

Pax Christi International Africa Consultation Catholic Nonviolence Initiative

Many of you were present at the April Conference on Nonviolence and Just Peace, but others were not, so just a few words of introduction – and an update for those who were there.

Despite the fact that people and communities around the world are living and making peace, are caring about each other, are striving for social justice and right relationships with the rest of creation, every day we are faced with violence... that you all know so well – and that Bishop Kevin, Danisa and others have reminded us about today including fear and enemy-making ... structural and systemic violence ...

Danisa asked us this morning, **Is this the Africa we want?** For decades so many of us have been asking a very similar question: **Is there another path for the human community to take that will lead us beyond perpetual war and violence?**

and

What contribution could the institutional Catholic Church make to help us find another path and move in a direction that better reflects Jesus' teachings and way of life?

Given that the size and reach around the world of Catholic Church – and the style of Pope Francis' leadership we began to wonder if we could explore this question with the Vatican and especially with people living in the midst of war, violence and violent conflict.

It seems evident that:

- The effectiveness of strategic nonviolent practices in many different situations of potential or actual violent conflict has been demonstrated in different ways throughout history, but especially in the past century.
- Yet, nonviolence is often misrepresented, misunderstood or too narrowly defined.
- Rarely is there sufficient human or financial investment in creative thinking, teaching nonviolence or developing effective nonviolent practices – from skilled diplomacy to policies or tools for the prevention of violence and protection of people.
- In addition, concepts like nonviolence, structural violence, culture of violence, just peace, culture of peace etc. are not widely known or well understood in the Catholic community. Where discussion about these topics takes place, it tends to be a theoretical or intellectual discussion among moral theologians, ethicists, academics, and peace activists. The movement from a “just war” framework to a just peace framework is neither understood nor accepted and there is very little grassroots Catholic education or preaching about Catholic teaching on war and peace.
- At the same time, the just war tradition can no longer claim center stage as **the** Christian approach to war and peace. Emphasizing the need to work for a just peace, the official Church has been rereading the text of Jesus' life, re-appropriating the

Christian vocation of pro-active peacemaking and moving away from the acceptability of calling war “just.”

- While clear ethical criteria are necessary for addressing egregious attacks or threats in a violent world, we thought that moral theologians and ethicists should no longer refer to such criteria as the “just war theory,” because that language undermines the moral imperative to develop tools and capacity for nonviolent conflict.

We believe that the exceedingly rich concrete experience of people making peace around the world – especially those in extremely violent circumstances who are living witnesses to the power of nonviolence - could help enrich a Catholic theology of positive peace.

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

The impact could be tremendous, so we decided to see if we could make a contribution to the process of moving in that direction:

We began with a conference on nonviolence and just peace in Rome in April 2016. How many of you were there?

The specific goals of our conference were

1. New articulation of Catholic teaching on war and peace, including explicit rejection of “just war” language in favor of an alternative ethical framework for engaging acute conflict and atrocities by developing the themes and practices of nonviolent conflict transformation and just peace.
2. Clearer, more developed, Scripture-based Catholic teaching on violence and nonviolence in social, cultural, economic and political spheres.
3. Identification of ways to deepen the understanding of and commitment to nonviolence throughout the Catholic community -- in Catholic dioceses, seminaries, Catholic educational institutions, Catholic media, and parishes.

The conference itself was extraordinary, particularly the presence of so many people from regions of war and violent conflict ((name countries) and reflections in advance from participants on their own experience of nonviolence

Participative “fishbowl” process and language groups addressing four main topics:

- ✓ Experience of Nonviolence in the Midst of Violence
- ✓ Jesus and Nonviolence
- ✓ Just Peace Practices in the Church
- ✓ Moving Beyond Perpetual War

Outcome document – Appeal to the Catholic Church to re-commit to the Centrality of Active Nonviolence (main points in document and specific requests to Church ... (see Appeal and brochure)

Since the conference in April much has happened:

- **Catholic Nonviolence Initiative** was created to follow up the work of the April conference. It is active in the Philippines, the UK, Germany, Australia, Japan, Mexico,
- World Day of Peace 2017 message will be on the theme of Nonviolence: A Style of Politics for Peace
- Continued conversation with Cardinal Turkson and Archbishop Tomasi – toward a meeting with Pope Francis and hopefully an encyclical
- endorsements of Appeal by Japanese Bishops Conference
- thousands of individual endorsements
- enthusiastic response of others – South Sudan Bishops Conference, the Elders, the Alliance of Peacebuilding, WCC, etc.

This week we hope to further ground this work of Pax Christi International through our project, the **Catholic Nonviolence Initiative**, in an African context ...

- www.nonviolencejustpeace.net