Dorothy Day named it “love in action.” Historian Jonathan Schell called it “cooperative power,”⁷¹ while the nonviolence scholar Stellan Vinthagen called it “a stand against violence without using violence.”⁷² But nonviolence is deeper still. Nonviolence is a radical engagement with the suffering of our world and all the forms of violence which spawn that suffering: our own violence; the violence between persons; the violence a community experiences; the structural violence that excludes and diminishes; the violence nations impose on nations; and the violence inflicted on the earth. Each of these unleashes waves of suffering. Active nonviolence seeks to engage and end this suffering by confronting violence with love and determination.

In his age rife with structural violence, Jesus proclaimed a nonviolent Reign of God rooted in the unconditional love of God. Jesus called on his disciples to love their enemies (Matthew 5: 44);

67 Rev. Richard McSorley, SJ, “It’s a Sin to Build a Nuclear Weapon,” U.S. Catholic, 1976.

68 Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’* (#57), 2015.

69 Message of the Holy Father to Cardinal Peter K.A. Turkson on the occasion of the Conference on “Nonviolence and Just Peace: Contributing to the Catholic Understanding of and Commitment to Nonviolence” Rome, 11-13 April 2016 (6 April 2016).

70 Greg Moses, *Revolution of Conscience: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Philosophy of Nonviolence* (The Guilford Press, 1997).

71 Jonathan Schell, *The Unconquerable World: Power, Nonviolence, and The Will of the People* (Metropolitan Books, 2003).

72 Stellan Vinthagen, *A Theory of Nonviolent Action: How Civil Resistance Works* (Zed Books, 2015).

to offer no violent resistance to one who does evil (Matthew 5: 39); to become peacemakers; to forgive and repent; and to be abundantly merciful (Matthew 5-7). Jesus embodied nonviolence by actively resisting systemic dehumanization, as when he defied the Sabbath laws to heal the man with the withered hand (Mark 3: 1-6); when he confronted the powerful at the Temple and purified it (John 2: 13-22); when he peacefully but persistently challenged the men accusing a woman of adultery (John 8: 1-11); and when, on the night before he died, he commanded Peter to put down his sword (Matthew 26: 52).

In his preaching and his life, Jesus revealed that God calls us to live nonviolently: to make peace with one another; to resist the violence and injustice that threaten or destroy peace; and to foster a Church and world where the fullness of just peace is the birthright of all. As Pope Benedict XVI said:

[Jesus] came with only the strength of love, totally without violence, even to the point of going to the Cross. This is what shows us the true face of God, that violence never comes from God, never helps bring anything good, but is a destructive means and not the path to escape difficulties ... This is Jesus' true message: seek peace with the means of peace and leave violence aside."⁷³

Christian nonviolence is a spiritual path rooted in the Gospels and a counter-intuitive strategy for the transformation of the world.

When the disciples James and John asked Jesus if he would like them to command fire to come from heaven and consume a Samaritan village that had not received them, "he turned and rebuked them" (Luke 9:51-54). He is teaching them – and us - that violence and destruction are not the way forward.⁷⁴

Over seventy-five years into the nuclear age, we are called to end the threat, possession and potentially catastrophic fire of nuclear weapons by pursuing a spiritually-grounded nonviolent life: to pray for the grace of nonviolence; to study nonviolence; to train for nonviolence; to practice nonviolence; to spread the vision and methods of nonviolence.; and to foster nonviolent strategies to promote just and sustainable peace.

Pope Francis said, "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."⁷⁵ Nowhere is this transformation more desperately needed than in freeing the world from the terrifying threat of nuclear weapons.

73 Pope Benedict XVI, Good Friday Sermon, the Vatican, 2011

74 John Dear, Walking the Way (Twenty-Third Publications, 2015).

75 Letter from Pope Francis to Cardinal Blase Cupich, April 4, 2017.

Nonviolence in Response to COVID19

The coronavirus has thrown into sharp relief the contemporary global culture of violence: its interlocking, unjust systems; the suffering it imposes on billions of people; and its incapacity to respond effectively and comprehensively to the current crisis and other monumental challenges facing the whole earth community. Responding to the pandemic, both short-term and longer-term, requires a fundamental shift from the “unjust normal” of systemic and structural violence across the globe, from systems that destroy, dehumanize, and diminish, to a culture that seeks the fullness of life for all.

In this spirit, Pope Francis has underscored nonviolence as a core value of the Church in many public statements and, most significantly, in his 2017 World Day of Peace message entitled, *Nonviolence: A Style of Politics for Peace*: “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.”

The following sections that connect Gospel nonviolence to different threat from or consequences of the COVID19 pandemic were written originally for the Vatican COVID19 Commission, Security Taskforce.

Fostering A Nonviolent Shift to Authentic, Inclusive Security

COVID-19 upended communities around the world, threatening livelihoods and lives, forcing a previously unthinkable change in daily routines, helping everyone to recognize the fragility of life and exposing the deep injustice and violence that leave too many people, communities and countries vastly more vulnerable than others. The impact of the pandemic was felt universally as it crossed political, geographic, economic, social, religious and cultural boundaries, powerfully illustrating the reality of global interdependence and calling into question basic assumptions about security.

The virus, which overwhelmed health care systems in wealthy countries, presented a tremendous threat to life in places where health systems have been ravaged by war; where 70.8 million people⁷⁶ uprooted by violent conflict, poverty or climate disruption, try to survive in extremely crowded conditions; and where life-saving resources like clean water, soap and medicine are in short supply.^{77 78} In many cases, COVID-19’s impact was felt disproportionately by women, who often form the majority of displaced populations.

COVID-19 also disrupted the work of UN peacekeepers and curbed peacemaking efforts, as travel restrictions impacted international mediation efforts and regional organizations suspended diplomatic initiatives in areas ranging from the South Caucasus to West Africa to Venezuela and Afghanistan.⁷⁹ The interruption of supply chains also compounded already significant humanitarian challenges, as medical supplies and

76 <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html>

77 International Committee of the Red Cross <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/covid-19-urgent-action-needed-counter-major-threat-life-conflict-zones>

78 Jesuit Refugee Service <https://jrs.net/en/news/jrs-stands-with-refugees-and-migrants-in-the-midst-of-covid-19/>

79 International Crisis Group <https://www.crisisgroup.org/global/sb4-covid-19-and-conflict-seven-trends-watch>

other essentials were unable to reach people in conflict-affected countries.⁸⁰

UN High Representative on Disarmament Affairs Izumi Nakamitsu: “The pandemic arrived as our frameworks to prevent catastrophic confrontation are crumbling. Countries are building faster and more accurate nuclear arms, developing new weapon technologies with unpredictable implications and pouring more resources into militaries than at any point in decades. In the 75-year history of the United Nations, the folly of seeking security in vast destructive arsenals has never been clearer. Nor has the need to finally put the brakes on this deadly addiction.”⁸¹

Leading scientists are clear that the Covid-19 outbreak was a warning and that far more deadly diseases still exist in wildlife, where 75% of all emerging infectious diseases originate.⁸² To prevent further outbreaks, both global warming and the destruction of the natural world for farming, mining and housing have to end, as both drive wildlife into contact with people.⁸³ But war, preparations for war and other military activities also have a tremendous negative impact on the physical environment.⁸⁴ Military activities are responsible for multiple forms of environmental destruction, including massive carbon emissions, resource depletion and pollution.⁸⁵

The coronavirus pandemic laid bare the structural violence facing our planet and the radical insecurity it creates - the insecurity of systemic poverty, of political upheaval, of useless but dangerous military systems and the armed conflicts they breed, of the growing climate crisis. Nationalism, unilateralism and militarism undercut the cooperation necessary for addressing disease,

including COVID-19, ebola and deadly viruses yet to emerge, as well as climate change, hunger and poverty, resource depletion, human trafficking, corruption, illicit trade in drugs and weapons, terrorism and other real threats that transcend national boundaries.

The COVID-19 pandemic unmasked the global reality of counterfeit security. Protestant Theologian Walter Bruggeman said it well: “We see that our immense power is unable to fend off a threat that is for the moment beyond our explanation. We see that our great wealth is not able to assure us of security.”⁸⁶

Although one response to the pandemic was for countries to isolate themselves for protection or in response to xenophobia or nationalism, an opposite response could be to enhance solidarity and transnational cooperation, believing that global cooperation in a spectrum of nonviolent actions is the only way to address such a massive global threat.

We may be awakening to the possibility of a long term global shift to a world of inclusive human security and respect for nature. The COVID-19 pandemic is pointing to our deepest calling as a human family: to nurture a world of mercy, compassion, justice and care for one another rooted in the universal ethic of nonviolence.⁸⁷ True, inclusive security relies on a culture of interconnectedness and hope.

