

## *Christian Focus on Peace, Justice and Disarmament*

This is an edited version of a talk given at the 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gathering of Pax Christi in Florence in November 2025. Please make contact if you wish to have the full transcript. The talk began with the story of a peace walk in 1962 conducted by Satish Kumar from India to Washington. I had in mind the beautiful quote by Pope Francis who spoke of the 'culture of encounter' to highlight and to develop our interconnectedness with all living things. These two young Indians were offered hospitality by people of all ethnicities, religions, classes and dogmas. It reflected my experience in Florence with so many people gathering to witness to peace by encountering one another and sharing the same humanity. Kumar did not go as a Hindu, an Indian, a Socialist or a coloured man, but as a human being and met only human beings.

Acknowledging this dignity, Pope Francis said that peace, security and human and ecological flourishing are grounded in right relationships with God, each other, and the whole of creation. He spoke of 'piecemeal' violence that causes great suffering: wars; terrorism, organized crime; the abuses of migrants; human trafficking; and the devastation of the environment. In *Fratelli Tutti*, he noted 'dark clouds over a closed world' and identified 'trends in our world that hinder the development of universal fraternity' as the world is experiencing the highest number of violent conflicts since World War II. Christ offers a radically positive approach – of God's unconditional love, that is welcoming and forgiving. It is a gospel imperative that we stop the violence and work to build peace in a world where **conflict** often overshadows **compassion**.

Our task is to confront the deep roots of cultural and structural violence head on by resisting the systems and ideologies that perpetuate inequality, dehumanization, and oppression, even those within our faith communities. We need a radical transformation of our collective moral imaginary where every life is valued and affirmed, where everyone —regardless of race, class, gendered identity, sexuality, or sexual expression—are seen as sacred and worthy of justice.

In 2022, in calling for more investment in education and less in weaponry, Pope Francis said it needed to be accompanied by the promotion of a '[culture of care](#),' which could become '*a common language working to break down barriers and build bridges.*' As *Fratelli tutti* powerfully challenges our ecological, political, economic, and social life, there is a call to gaze at the world to see the basic, indispensable relation of all things and people, near and far. To be truly human is to be willing to look at the world in its beauty and its pain – contemplative gaze – and listening deeply through human encounters to the griefs and the joys of one's age. Francis upheld that we see ourselves as 'a people' and to become 'a people' when we encounter each other in dialogue, face-to-face, and side-by-side.

In *Fratelli Tutti*, fraternity competes with war. For too long, we — governments, institutions, individuals — have accepted war as a constant companion of our time. It has become a cultural and political fact. We cannot remain on the sidelines. Peace is everybody's task. As Pope John Paul II said in Assisi in 1986, '*Peace awaits its prophets ... its builders ... peace is a workshop, open to all and not just to specialists, savants and strategists ... it comes about in a thousand little acts in daily life.*'

So, why are believers in the nonviolent Jesus, the Prince of Peace, so silent? Why do we not demand an immediate end to the genocide in Gaza? Why do we not demand the end to the destruction of boats in the Caribbean? Why were we silent about the nuclear tests in the Pacific and the Australian deserts? Why are we still silent about the impacts of these actions on the people?

Need to cultivate nonviolence in our most personal thoughts and values. 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 has nothing to do with surrender, lack of involvement and passivity. Dag Hammarskjöld in *Marking* leaves us with a challenge: Life only demands from the strength you possess. Only one feat is possible – not to have run away.