



Resolutions To Action

LCWR Global Concerns Committee

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Called to Nonviolence

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EXPERIENCE

Invited by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace and Pax Christi International with LCWR, CMSM, Pace e Bene, the JPIC Commission of the Unions of Superior Generals (USG/UISG), the Columbans and Maryknoll, 85 people from around the world gathered in Rome last April for a conference on nonviolence and just peace. Many participants came from countries that have been at war or dealing with serious violence for decades: South Sudan, the Philippines, the DR Congo, Iraq, Sri Lanka, Palestine, Lebanon, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Uganda, Burundi, South Africa, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Colombia.

While acknowledging the difficulties, even danger, of persistent, active nonviolence, participants in the conference shared stunning examples of effective peace-building in South Sudan, Northern Uganda, the Philippines, Colombia and elsewhere under extremely difficult circumstances. They recognized that communities of faith are contributing to the develop-

ment of other routes than violent ones to solve crises.

The Rome meeting has generated a lively conversation on active nonviolence as a way of life, a positive and powerful force for social change, and a process for ending violence without violence, transforming conflict, and protecting the vulnerable. Given the effectiveness of strategic nonviolent practices in different situations of violent conflict and the fact that nonviolence is often misrepresented or misunderstood, participants in the Rome conference agreed to try to move the conversation about war and peace in the Catholic Church from just war to just peace by developing a deeper understanding of and commitment to nonviolence.

SOCIAL ANALYSIS

Many people around the world are living and making peace; caring about one another; and striving for social justice and right relationships with the rest of creation. Yet, war, gang violence, gun violence, terrorist attacks, fear, and enemy-making, and the structural and systemic violences of poverty,

racism, environmental destruction, and gender violence are present in every person's life -- virtually if not personally.

For decades many of us have been asking: *Is there another path for the human community to take that will lead us beyond perpetual violence and war?*

While ethical criteria are necessary for addressing serious threats in a violent world, participants in the Rome conference called for the church to give less attention to the "just war theory,"

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which is well ensconced in international law. In many ways the language and concept of a “just war” has become a major obstacle to developing nonviolent tools and capacity for preventing violence, protecting vulnerable communities, transforming structures of violence, and promoting sustainable peace.

At the same time, “just peace,” as it is being developed by scholars and practitioners of peace, is an excellent example of a nonviolent moral framework that can help us navigate challenging ethical questions in a violent world and discern whether or not intended actions will move us toward the peace we all seek – or once again toward perpetual war.

A school of thought and set of practices for building peace at all stages of conflict, just peace draws on three key approaches—principles and moral criteria, practical norms, and virtue ethics—for building a positive peace. Just peace is not only the absence of violence but the presence of social, economic, and political conditions that sustain peace and human flourishing and prevent conflicts from turning violent or returning to violence. Just peace can help Christians move beyond war.

REFLECTION

Nonviolence was central to Jesus’ life and teaching. The Rome conference outcome document, *An Appeal to the Catholic Church to Recommit to the Centrality of Active Nonviolence* (www.nonviolencejustpeace.net), notes that

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); ... Jesus embodied nonviolence by actively resisting systemic dehumanization ...

What if the institutional Catholic Church encouraged Catholics worldwide to study nonviolence and to engage in the development of increasingly effective nonviolent practices for protecting vulnerable communities, avoiding violent conflict, transforming structures of violence, and promoting cultures of peace?

What if ... the whole Catholic Church followed the example of the Church in the Philippines or Colombia, Uganda or South Sudan? What if Catholics were formed from the beginning of life to understand the power of active nonviolence and the connection of nonviolence to the heart of the Gospel – trained to understand the implications of love your enemy? What if every Catholic in the world were alert to signs of impending violence and trained to transform conflict? What if Catholics advocated actively for less spending on military and more on diplomacy, unarmed civilian protection teams, early warning systems, trauma healing programs, training in conflict transformation, as well as on just and sustainable development, education, environmental healing – efforts that we know can make a difference. What if the Catholic Church committed its vast spiritual, intellectual, and financial resources to developing a new moral framework and language for discerning ways to prevent violence and protect people and the planet in a dangerous world?

ACTION

To more deeply explore what could be a major shift in Catholic theology on war and peace, conference participants asked Pope Francis to write an encyclical on nonviolence and just peace. They asked the institutional church to integrate gospel nonviolence explicitly into the life, including the sacramental life, and work of the church and to focus not on the “just war theory” but on the development of nonviolent tools that can help the world move into the future on a different path.

In a very positive development, Pope Francis approved a proposal from conference participants to write his World Peace Day 2017 message on nonviolence. The theme is Nonviolence: A Style of Politics for Peace.

- In your congregation study the Appeal from the Rome conference at nonviolencejustpeace.net/final-statement-an-appeal-to-the-catholic-church-to-re-commit-to-the-centrality-of-gospel-nonviolence.
- Prayerfully consider whether as an individual or a congregation you can endorse the Appeal.
- During 2017 highlight the World Peace Day message on nonviolence using resources on The Catholic Nonviolence Initiative website: www.nonviolencejustpeace.net.
- Study and practice the virtues of active nonviolence and just peace in your congregation and congregational ministries.

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