Over the past half century the Catholic Church has taken steps to re-affirm the foundational ethic of nonviolence in papal and episcopal statements, in an expanding body of theological research and biblical exegesis, and in the experience

80 What's In Blue: Insights on the Work of the UN Security Council 21 March 2020 <https://www.whatsinblue.org/2020/03/possible-implications-of-covid-19-on-international-peace-and-security.php>

81 <https://www.un.org/disarmament/how-the-covid-19-pandemic-is-affecting-the-work-of-disarmament/>

82 Taylor LH, Latham SM, Woolhouse ME. Risk Factors for Human Disease Emergence 2001 *Philos Trans R Soc Lond B Biol Sci.* 2001 Jul 29;356(1411):983-9 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/11516376>

83 Damian Carrington, *The Guardian* <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/25/coronavirus-nature-is-sending-us-a-message-says-un-environment-chief>

84 Murtaza Hussain, *The Intercept* September 15, 2019 <https://theintercept.com/2019/09/15/climate-change-us-military-war/>

85 International Peace Bureau, *The Military's Impact on the Environment: A Neglected Aspect of the Sustainable Development Debate* (2002) <http://www.ipb.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/briefing-paper.pdf>

86 <https://churchanew.org/blog/2020/04/01/brueggemann>

87 Bishop Robert McElroy: “We need to mainstream nonviolence in the Church. We need to move it from the margins of Catholic thought to the center. Nonviolence is a spirituality, a lifestyle, a program of societal action and a universal ethic.” Statement, “Path of Nonviolence: Toward a Culture of Peace,” symposium, Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, Vatican City, April 4-5, 2019.

and commitment of Catholic individuals and communities throughout the world. In this spirit, Pope Francis has underscored nonviolence as a core value of the Church in many public statements and, most significantly, in his 2017 World Day of Peace message entitled, “Nonviolence: A Style of Politics for Peace.”

The seeds of nonviolence are being planted in this dire time—by the courageous actions of countless health professionals; by people, organizations and governments providing aid for those plunged into financial desperation or lacking the basic necessities of food, shelter, clean water, even soap; by the millions who are maintaining a safe physical distance from others; by all who are acting to protect prisoners, the elderly, those in nursing homes and care facilities, refugees and asylum seekers; and by all those responding in any helpful way to the suffering caused by this omnipresent threat. These seeds, if nourished and carefully tended, may give rise to something even more powerful.

The pandemic, with its enormous suffering, may have opened our eyes. The experience of radical physical-distancing helped us to recognize the centrality of relationships in our lives and the importance of community. Even in cultures where individualism is held as a high value, as the coronavirus isolated us, we built safe bridges, many of them virtual, to care for each other and those most at risk.

The COVID-19 crisis called for a fundamentally new understanding of security that is based on diplomacy, dialogue, reciprocity and a multilateral, collaborative approach to solving very real and critical global problems. A globalization of solidarity rooted in nonviolence will engage diverse nations and peoples in promoting sustainable communities based on economies of “enough” and fostering inclusive human security based on social, economic and ecological justice.

In *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis highlights the need for new convictions and attitudes: “Many things have to change course, but it is we human beings above all who need to change. We lack an awareness of

our common origin, of our mutual belonging, and of a future to be shared with everyone. This basic awareness would enable the development of new convictions, attitudes and forms of life. A great cultural, spiritual and educational challenge stands before us, and it will demand that we set out on the long path of renewal.” (*Laudato Si*, 202)

Spending hundreds of billions of dollars annually on weapons and preparations for war has not given us the tools to address this global pandemic. In fact, military spending steals resources from providing for healthy, resilient communities that can slow the spread of disease and more quickly recover from serious threats like the COVID-19 pandemic.

Authentic security in which the whole earth community can thrive will emerge only from serious attention to meeting basic human needs on a global scale, including in the midst of the pandemic. COVID-19 has demonstrated clearly that well-resourced healthcare systems are essential to protect us from health security threats and that poverty, war and environmental degradation make inclusive security unattainable.

Such a profound shift will require both clear vision and faithful commitment. For followers of Jesus, this shift will be inspired by the Sermon on the Mount. For the whole global community it will be rooted in an emergent paradigm that stands sharply against the paradigm of violence and injustice: the way of active, transformative, faithful and effective nonviolence.

Martin Luther King, Jr. called nonviolence “a universal principle inherent in the moral structure of the universe.” Bishop Robert McElroy describes nonviolence as a “universal ethic.” A *Laudato Si* culture requires active and courageous nonviolence.

In the midst of the enormous suffering and upheaval of the COVID-19 pandemic, a global course correction for authentic, inclusive security became urgent. The crisis could have been a trigger event, “a shocking incident that dramatically reveals a critical social problem

to the general public in a new and vivid way.”⁸⁸ Historically, “trigger events” have unleashed a deep longing for society-wide transformation, creating opportunities for major shifts in public perceptions and significant structural or systemic change.

Now, although powerful sectors in the dominant culture will try to respond to this crisis by deepening the violence and injustice, equally possible is a dramatic shift to promote nonviolent values and inclusive security for the whole earth community. This adaptation is urgent and, for practical, survival reasons in the context of the current crisis, has already begun. In many places around the world, dialogue, cooperation, reciprocity, courageous compassion, coordination and constructive nonviolent strategies are already operative in pursuit of community-wide well-being. But to adapt at a global level to a more nonviolent world, even out of necessity, will itself depend on the power of active nonviolence -- innumerable, nonviolent steps toward the world envisioned in *Laudato Si*.

The Vatican can play a unique and critically important role in this process of adaptation by publicly encouraging a world mired in violence (and therefore unable to provide authentic security for people and the planet) to recognize the potential of nonviolent action to effectively address the tremendous challenges that confront our planet.

The Church, in the context of the current crisis, should promote world-wide Catholic understanding of and commitment to nonviolence as a spirituality, a way of life, a universal ethic and an effective strategy for promoting authentic human security and just peace. Likewise, the Church should convene a global conversation with people of other faiths and with the larger world to explore together and institutionalize a global culture of nonviolence as a basis for true security and peace.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, a dramatic shift, a nonviolent transformation toward authentic, inclusive security for the whole earth community is possible. Visionary ideas and proposals, global cooperation in a spectrum of nonviolent actions, and practical steps, both personal and political, to enhance solidarity and transnational cooperation may be the only way to address such a massive global threat.

Choosing a Future: Violence or Nonviolence

COVID-19 placed tremendous stress on societies and political systems around the world, generating significant insecurity and creating the potential for deepening structural and systemic violence (including poverty, racism, hunger, extreme inequality, xenophobia, political repression, weakened human rights protections), as well as new or more virulent outbreaks of direct violence (such as domestic violence, militarized policing, gang and drug-related violence, gun violence).

Catholic social teaching brings to the current context a deep commitment to the inherent dignity of every person and respect for the integrity of creation. The Gospel and Church teaching are clear regarding every dimension of this crisis that is likely to exacerbate the multiple forms of the violence we now see so well, including economic injustice and marginalization, racism, mistreatment of migrants and workers, violations of basic rights to health care and food, political exclusion and repression, exploitation of the natural world or a lack of commitment to solidarity and the common good.

Nonviolence is at the heart of the Gospel and Catholic social teaching. Pope Francis said: “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.”⁸⁹ Now, more than ever, the Church is called to embrace the nonviolence of Jesus - to choose

88 Defined by the late Bill Moyer in his Movement Action Plan.

89 Pope Francis, 2017 World Day of Peace on Nonviolence: A Style of Politics for Peace (1).

and promote a more effective “third way” that is neither passive in the face of looming threats, nor responding to violence with more violence.

At the core of Christian nonviolence stands the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus’ blueprint, vision and instruction for mature Christlike discipleship, with its new commandments of nonviolence: “You have heard ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth’ but I say to you, offer no violent resistance to one who does evil,” (Mt. 5:38-39) and “You have heard it said, ‘Love your countrymen and hate your enemy, but I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you that you may be sons and daughters of your heavenly God who makes the sun rise on the bad and the good and the rain to fall on the just and the unjust.” (Mt. 5:43-45)

“We need to mainstream nonviolence in the Church,” Bishop Robert McElroy of San Diego, Calif. has said. “We need to move it from the margins of Catholic thought to the center. Nonviolence is a spirituality, a lifestyle, a program of societal action and a universal ethic.”⁹⁰

A future that is nonviolent and reflects the values of Catholic social teaching can be built during and following this global crisis if we apply tested strategies of active nonviolence to reshaping our broken world. To do so, we need to cultivate creative moral imaginations that understand nonviolence as a dramatic alternative to “business as usual,” a cross-cutting approach to the multiple violences at the root of human vulnerability to COVID-19. We need to challenge the too-normal patterns of violence against each other and the natural world with powerful, nonviolent love in action.

Gospel nonviolence is much more than a political strategy; it is a spirituality through which we see and interpret life, a set of virtues and principles

for personal and social change.⁹¹ Nonviolence is not passive. It is not only the cessation of killing, although that is a clear starting point. Rather, nonviolence views active peacemaking, persistent reconciliation and steadfast resistance to evil through the lens of love. It speaks truth in a global struggle for integrity, just peace and ecological sustainability. It is transformation and healing of our lives and our world.⁹²

Nonviolence, then, is a constructive process applicable at a personal, interpersonal, and social-structural level. It includes nonviolent resistance and nonviolent action for social change. It also activates everyday techniques and practices, including nonviolent communication, compassionate listening, restorative justice peace circles, peaceful parenting, trauma healing, anti-racism training, and nonviolent community-building. It is a method that can be used to change policies, protect the vulnerable and respond to the crises.

Active nonviolence includes negotiation and conflict transformation; violence interruption and prevention; restorative and distributive justice; “just peace” strategies, such as unarmed civilian protection, accompaniment and civilian-based defense; disarmament; strengthening social cohesion; building and training social movements; and a multitude of peacebuilding approaches.

Common responses around the world to COVID-19 illustrate very important characteristics of and values at the heart of nonviolent action: a deepened sense of our interdependence and interconnectedness; courageous and creative risking of life without killing others (by health care and other essential workers); acknowledging and caring for the most marginalized, including the elderly and lonely, persons who are homeless or impoverished, persons with impaired immune

90 Statement, “Path of Nonviolence: Toward a Culture of Peace,” symposium, Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, Vatican City, April 4-5, 2019.

91 For example, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s six principles of nonviolence: Nonviolence is a way of life for courageous people; nonviolence seeks to win friendship and understanding; nonviolence seeks to defeat injustice, not people; nonviolence holds that voluntary suffering can educate and transform; nonviolence chooses love instead of hate; and nonviolence believes that the universe is on the side of justice.

92 In his book *Healing Resistance: A Radically Different Response to Harm*, Kazu Haga writes, “When we view nonviolent resistance as part of a process of healing our collective wounds; when we work to cultivate compassion for all beings, including those who perpetuate systems of injustice; when we begin to see that our ultimate goal is not only to change unjust structures but also to change cultures, value systems, and to repair relationships—that is when we begin to enter into the shugyo [Japanese term for “practice”] of nonviolence.” (Parallax Press, 2020).

systems or mental and emotional health challenges, persons without legal status, persons in prison.

The coronavirus has thrown into sharp relief the contemporary global culture of violence: its interlocking, unjust systems; the suffering it imposes on billions of people; and its incapacity to respond effectively and comprehensively to the current crisis and other monumental challenges facing the whole earth community.

Responding to the pandemic, both short-term and longer-term, requires a fundamental shift from the “unjust normal” of systemic and structural violence across the globe, from systems that destroy, dehumanize, and diminish, to a culture that seeks the fullness of life for all.

This will not be easy. The growing fragility of entrenched global systems will create enormous turbulence as the existing order, which especially perpetuates systemic and structural violence, seeks to reassert its power and reach.

Global cooperation in a spectrum of nonviolent actions is the only way to address what is already a massive global threat and may worsen in the coming months and years.

The important role that the Church could play in the post-pandemic transition was very evident during a global research project conducted by Pax Christi International’s Catholic Nonviolence Initiative in 2017-2018. The initiative gathered, in 15 different countries, case studies from Catholic communities using nonviolent strategies to build sustainable peace.

Jamila Raqib executive director of the Albert Einstein Institution, said, “What came through very clearly is that in each of the cases...the Church and spiritual communities acted as connectors and facilitators in environments where there was a weak civil society because it has been

eroded due to conflict, or for other reasons. ... as a global institution with a deep and diverse network, the Church connected local struggles with global movements.”⁹³

Mel Duncan, co-founder of Nonviolent Peaceforce, said, “Local Churches are well placed to support localised approaches and provide bases for the ongoing reflections required to adapt nonviolent approaches. Churches can also provide the venues for training. And they can play an important role in mobilising the resources for trauma treatment... The case studies illustrated instances where the Church played a positive role, but others where the Church was an impediment. Without strong papal leadership, Churches will continue to play mixed and confused roles. Clergy will have to take militant, Romero-like stances, not only in conflict-affected countries but also in the seats of the empire, following the example of Jesus’s entry into Jerusalem.”⁹⁴

What we are now living is a place of metanoia (conversion), and we have a chance to begin. So let’s not let it slip from us, and let’s move ahead.

*Pope Francis*⁹⁵

A worldwide, visible commitment of the Catholic Church to Gospel nonviolence is essential to the new paradigm necessary for the survival of the whole earth community. Formation and training in the principles and practices of Gospel nonviolence for Catholic parishes, religious communities, Catholic universities, Catholic organizations and 1.3 billion Catholics worldwide, who could make a tremendous contribution to just and lasting peace in lieu of a return to the “normal” entrenched violences that too often define our societies.

93 Case studies, interviews, and comments from reviewers are drawn from the unpublished “Nonviolence Is a Crop that Can Feed the Whole World”: A Listening Project on Active Nonviolence, Catholic Nonviolence Initiative (Roundtable 5), 2017-2018.

94 Case studies, interviews, and comments from reviewers are drawn from the unpublished “Nonviolence Is a Crop that Can Feed the Whole World”: A Listening Project on Active Nonviolence, Catholic Nonviolence Initiative (Roundtable 5), 2017-2018.

95 Austen Ivereigh, “A Time of Great Uncertainty: An Interview with Pope Francis,” *Commonweal*, April 8, 2020: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/time-great-uncertainty>.

Exposing Violence at the Heart of Food Insecurity

Note: This brief article was written with a focus on the consequences of COVID19 on food security. Clearly, the war in Ukraine and significantly worsened the situation.

Even before the emergence of the coronavirus, 135 million people were “marching toward the brink of starvation.”⁹⁶ A careful reading of the *2020 Global Report on Food Crises*,⁹⁷ written largely before the pandemic, reveals that violent conflict, war and forced displacement are by far the most frequent causes of food insecurity.

COVID-19 effectively exposed the extremely heavy price of structural and systemic violence in the fabric of socioeconomic and political systems with global reach, and in the structures that impact daily life at a national and local level. This violence was evident even in the wealthiest countries. In the U.S., for example, racism and poverty leave African Americans and indigenous peoples more vulnerable to COVID-19 impacts, including food insecurity.⁹⁸ While natural events (swarming of locusts, floods, droughts etc.) are devastating, poverty, marginalization, lack of political power and environmental destruction and climate change exacerbate vulnerabilities. The exclusion and unjust treatment of migrants and refugees, racism, lack of access to land and water, unjust trade agreements, the manipulation of commodities markets, lack of access to health care, poor quality or no education – all of the ways that people, communities and whole countries are *made poor* or *kept poor* have created the heartbreaking context for famine. Poor people in countries impoverished by war are the most at risk.

The coronavirus further devastated communities already on the brink of a global humanitarian crisis.⁹⁹ Loss of livelihoods, a sharp drop in remittances, little or no tourism, collapsing oil prices, transport barriers, supply chain disruptions, commodity shortages, lockdowns will all contribute to the pending catastrophe.

A critical long term challenge is to address the systemic and structural violences that perpetuate poverty, leaving whole countries and huge segments of the global population extremely vulnerable in the current pandemic.

We judged the catastrophe in light of our call as people of faith and conscience to respond to every crushing form of violence with the power of nonviolent love. The universal ethic of active nonviolence¹⁰⁰ demands that we challenge the violence of hunger, food insecurity and the global, interlocking systems of structural violence that have created this crisis, with powerful and effective strategies that remove barriers to food for all, support local engagement, and mobilize the world to respond to these needs in a spirit of solidarity and shared sacrifice.

Pope Francis said, “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...”¹⁰¹ Nowhere is this more important than in guaranteeing access to food for all people everywhere.

COVID-19 made clear the urgent need to address the systemic and structural violences that perpetuate poverty and hunger and that are exacerbating vulnerability in the current pandemic. To that end we again propose a “global shift to nonviolence” as the basis for, route to and framework for just peace and integral human development. *A Laudato Si* future that

96 David Beasley, UN World Food Programme Executive Director to UNSC 21 April 2020 <https://www.wfp.org/news/wfp-chief-warns-hunger-pandemic-covid-19-spreads-statement-un-security-council>

97 2020 Global Report on Food Crises Chapter 4. acute food insecurity and malnutrition forecasts for 2020 <https://www.wfp.org/publications/2020-global-report-food-crises>

98 Bread for the World series on “Race, Hunger and COVID-19 Impact” in the U.S. www.bread.org

99 David Beasley, UN World Food Programme Executive Director to UNSC 21 April 2020 <https://www.wfp.org/news/wfp-chief-warns-hunger-pandemic-covid-19-spreads-statement-un-security-council>

100 Bishop Robert McElroy: “We need to mainstream nonviolence in the Church. We need to move it from the margins of Catholic thought to the center. Nonviolence is a spirituality, a lifestyle, a program of societal action and a universal ethic.” Statement, “Path of Nonviolence: Toward a Culture of Peace,” symposium, Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, Vatican City, April 4-5, 2019.

101 Pope Francis, 2017 World Day of Peace on Nonviolence: A Style of Politics for Peace (1).

is nonviolent and reflects the values of Catholic social teaching can be built during and following this global crisis if we apply tested strategies of active nonviolence to reshaping our broken, hungry world.

Budgets are Moral Documents

Global military expenditures amounted to \$1917 billion in 2019, the highest level since 1988 and 3.6 per cent higher in real terms than in 2018.¹⁰² At the same time, robust trade in major arms continued. The US, for example, with a total military budget of \$756 billion for FY2020, exported major weapons systems to 96 countries. 73 per cent of major weapons imported by Saudi Arabia, the world's largest arms importer in 2015–19, came from the US and 13 per cent from the UK. The United Arab Emirates (UAE), the eighth-largest arms importer in the world during the same period, had major arms import deals with Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Russia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, the UK and the US;¹⁰³ China exported weapons to 53 countries; South Korea and Israel greatly expanded their international weapons sales; and Egypt's arms imports tripled.¹⁰³ Meanwhile, nuclear weapons states will spend fortunes in the coming decades to modernize, develop new or expand stockpiles of nuclear weapons.

As the coronavirus threat became increasingly evident, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Ms. Hilal Elver, urged the international community “to pay particular attention to the situation of civilians trapped in conflict settings, and notably those already experiencing acute violations of their right to food, such as in Yemen, South Sudan, Gaza, Syria and in refugee camps worldwide.”¹⁰⁴ Massive investment in arms and

preparations for war by rich countries and poor countries alike; economies that depend on the development, production and sale of weapons; companies and countries that profit from marketing the tools of war have helped to create a “perfect storm,” in which millions of people and societies lack access to the necessities of life – including clean water, basic and emergency health care, food security, social structures - that would have enabled them to better withstand the onslaught of COVID-19...

Spending massive amounts on war and preparations for war is a direct affront to marginalized people who are facing the COVID-19 pandemic defenseless, without access to the most basic necessities of life that are essential in the context of this pandemic, among them food, clean water, health care.

The two hands of nonviolence speak clearly to this moment in history: “No” to the violence and false security of weapons and “Yes” to human dignity and food for all. Pope Francis could be key to mobilizing both efforts. The “No” is a freeze on the production and supply of weapons as proposed by *Global #FreezeWeapons Now*;¹⁰⁵ the “Yes” is an immediate redirection of funds from preparations for war to meeting the urgent needs of millions of people facing hunger in the wake of this pandemic.

We urge Pope Francis to explicitly draw on just peace norms¹⁰⁶ in calling for a vast, historic collaboration between friends and enemies at every level - from the United Nations to local communities - to abandon animosity and join together, dismantling existing financial, structural, political and historical impediments to food security for all and promoting mutual aid networks, cooperative businesses and other models that can help achieve immediate and

102 Trends in World Military Expenditure, 2019, <https://www.sipri.org/publications/2020/sipri-fact-sheets/trends-world-military-expenditure-2019>

103 SIPRI Press Release, <https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2020/usa-and-france-dramatically-increase-major-arms-exports-saudi-arabia-largest-arms-importer-says>

104 Economic Sanctions Should Be Lifted to Prevent Hunger, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25761&LangID=E>

105 <https://www.scrapweapons.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Covid19-Freeze-Main-Strategy-Document.pdf>

106 Particularly relevant norms include: integral disarmament, nonviolent communities, human dignity, reflexivity, reconciliation, economic and racial justice. https://nonviolencejustpeacedotnet.files.wordpress.com/2019/04/jp-handout_cni_workshop_2019.pdf

longer-term food security,¹⁰⁷ as well as the just peace that can follow.

Cyber Security and Peacemaking

COVID-19 placed tremendous stress on societies and political systems around the world, generating significant insecurity and creating the potential for deepening structural and systemic violence (poverty, racism, hunger, extreme inequality, xenophobia, political repression, weakened human rights protections), as well as new or more virulent outbreaks of direct violence (war, domestic violence, militarized policing, gang and drug-related violence, gun violence).¹⁰⁸ Efforts to navigate the pandemic have exposed serious cyber-related threats, as well as a number of digital opportunities to protect or promote just peace.

For example, digital technologies are improving the collection, organization, analysis, visualization, storage and distribution of data key to peacebuilding processes. This enables more effective early warning of and response to violent conflict, facilitating the protection of vulnerable people and communities. According to the World Economic Forum, “The international system needs a global insecurity monitoring system to track grievances and signal unrest before they escalate into violence.”¹⁰⁹ A shared platform for analyzing conflict risk could benefit from real-time mapping, remote sensing and digital data needed for a comprehensive assessment tool. Other early-warning systems, such as for food insecurity and hunger, could also benefit.

The internet and digital tools are being used successfully in nonviolent strategies to prevent or transform violence and to build just peace. Many of these are small scale, local projects using technology from the bottom up; others are larger projects that include digital technologies to enhance potential effectiveness, accountability or transparency.

In response to the trauma generated by COVID-19, local peacebuilders offered online sessions on self care in the framework of integrative community therapy and circles of empathy, while young peacebuilders are helping to innovate new online peacebuilding technologies.¹¹⁰

During this crisis, online platforms demonstrated their ability to reduce disinformation, as well as to be forces for the common good¹¹¹ and in many countries, social movements used digital tools more often amid new strategies to push for social change,¹¹² including digital rallies, teach-ins, webinars, tweetstorms, information-sharing and more.^{113, 114}

But digital technology can also pose serious threats through, for example, recruiting extremist sympathizers, facilitating targeted cyber attacks and flash mobs, raising funds for violent organizations, highlighting and inflaming grievances or fomenting violent conflict. Now, the threat of worsened digital authoritarianism¹¹⁵ is growing as extraordinary restrictions deemed necessary to control spread of the virus are likely to be kept in place when the COVID-19 threat subsides.

107 Feeling Powerless about Coronavirus? Join a Mutual Aid Network,” New York Times, Mar. 23, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/23/opinion/coronavirus-aid-group.html>

108 International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch, interactive map, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/about-crisiswatch>

109 Robert Muggah, David Steven, Liv Torres, World Economic Forum, We Urgently Need Major Cooperation on Global Security in the COVID-19 Era, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/04/we-need-major-cooperation-on-global-security-in-the-covid-19-era/>

110 Crisis Direct, COVID 19 and the Impact on Local Peacebuilding <https://www.peacedirect.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/COVID-19-and-the-impact-on-local-peacebuilding.pdf>

111 https://ict4peace.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/When-going-viral-can-be-lethal_v31-3-4.pdf

112 Erica Chenoweth, Austin Choi-Fitzpatrick, Jeremy Pressman, Felipe G Santos and Jay Ulfelder, The Global Pandemic Has Spawned New Forms of Activism – and They’re Flourishing, The Guardian, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/apr/20/the-global-pandemic-has-spawned-new-forms-of-activism-and-theyre-flourishing>

113 Earth Day Live, <https://strikewithus.org/>

114 https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the_americas/coronavirus-protest-chile-hong-kong-iraq-lebanon-india-venezuela/2020/04/03/c7f5e012-6d50-11ea-a156-0048b62cdb51_story.html

115 Jonathan Pinckney, U.S. Institute of Peace, Amid Coronavirus, Online Activism Confronts Digital Authoritarianism <https://www.usip.org/publications/2020/04/amid-coronavirus-online-activism-confronts-digital-authoritarianism>

Technology-aided contact tracing, which is also identified as an important strategy for controlling COVID-19, raised concerns about both equity and privacy rights.¹¹⁶ “Technology may make it possible to monitor almost everybody, almost everywhere, almost all the time as we slide into a world of global surveillance.”¹¹⁷

With countries around the world placing severe restrictions on the movement of many population sectors, digitalization of the workplace, the classroom and the living room became the norm for billions of people, but, according to the World Economic Forum, 3.7 billion people have no internet access, highlighting a massive, worldwide digital divide.¹¹⁸

In addition, autocratic governments are using internet shutdowns, [digital surveillance](#), [online censorship](#), cyberattacks and hacking, disinformation, targeted arrests and detentions of internet users to sustain concentrated power. Many governments, businesses and powerful organizations used digital tools for security or marketing purposes, raising questions about confidentiality, privacy and personal security and for many people, coronavirus phishing and scams¹¹⁹ were a significant threat.

In a world beset by overwhelming violence and injustice, digital technologies used to manage the pandemic could simply compound and institutionalize in new and dangerous ways our persistent culture of violence. Hence the need to affirm a rigorous commitment to digital ethics consistent with a universal ethic of active and creative nonviolence, which provides a powerful lens for discerning the common good. To be consistent with Catholic Social Teaching, digital technology must be used in a manner that

is culturally and contextually appropriate - doesn't exacerbate violence, existing inequalities, social or ecological injustice or human rights violations. When applied for the common good, digital tools, for example,

- can facilitate participation of ordinary people in addressing the violence that impacts their lives and communities, foster collaboration and transform attitudes;
- enable more voices and alternative narratives to enter the conversation around violent conflict and peacebuilding, help heal trauma, challenge divisive or violent narratives and counter sectarian rhetoric, fake news or extremist ideology;
- create alternative spaces to encourage collective action for human rights and just peace and hold to account political decision-makers or parties in conflict.

COVID-19 made clear the urgent need to address the systemic and structural violences that perpetuate poverty and inequality evidenced in the digital divide. To that end we again propose a “global shift to nonviolence” as the basis for, route to and framework for just peace and integral human development.

Health Care, Security and Peace

As the COVID-19 pandemic spread rapidly around the globe, details of deep health care inadequacies in many countries have been exposed. Preparedness¹²⁰ to respond to COVID-19 was hindered by war and ongoing violence, including direct attacks on health care facilities and workers, and by annual spending on weapons and preparations for war,¹²¹ by poverty and racism,¹²² and by health care policies¹²³ and priorities.¹²⁴

116 Susan Landau, Christy E. Lopez, Laura Moy, The Importance of Equity in Contact Tracing, <https://www.lawfareblog.com/importance-equity-contact-tracing>

117 ICT for Peace Foundation, Corona Pan(dem)ic: the Gateway to Global Surveillance? <https://ict4peace.org/activities/corona-pandemic-the-gateway-to-global-surveillance/>

118 World Economic Forum, Coronavirus has exposed the digital divide like never before <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/04/coronavirus-covid-19-pandemic-digital-divide-internet-data-broadband-mobility/> 22 April 2020

119 COVID-19 Security Resource Library, <https://staysafeonline.org/covid-19-security-resource-library/>

120 <https://datastudio.google.com/u/0/reporting/abd4128c-7d8d-4411-b49a-ac04ab074e69/page/QYXLB>

121 <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/africa/news/2020-04/catholic-nonviolence-initiative-spending-on-weapons-robs-world.html>

122 <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20200420-coronavirus-why-some-racial-groups-are-more-vulnerable>

123 <https://www.cfr.org/background/comparing-six-health-care-systems-pandemic>

124 <https://www.forbes.com/sites/niallmccarthy/2016/04/22/global-health-and-military-expenditure-in-comparison-info-graphic/?sh=51a124653020>

In the midst of fears stemming from the COVID-19 crisis, Khartoum, Darfur and elsewhere in Sudan have experienced violence against health workers and medical facilities. In Yemen, hospitals and doctors were targeted at least 120 times by the conflict's warring parties and in Syria, health facilities and health workers were targeted primarily by government-allied forces to break civilian populations and force them into submission. The consequences of deliberately debilitated health care capacity in these and other contexts are dire.

Disparities rooted in poverty and racism¹²⁵ were equally significant in terms of physical vulnerability to the coronavirus. Income inequality, pre-existing health conditions, food insecurity and hunger, lack of access to clean water, exposure to environmental hazards, crowded living conditions, undocumented immigrant status, weathering or allostatic load (the accumulated physiological burden from the stress of racism) and lack of health insurance all had a negative impact on the ability of marginalized communities and, in some countries, people of color to withstand COVID-19.

The universal ethic of nonviolence requires that the pandemic's systemic violence be confronted with love, courage, and relentless action for the health and well-being of all. The coronavirus pandemic is reiterating lessons about solidarity and the values of Catholic social teaching, including the dignity of every person, social justice, basic human rights (to health care, food, water, housing, work) and responsibilities, interdependence, care for creation and the common good. We are intensely aware of our global interdependence and shared vulnerability. Whether or not other people, regions or countries try to prevent transmission of the virus matters to us. "If one part suffers, every part suffers with it..." (1 Cor 12:26)

COVID-19 has demonstrated clearly that well-resourced healthcare systems are essential

to protect humanity from the threat of communicable diseases that readily transcend borders and boundaries. Authentic security in which the whole earth community can thrive will emerge only from serious attention to meeting basic human needs on a global scale and developing healthy, resilient communities that can slow the spread of disease and more quickly recover from serious threats like the coronavirus pandemic.

COVID-19 also has made clear the urgent need to address violent conflict as well as the systemic, structural and cultural violences (of racism, environmental destruction, poverty, social injustice, etc.) that are exacerbating vulnerability in the current pandemic. Taking a public/global health approach¹²⁶ to doing so helps us to see that violence functions like a contagious disease that can be stopped using the same strategies employed to fight epidemics.

Significant research has demonstrated that exposure to violence increases the person's or community's risk of adopting violent approaches. Violence transmits, clusters, and spreads primarily based on exposure and habits, just like an epidemic disease. Violence is about learned behavior, not about bad or evil people. Transforming community norms, focusing on prevention, and interrupting transmission are crucial strategies.

Pope Francis has reminded the world¹²⁷ that "an emergency like COVID-19 is overcome in the first place by the antibodies of solidarity." A just peace ethical framework¹²⁸ (rather than a "war-fighting" framework) can help discern exactly what the "antibodies of solidarity" might be by focusing on breaking cycles of violence (eg. accepting responsibility for harm done or integral disarmament), building sustainable peace and specifically identifying key virtues, such as solidarity, and skills, to constructively engage conflict and the violence.

125 <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/11/opinion/coronavirus-poor-black-latino.html>

126 <https://cvg.org/the-big-idea/>

127 <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2020/04/17/pope-francis-shares-his-vision-covid-19-aftermath>

128 https://nonviolencejustpeacedotnet.files.wordpress.com/2019/04/jp-handout_cni_workshop_2019.pdf

For example, with the norm of “accepting responsibility for harm done,” emphasis of violence-reduction efforts would be on restorative justice and trauma healing, both essential nonviolent tools in building just peace. Or, with the norm of “integral disarmament,” rather than selling and buying more weapons in the context of COVID-19, support for a global ceasefire would be strong, as well as for shifting military spending towards public health infrastructure, medical supplies, and nurses. (See [A Just Peace Ethic Primer](#), Georgetown University Press, 1 May 2020.)

Women, Security and Peace

According to the UN, COVID-19 could reverse¹²⁹ the limited progress that has been made on gender equality, which is an important foundation for a peaceful and sustainable world. Women represent 70% of frontline healthcare workers. Their unpaid care work has increased significantly due to school closures and the increased needs of older people. They are harder hit by the economic downturn; almost 60% work in the informal economy. The pandemic has also led to a steep increase in violence against women and girls.¹³⁰

Research shows that sustainable peace is more likely if women are meaningfully involved in peace processes. Higher levels of participation, particularly of women, is also a major factor in making nonviolent movements nearly twice as successful as violent ones in achieving their objectives. In spite of significant inequalities, women have persisted to assume roles as strategists, organizers, and active participants in various nonviolent campaigns and movements, including in Argentina, Chile, Egypt, Liberia, the Palestinian territories, Poland, Syria and the United States. Also, according to Erica Chenoweth,¹³¹ the greater the role of women in a campaign, the larger the correlation with nonviolent methods, even in highly repressive

contexts. Campaigns that feature greater women’s participation—in terms of both the extent of women’s frontline participation and the formal involvement of women’s organizations—are more likely to maintain nonviolent discipline (i.e., are less likely to have violent flanks).

The serious problem of direct, structural and cultural violence against women and girls needs to be named and addressed as sins that are personal, relational and social—causing harm to individuals, to relationships built on trust and mutual care, and by infecting societies with structures of dominance that destroy community.

The late Kenyan Nobel laureate Wangari Maathai created a nonviolent movement that simultaneously planted 200 million trees in Africa, created economic self-sufficiency for women, and fought political corruption. Each interconnected facet of her work challenged a domination system that had been constructed by men to serve and benefit men. To resist the violence of exploitation was to stand against a patriarchal system. Nonviolence is not only a challenge to specific forms of violence; it is a principled critique of systemic violence which, historically and culturally, has often been perpetrated and sustained by men.

The universal ethic of nonviolence demands that we affirm and promote the central role of women as agents of the nonviolent change capable of constructing a future beyond the “unjust normal.” If this world is to peel away deeply ingrained structures of inequality so that the infinite worth of every person is prized and the life of the planet is spared, women must not only be recipients of such change, they must lead this change. The greatest movement in human history is coming—and it will be led as much by women as by men.

Women will be critical to creating policies and social structures that are inclusive and sustainable – and to facilitating powerful campaigns and social movements to help establish them – because,

129 https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/policy_brief_on_covid_impact_on_women_9_apr_2020_updated.pdf

130 <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/issue-brief-covid-19-and-ending-violence-against-women-and-girls-en.pdf?la=en&vs=5006>

131 https://oefresearch.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/Womens_Participation_Nonviolent_Campaigns_Digital.pdf

generally speaking, of their capacity to produce alternatives to dominant, patriarchal methods for ordering the world, especially the threat and use of violence. Hence the US Institute of Peace research showing that sustainable peace is more likely if women are meaningfully involved.

To build a future that is nonviolent, just and sustainable will require a dramatic increase in:

- the leadership of women in governments and institutions as they move through the process of adapting to nonviolent governance;
- the role of women in envisioning, organizing and mobilizing nonviolent people-power movements to create the traction necessary for the global transformation to a future envisioned in *Laudato Si'*;
- the role of women in widespread training and education in the vision, principles, strategies and tactics of nonviolent change;
- data collection and quantitative research on the impact of women's leadership in each of these areas.

The future awaits many more Wangari Maathais and the nonviolent revolution they will facilitate.

Dignity in work and the jobs of the future, today

Work should be the setting for this rich personal growth, where many aspects of life enter into play: creativity, planning for the future, developing our talents, living out our values, relating to others, giving glory to God. ... We were created with a vocation to work... Work is a necessity, part of the meaning of life on this earth, a path to growth, human development and personal fulfillment. (Laudato Si' #127-128)

Work or job-related violence robs the worker of human dignity or life itself; it destroys or unsustainably exploits the earth's resources, whether minerals, soil or water. In addition to

the personal, family and social harm caused by involuntary unemployment itself, work-related violence is visible in jobs that fail to pay a living wage or provide benefits; in work that is demeaning, that exploits other people, that promotes or perpetuates violence and war, that is destructive to the earth and the natural world.

Violence and harassment in the world of work deprives people – often women – of a sense of their own dignity, is incompatible with decent work and a threat to equal opportunities as well as to safe, healthy, and productive working environments. It remains a widespread phenomenon, present in all countries and disregarding sectors, occupations and work arrangements. In response, nonviolent empowerment, de-escalation, and unarmed self-defense trainings for women factory workers and women in high violence contexts teaches respect for human dignity, respect for self and worker's rights, labor organizing skills and practical skills for defending against male harassment and violence.

As with climate change, the worst effects of the coronavirus pandemic have fallen on the most vulnerable communities. COVID-19 has devastated the world of work, causing massive unemployment and laying bare the extreme vulnerability of many millions who have been required to be present in the workplace, often in very dangerous circumstances.

Noncoercive ownership models such as worker-owned cooperatives are examples of nonviolent constructive societal programs. "The constructive programme"¹³² was a core strategy of Mohandas Gandhi for building nonviolent societies. As needed, it was paired with nonviolent resistance to create the conditions for durable social change.

Extensive research on worker cooperatives¹³³ in Western Europe, the United States and Latin America found that worker cooperatives are more productive, efficient and sustainable than conventional businesses and more likely to preserve jobs during economic downturns.

132 <http://www.egyankosh.ac.in/bitstream/123456789/33649/1/Unit-10.pdf>

133 <https://democracycollaborative.org/learn/publication/are-worker-cooperatives-viable-way-promote-more-equitable-economy>

In Africa, a regional technical cooperation programme of the ILO¹³⁴ contributes to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and the promotion of decent work by promoting self-help initiatives, mutual assistance in communities and cross border exchanges.

In Burundi, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo, a Pax Christi International program¹³⁵ being implemented by 16 organizations is building on a series of nonviolence trainings by creating income generating projects that contribute to local economies.

Decent work, as defined by the International Labor Organization (ILO)¹³⁶ “involves opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men.” The four pillars of the ILO’s Decent Work Agenda are employment creation, social protection, rights at work, and social dialogue.

“Social protection” and “social dialogue” are both skills and practices of nonviolence. “Social protection” relies on civil society pressure to hold governments accountable for building economic resilience and freedom into the daily lives of workers. “Social dialogue” requires the skills of diplomacy, nonviolent communication, sophisticated power mapping, and strategic analysis.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) was founded in 1919, in the wake of a destructive war, to pursue a vision based on the premise that universal, lasting peace can be established only if it is based on social justice. Its vision and unique structure that brings together workers, employers and governments, as well as civil

society organisations, position the ILO as an important multilateral institution that is central to shaping the jobs of the future. The Holy See actively participates as an observer in the ILO. In addition, Caritas International, the International Catholic Migration Commission, the World Union of Catholic Women’s Organisations, the International Movement of Catholic Agricultural and Rural Youth and several international Catholic professional associations are included in the ILO Special List of NGOs.¹³⁷

In April 2019 on the 100th anniversary of the ILO, H.E. Archbishop Bernardito Auza, Apostolic Nuncio, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations, said, “Giving priority to decent work keeps economic activity at the service of the human being and its social relations and strengthens the ethical foundation that can help to guarantee it.” He also reminded those present of Pope Francis’ insistence that “decent work must fully integrate the ecological paradigm.”

Among the key pillars of an effective response to the COVID-19 crisis, a recent [ILO Global Summit on COVID-19](#) identified social dialogue as crucial -- strengthening collective bargaining and labor relations institutions and processes.

Since the late 19th century, the labor movement has manifested in innumerable contexts around the world a capacity for nonviolent organizing and strategic movement-building to redress society’s economic inequities and to promote the dignity of work. In a post-pandemic world, where globalization, mechanization, artificial intelligence and digitalization are a reality, the dynamics of solidarity, organization and mobilization – nonviolent approaches at the heart of the labor movement - need to be extended and contextualized. In a transnational world, fair labor standards and practices can no longer be limited to national borders.

134 http://ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/---emp_ent/---coop/documents/publication/wcms_117870.pdf

135 <https://paxchristi.net/programmes/empowering-new-generations-for-active-nonviolence/>

136 <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/decent-work/lang--en/index.htm>

137 <https://www.ilo.org/pardev/partnerships/civil-society/ngos/ilo-special-list-of-ngos/lang--en/index.htm>

At the same time, the UN Inter-Agency Taskforce on Social and Solidarity Economy¹³⁸ emphasizes the need to build local economies to create decent work that integrates the ecological paradigm in preparing the post-COVID19 future. Cooperatives, mutual benefit societies, associations, foundations, social enterprises and other Enterprises and Organizations of Social and Solidarity Economy (SSEOs) have an ownership structure that promotes participation and engagement in social dialogue. They are particularly suited to making labor the central factor of production and the provision of personal and social services. As community-based enterprises, SSEOs can help rebuild local economies while leaving no one behind.

For 130 years, from *Rerum Novarum* to *Laudato Si'* Catholic social teaching has emphasized the dignity of work and – more and more clearly – that work is about relationships with others, with the earth and earth's resources; about relationships between capital and labor; about contributing to inclusive human security on a healthy planet. Dignity of work is not an isolated value; rather, it arises when racial justice, care for the most marginalized, care for creation, and other values are actualized. This is the intersectionality that nonviolence can help us illuminate. Workers have the right to organize in unions, but all unions also have an obligation to serve the common good. At the same time, Catholic teaching must be retooled for the current and future moment. The urgently needed shift to a green economy will cause massive disruption to the labor force and many people will no longer be “employed” as they have in the past.

The COVID-19 pandemic is pointing to our deepest calling as a human family: to nurture a world of mercy, compassion, justice and care for one another, a world of “right” relationships rooted in the universal ethic of nonviolence. The pandemic, with its enormous suffering, may be helping us to recognize the centrality of relationships in our lives and the importance of community.

For example, we are beginning to acknowledge the authentic human service of doctors, nurses, care workers, shop workers, delivery people, teachers, and community workers, who are holding society together, creating the security needed for our time. People are now calling for just wages and conditions for such workers, for ‘days’ that recognize their heroism, outwardly acknowledging their value. Will “essential workers” ever be defined as those who care for forests, tend to community gardens, raise children, keep streams and oceans clean, do the work necessary to cool the planet?

E.F. Schumacher, author of *Small Is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered* (1973), proposed an economic system¹³⁹ based on the quality of life of everyday people. Work is meant to be meaningful and creative; machines should improve a person's work, not replace it; an economy is measured by the health and creativity of its members rather than by how much it produces or consumes.

Schumacher, calling Gandhi a great “people's economist,” identified Gandhian economic thinking¹⁴⁰ as nonviolent, simple, small, capital saving, self-reliant and employment-oriented. In a Buddhist economy the goals of simplicity and nonviolence work together. For example, in an effort to reduce violence against the earth, the Buddhist economist would support using more local and ecologically sensitive sources of energy, such as solar power, rather than the cheapest, in order to serve the aims of simplicity and nonviolence.

Nonviolence stands against violence, including violence against workers. Constructive, nonviolent, alternative systems designed, for example, to promote and protect decent work, to safeguard the earth and to prevent war and violent conflict are essential to the post-pandemic future, as is the people-power needed to bring these systems into being.

138 <http://unsse.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/UNTFSSSE-Statement-on-COVID-19-June-2020.pdf>

139 <http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/edumat/sustecom/others/buddhist.htm>

140 <https://gandhifoundation.org/2007/05/21/schumacher-on-gandhi-%E2%80%93-by-surur-hoda/>

The universal ethic of nonviolence (including its foundations of interconnectedness, human dignity, “right” relationships and resistance to injustice) can strengthen societal values, policies and practices that guarantee decent work within an ecological paradigm for the post-pandemic context. Such an ethic would also insist on a strong social safety net when such work is not available, as has been the case during the COVID-19 pandemic. It would endeavor to prevent

war, violent conflict, preparations for war and the production and marketing of weapons. To do so will require massive conscientization and education as well as the mobilization of nonviolent people power worldwide to support international policies establishing living wage standards, safe workplaces, the survival and dignity of workers everywhere and a just, nonviolent sustainable global economy.

From One to Many: New Structures for the Common Good

If every action has its consequences, an evil embedded in the structures of a society has a constant potential for disintegration and death. It is evil crystallized in unjust social structures, which cannot be the basis of hope for a better future. (*Evangelii Gaudium* # 59)

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. (*Nonviolence: A Style of Politics for Peace*, World Day of Peace 2017)

Structural violence is carried out through inequalities built into social, political or economic systems. Violent because it is inconsistent with human dignity and destroys the integrity of the natural world, structural violence manifests racism, sexism, xenophobia, ecological alienation and other forms of exclusion. It can be found in unjust educational, health care and food production or distribution systems, in trade agreements and financial institutions, in militarized security and political repression, in structured “power-over” relationships, in lack of access to resources for learning, including the internet, in cultural symbols and practices. Intersectionality is central to how structural violence operates, as multiple expressions of structural violence devastate marginalized populations.

Racism - most visible right now in the U.S. after 400 years of violent repression and degradation – is not a stranger to other corners of the world. COVID19 has brought to the fore racial inequalities

with the Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities in the UK. Aborigines in Australia and New Zealand, indigenous people across the Americas, Black Africans in South Africa, Romas in Europe, millions of refugees and migrants and so many more know too well the exclusion and suffering caused by structural or systemic racism. Racism is ingrained in nearly every way people move through society - in the policies and practices of institutions like banks, schools, private corporations, government agencies, nonprofit organizations and law enforcement. Racial disparities impact nearly every facet of life, including employment, wealth, education, home ownership, healthcare and incarceration. The pandemic has more severely affected people of color¹⁴¹ because of structural racism’s persistent influence.

At the same time, systemic racism can be dismantled. It will be a long, slow, painful process of learning how to become anti-racist, learning how to dismantle white privilege, including in the Catholic Church. African American Fordham theologian Father Bryan Massingale has called for much deeper Catholic Church engagement in condemning the sin of racism, building on Pope Francis’ insistence that “we cannot turn a blind eye to racism and claim that we are defending the sacredness of human life.”

At a global level, the institutionalized violence of economic injustice also has been clearly exposed by the coronavirus. Our ability to protect loved ones and neighbors varies widely according to our economic status. For example, billions of people around the world lack access to basics: water, soap, disinfectants, enough space to maintain a safe distance from other people, adequate food, health care, enough income to meet even basic needs, access to the internet or electronic tools for distance learning. Whole countries and specific

141 <https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/covid-19-crisis-continues-have-uneven-economic-impact-race-and-ethnicity>

regions within countries lack hospitals, critical care capacity, ventilators, adequate protection for nurses, doctors and other medical personnel and water delivery systems. COVID-19 is likely to leave the poor even farther behind.

According to [Oxfam](#), billionaires have more wealth than the 4.6 billion people who make up 60% of the planet's population, while 735 million people are living in extreme poverty. At the same time, public services are suffering from chronic underfunding or being outsourced to private companies that exclude the poorest people, while trillions are spent on weapons and preparations for war. In many countries a decent education or quality healthcare has become a luxury only the rich can afford. People from poor communities can expect to die ten or twenty years earlier than people in wealthy areas and women make up the greatest proportion of the world's poorest households. They are more likely to be found in poorly paid and precarious employment, supporting the market economy with cheap or free labor.

At the same time, people around the world are working to dismantle the structural violence that is harming their communities. Examples include nonviolent campaigns over the control of land and the extraction of natural resources.

In Colombia, the indigenous community of Las Pavas, Magdalena de Medio, had rights to the land that they had been cultivating for seven years, but the land was sold out from under them to Aportes San Isidro, a Colombia-based oil palm producer that destroyed their fields and planted them with oil palm monoculture. The state did nothing to intervene. Daabon corporation was the foreign owner of Aportes San Isidro. The Body Shop, a British cosmetics company with a brand that promotes ethical supply chains, was one of Daabon's largest purchasers of palm oil. Accompanied by Christian Peacemaker Teams, the community of Las Pavas launched an effective transnational campaign that included documenting the abuses in the Las Pavas community, direct conversations with all the stakeholders and a letter-writing effort that

engaged consumers in the global North. The indigenous farmers of Las Pavas were eventually able to return to their land.

Similarly Catholic Relief Services worked in 20 villages in the Mindanao, Philippines to help resolve long-standing land conflicts. They gained the trust and support of the Traditional Religious Leaders (TRLs) who were embedded in the local context and had connections to conflicting groups and also had their own interests in land issues. A community-based structure was established for collective reflection and the TRLs worked together to address the conflicts over land. This was an integrated process of peacebuilding, culture of peace and nonviolence training on one side and working on land law, land policy and land tenure education on the other.

In many countries, mining operations have generated severe environmental degradation and pollution, including the discharge of toxic substances into river systems, large volume waste disposal and the inadequate disposal of hazardous wastes. The majority of Peru's Aymara indigenous people live in the southern Andean region of Puno. The Aymara have seen their water of the Condoraque River contaminated by tons of toxic tailings from a tungsten mine operating near their community since the 1970s. The contamination affected not only their environment, but also their health and that of their animals. The Association Human Rights and Environment ([DHUMA](#)), a member of Pax Christi Peru and [supported](#) by Pax Christi International, has been working with the community to monitor the water contamination and mount a legal case that finally convinced the current mining company to restore the Condoraque back to a healthy state. Fundamental to the successful process of claiming their basic rights was the Aymara community's understanding of [ILO Convention No. 169](#), which protects tribal peoples' right to equality and freedom, to own the land they live on and use and make decisions about projects that affect them. The paradigm of nonviolence is a lens for judging this crisis and for pointing us in a more effective direction. It exposes interrelated systems and patterns of violence; illuminates how alternative nonviolent systems, policies, and ways of life

can be advanced throughout the world; and promotes strategies, practices, education and formation to support the emergence of this life-giving paradigm. These approaches include building nonviolent movements for social change; advancing peacebuilding strategies and practices; and spreading tools for living more nonviolent lives (such as nonviolent communication, peacemaking circles for restorative justice, trauma healing, anti-racism training and multiple forms of nonviolence training). In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, this nonviolence paradigm helps us to judge how current global systems fall far short of what is needed for the fullness of life for the planet and its inhabitants— and illuminates the new direction we must take as a worldwide community.

Catholic social teaching has increasingly identified nonviolence as a core value at the heart of Jesus' life and mission, and thus the life and mission of the Church, as underscored in recent papal statements, theological research and concrete praxis in diverse situations around the world. Each of the principles of Catholic social teaching -- the dignity of every human life, community and the common good, care for creation, participation, subsidiarity, the rights of labor, social mortgage on private property, preferential option for excluded

and impoverished people, economic justice and racial justice – are key dimensions of the universal ethic of nonviolence. These nonviolent values and approaches, applied to culturally and contextually appropriate structures and systems, would turn them toward right relationships, human dignity and ecological integrity worldwide.

Just as Jesus revealed an extraordinary, new way forward in the midst of the violence of his time, so too humanity is called to move forward daringly in this *Kairos* moment of both titanic calamity and epochal possibility. Restructuring the world will require a long-term global paradigm shift toward the well-being of all. Facing COVID-19 and the global culture of violence in which it is embedded, the Church is inspired to turn to Gospel nonviolence: the paradigm of the fullness of life that Jesus consistently preached, practiced, and enfolded, combining the thorough rejection of violence with the power of love in action.

“In the same way that violence has been institutionalized, we can institutionalize its antidote – nonviolence... What if we transformed our major institutions so they were facing in the direction of the Beloved Community?” (Kazu Haga, *Healing Resistance*)

Governance, Peace and Security, at the Heart of Global Solidarity

Jesus himself offers a “manual” for this strategy of peacemaking in the Sermon on the Mount... 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 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. *(Nonviolence: A Style of Politics for Peace, World Day of Peace 2017 #6)*

COVID-19 placed tremendous stress on societies and political systems around the world, generating significant insecurity and creating the potential for deepening structural and systemic violence (poverty, racism, hunger, extreme inequality, xenophobia, political repression, weakened human rights protections ...), as well as virulent outbreaks of direct violence (domestic violence, killing, militarized policing, gang and drug-related violence, gun violence, extremist violence ...). ...

Nonviolent values, just peace, global solidarity, inclusive security and right relationships in the whole earth community may become more possible, but the growing fragility of entrenched global systems will create enormous turbulence as the existing order, which perpetuates systemic and structural violence, seeks to reassert its power and reach. Global cooperation in a spectrum of nonviolent actions is urgently needed to establish just and effective institutions with the authority

and capacity to govern an increasingly complex world.

At the international level, this will require strengthening and deepening an overlapping web of intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, treaty regimes, ecumenical and interfaith bodies and civil society groups. Such institutions are able to cultivate interdependence and co-operation, norms against war, alternative dispute resolution mechanisms and sustained diplomacy. Their influence helps build more effective global governance and they have proven successful in mediating existing armed conflicts and helping to administer post-conflict agreements that create an enduring peace.

Nationally and locally, just governance includes responsive, accountable and fair public officials and political institutions that uphold the rule of law, provide space for a vibrant, multi-cultural civil society and protect basic human rights, especially for women, girls and those with special needs. Sustainable and equitable economic development, along with preventing corruption and ending the influence of powerful special interests who benefit from violence and war, can also contribute to just peace and inclusive security.

Given the reality of violence in the world, including extreme violence, the global community should make an immediate and long-term commitment to developing multilateral governance structures empowered to *sustain* peace — to support the application on a consistent basis of lessons learned about what makes for enduring peace. This includes preventative measures that address the root causes of conflict, support for those who challenge injustices nonviolently and active approaches for de-escalating destructive conflict, cultivating reconciliation, transforming patterns of perception and behavior and cultivating conversion.

Many nonviolent practices for preventing and interrupting violence have been well tested. For example,

- alternative policing, such as the mostly unarmed policing units now deployed in several countries (England, Norway, Ireland, New Zealand, Iceland and most of the Pacific Island nations) which can build trust, empower the community and reduce crime - in part because of their increased willingness to de-escalate situations and actively risk their lives to save others;
- unarmed civilian protection (UCP) initiatives that have protected people and saved lives in war zones and large-scale conflicts; in addition to important initiatives of local communities, these include organizations such as Nonviolent Peaceforce, Christian Peacemaker Teams, Peace Brigades International, Operation Dove and Meta Peace Team;
- sanctuary provided by faith communities and others;
- unarmed civilian programs in local communities that use a public health approach, recognizing that violence or killing mimics a contagious disease that clusters and is transmitted through observation, experience and trauma. “Credible messengers” who enjoy trust in the community are deployed to interrupt the transmission, in order to prevent violence and its contagion, as well as to change local norms that legitimate violence.
- traditional ways to maintain order – elders, women, clan members, age sets, spiritual leaders – that have now largely been eroded except in very traditional areas (e.g. South Sudan, Swaziland, and among some pastoralist and semi-nomadic peoples). Modern adaptations of these informal or semi-formal approaches include *Nyumba kumi* (“10 households”) in Tanzania and Kenya.

In the context of the pandemic, the urgent need to interrupt or prevent violent conflict and war and to nurture healing and solidarity is clear. A vast, historic collaboration between friends and

enemies at every level - from the United Nations to local communities - who abandon animosity and join together to address the monumental challenges caused or exposed by this pandemic should be guided by a just peace ethical framework, which would contribute in significant ways to a post pandemic future defined by good governance, just peace, inclusive human security and integral ecology. Such an ethic includes a set of norms with contextually relevant practices for preventing destructive conflict and violence, protecting vulnerable people and promoting sustainable peace founded on equal dignity, respect for life and nature, universal human rights, economic justice and a culture of peace and reconciliation rooted in the power of active nonviolence..

The Sermon on the Mount grounds and guides the Church’s public engagement on the difficult path to peace in a troubled world, as Pope Francis has affirmed by calling it the Church’s “manual” for peacemaking at every level of human society (World Day of Peace, 2017). While affirming the people’s *traditional righteousness*¹⁴² as far as it went, Jesus consistently diagnosed the vicious cycles of violence from which it could not free them and which it too often perpetuated. Thus Jesus offered *transforming initiatives* to empower the people to take creative nonviolent risks to strengthen human solidarity like loving their enemies and turning the other cheek.

Recognizing the interconnected roots of violence and the critical need for systemic and structural transformation, Catholic social teaching describes a nonviolent way of life that leads to a renewable, sustainable dynamic of just peace by developing effective nonviolent approaches — *transforming initiatives* — for preventing violence, protecting vulnerable people and promoting cultures of just peace. Pope Francis’s insistence that “time is greater than space” and that “unity prevails over conflict” implies the importance of taking time to imagine the best possible ways to transform a given conflict oriented by, and consistent with, just peace.

142 See Eli McCarthy, *A Just Peace Ethic: A Primer to Building Sustainable Peace*, 2020 and Gerald Schlabach, *A Pilgrim People: Becoming a Catholic Peace Church*, 2019.

In continuity with Jesus's teaching about *transforming initiatives* in the Sermon on the Mount, three categories of action that may overlap in time and function as urgently needed *transforming initiatives* have been articulated by moral theologians as just peace norms:

1. Develop virtues and skills to constructively engage and transform conflict and work for integral peace (sustaining spiritual disciplines, virtuous habits, education and training in key skills, participatory processes, form nonviolent peacemaking communities)
2. Break cycles of destructive conflict or violence (through diplomacy, nonviolent direct action, conflict transformation, rehumanizing rhetoric, integral disarmament, trauma awareness, restorative justice)
3. Commit to the long-term, ongoing work of sustaining peace (address root causes and systemic violence, relationality and reconciliation, gender and racial justice, inclusive political participation, robust civil society, ecological justice and sustainability, respect for human dignity and rights of all, economic justice, diversity of cultures, just and effective governance)

The just peace ethical framework is increasingly seen to be serving the purposes identified in Pope Francis's 2017 World Day of Peace message: "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."

Good governance, just peace and authentic security in which the whole earth community can thrive will emerge only from serious attention to meeting basic human needs on a global scale, including in the midst of the pandemic. COVID-19 has demonstrated clearly, for example, that spending hundreds of billions of dollars annually on weapons, preparations for war and militarized security forces has stolen resources from providing for healthy, resilient communities that can slow the spread of disease and more quickly recover from serious threats like the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, violence is not in accord with human dignity,¹⁴³ which is "inalienable."¹⁴⁴ We must turn away from legitimating violence and toward a just peace ethic which focuses us on the virtues and skills for constructive conflict, breaking cycles of violence, and building sustainable peace.¹⁴⁵

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.
(Pope Francis, Letter to Cardinal Blase Cupich, April 4, 2017)

143 Pope John Paul II, quoted in Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, par. 496.

144 Pope Francis, Aug. 12, 2020; http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2020/documents/papa-francesco_20200812_udienza-generale.html

145 https://nonviolencejustpeace.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/just-peace-handout_cni_workshop_2019.pdf

On the Threshold of a New Way of Being

We are on the threshold of a new way of being, a new paradigm, a new logic for life. What we are birthing will be closer to the beloved community; it will be anti-racist and socially just. It will be built on right relationships with each other and with the natural world. It will be richly, beautifully diverse and decidedly nonviolent. It will not depend on weapons of war but on right relationships, a commitment to inclusive human dignity and respect for the integrity of creation.

This new paradigm will be based on a completely different understanding of our place as humans in the whole Earth community -- and a recognition that we are latecomers at that to a spectacular cosmic reality that we are just now (thanks to the Hubble and Webb telescopes) beginning to see. It will recognize that diversity and relationality are imbedded in the cosmos and essential to survival on this planet. And it will clearly identify and reject violence in all its forms: armed violence, physical violence, structural and systemic violence, gender and racial violence, cultural, ecological, economic, spiritual and psychological violence.

Ilia Delio talks about “the new person” emerging in evolution, who is embracing pluralities of gender, race and religion; who is called into a “new type of consciousness where things are first seen together and then as distinct within this togetherness.”¹⁴⁶ She affirms that we are being rewired for belonging to the cosmic whole. We are more and more aware that we are one earth community; we have a planetary consciousness that, according to Ilia, evokes a deep concern, especially in younger generations, for the planet and for those who are impoverished or marginalized.

Michael Nagler, founder of the Metta Center for Nonviolence, talks about “the new story” that is replacing the “old story” told by the dominant

white culture about scarcity, competition and violence. He insists that violence is not the nature of humans - that love, faith, trust and the desire for community, peace and well-being are central to our identity and that nonviolence is a creative power, a pervasive energy, a fundamental principle that we can develop and deploy in human interactions. “Violence, he says, “is a tendency that pulls us back, away from the recognition of unity; nonviolence pulls us forward, toward that recognition ... We human beings ... can play an active role in our own evolution and consequently that of our species. The discovery of our capacity for nonviolence, connected as it is with higher consciousness or love, is a key to this development ... Nonviolence is not only at home in the new story, it *is* the new story.”¹⁴⁷

Nonviolence is more than pacifism; it is a spirituality, a way of life. a new way of thinking. It is a potentially universal ethic that could guide the world, including in times of crisis, toward just peace rather than justified war; toward respect and inclusion rather than exploitation. And it is a proven, effective approach to deep peace seen through the prism of justice.

Nonviolence imitates Jesus’ way of life, but is also challenged and shaped by the history and contemporary experience of those on the receiving end of war and racism and neglect and planetary destruction. Nonviolence is not just *not violent* but is muscular and actively engaged in preventing or interrupting the violence that is imbedded in our culture, by the way we relate to each other, by the way too many in our societies who have been and still are bruised, broken, killed by “the system” and by the way we humans treat the earth. And it is a nonviolence that energetically promotes just peace, the new story, the beloved community, the New Creation.

¹⁴⁶ Ilia Delio, *The Hours of the Universe* (Orbis Books, 2021), 98.

¹⁴⁷ Michael Nagler, *The Third Harmony* (Berrett-Koehler, 2020), 152.

Thousands and thousands of people, whole communities around the world are giving their lives to making the new story real. It is visible in brilliant work to root out systemic racism and structural injustice; to end the death penalty; to redress centuries of oppression against indigenous communities; to break habits of exploitation that are destroying the earth; to learn and promote restorative justice practices; to welcome migrants and refugees; to rid the world of nuclear weapons; to celebrate diversity and promote unwavering inclusion and respect for the rights of all people, believing that radical inclusion is the foundational message of the Sermon on the Mount.

It is visible in efforts to be respectful and deeply inclusive in our use of language; in growing awareness of where our feet are planted, acknowledging with gratitude and deep respect to elders both past and present that we are gathered on the traditional land of the Anacostans, the Piscataway and the Pamunkey people.

By his vision, creativity and commitment to the cry of the earth and the cry of those forced to live on the margins of our world, Pope Francis is urging us toward a paradigm shift. There is a leaning toward nonviolence in Catholic social thought that is being enhanced by the synodal process; and a complex

institutional Church that is troubled by scandal and a violent history has been amazingly open to engaging with our Catholic Nonviolence Initiative.

Five years ago, in his 2017 World Day of Peace message, Pope Francis said, “to be true followers of Jesus today also includes embracing His teaching about nonviolence. ...I pledge the assistance of the Church in every effort to build peace through active and creative nonviolence.”

We are doing all that we can to take Pope Francis up on his offer, urging the Church to promote the necessary shift from an ethic of violence and war to an ethic of nonviolence.

What we are birthing will be closer to the beloved community; it will be built on right relationships with each other and with the natural world. It will not depend on weapons of war but on a commitment to inclusive human dignity and respect for the integrity of creation. It will be diverse, nonviolent, and a new way of being viewed through the prism of justice.

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