



Pax Christi Germany
Stuttgart - 17 March 2013

Peace Spirituality

Basic to Pax Christi's work for peace is a rich and vibrant spirituality and a commitment to respond to complex and destructive human behaviour out of a deep well of moral and ethical principles inspired by the Christian Scriptures, Catholic social teaching and the witness of nonviolent peacemakers from different faith traditions, including Archbishop Oscar Romero, Franz Jägerstätter, the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., Dorothy Day and Mahatma Gandhi.

1. Often, however, the spirituality – the faith that guides and motivates Pax Christi members remains in the deepest places in the hearts of each one. Their experience of God's presence or absence, encounters with good and evil, inspiring moments, the impact on one of another's witness to their own beliefs are rarely shared – or even articulated.
2. For the past several years, Pax Christi has been inviting people in the movement from around the world to share their spiritual journeys. Bringing together the stories of grassroots people and their communities, Pax Christi has begun to capture the complexity of human experiences which take place in a world where war, conflict and violence exist alongside hope, peace and reconciliation.

3. This effort to understand how in a given situation people acted, and their reflections on the use of violence or the option to employ methods of active nonviolence has begun to bear fruit and is a rich source of insights into lessons learned by Pax Christi members in their work for peace. Recent PCI publicationsⁱ based on reflections and stories from Pax Christi members on different continents identify several commonly held and deeply rooted values and practices that resonate with the Catholic tradition.
4. First among them is a belief in the dignity of each person. Pax Christi spirituality confirms that “in the struggle against violence, poverty and injustice, we will act with love and compassion – respecting the human dignity of our opponents, even of perpetrators. This belief invites us to build bridges between people and communities, rich and poor, to overcome the borders that separate and marginalize people, to establish bonds of collaboration between those who hold decision-making power and those who can hardly make their voice heard. On our path toward a just peace we seek reconciliation and work for it.”ⁱⁱ
5. Pax Christi expresses this absolute respect for the dignity of others through a fundamental commitment to nonviolence. Jesus called us to right relationships – to relationships built not on violence, but on respect and social justice. Everyone should have a life of dignity and sufficiency. The beloved community must include every person without exception. Our commitment to nonviolence is *personal* in that it helps shape the fundamental direction of our lives, the nature of our

relationships at every level, and our peacemaking activities, but it is also *organizational*, shaping our identity as a peace movement, defining our way of working for peace and describing the right societal relationships we seek within the human and whole earth community.

6. In the *Challenge of Peace* and ten years later in the *Harvest of Justice*, the U.S. Catholic Bishops said, "The vision of Christian nonviolence is not passive about injustice and the defence of the rights of others...it consists of a commitment to resist manifest injustice and public evil which means other than force." The nonviolence that Pax Christi has embraced is decidedly active nonviolence.
7. Pax Christi International believes that the pursuit of peace requires careful social analysis and theological reflection on the values of our faith tradition in specific situations of violent conflict and war; vigorous spiritual exercises and creative liturgical expression; plus, presence, accompaniment and the nurturing of relationships across boundaries between countries, cultures, neighbourhoods, and people. Work for peace necessitates the creation and use of a moral framework and ethical tools that apply the principles of nonviolence in a way that is appropriate to these times and appropriate to particular situations. Since its founding, Pax Christi's commitment to prayer, study and action in a given context has kept our movement grounded in faith and thoughtfully engaged.
8. We struggle with the application of this commitment in an already-violent world – in particular, how to respond when people or whole

communities are threatened, subjected to horrific violence or faced with annihilation – how to make nonviolence functional in the political arena.

9. As Christians, whose worldview is defined by hope, Pax Christi believes in the possibility of a radical global conversion to nonviolence and sustainable peace. We believe that human beings are *subjects* of a future in which life can be protected, not victims of a future over which we have no control. The work of Pax Christi members and member organizations in situations of intense violence gives testimony to that belief.

10. Despite its effective use in the Philippines, Eastern Europe, South Africa, Colombia, the Sudans, El Salvador and elsewhere in recent years, however, the nonviolence tradition remains underdeveloped, both theologically and pragmatically, especially at an international level. The beginnings of theological thought have been articulated: nonviolence is rooted in the value of every human life and respect for creation; it is formed in the shadow of the cross; and it is infused with hope. The importance of nonviolence also is emerging from painful, practical experience when resorting to violence – even violence that seemed justified – in fact perpetuated violence. In some countries where war has been a way of life for decades, whole generations have little understanding of other-than-violent ways to resolve conflict and an ongoing flood of small arms helps make violence readily available and painfully effective. Furthermore, given the extent of war's physical,

psychological and environmental damage; the nature of real threats from extremist groups and non-state actors; the tendency to respond to criminal activities with military action, and so on, it is likely that so-called just war criteria are being used more often to justify unjustifiable war than to avoid it. Evidence from many different corners of the world increasingly suggests that active nonviolence is the only pathway to sustainable peace, especially if it is coupled with effective international capacity to resist manifest injustice and public evil non-violently – respecting just international law and moral boundaries defined by the obligation to respect the sacredness of human life and the integrity of creation.

11. Theologically, politically and strategically there is much work to be done. The diversity of experience among Pax Christi member organizations results in a rich, ongoing dialogue about the application of our commitment to active nonviolence. Some among us are pacifist; others believe that the use of even-violent force can occasionally be justified in circumstances of already existing extreme violence. Our dialogue about ways to interpret the “responsibility to protect,” for example, is rich and ongoing, highlighting the challenge of understanding in the context of the 21st century the moral laws around the use of violence and even whether the consequences of the use of violence can reduce existing violence and thus be positive in some extreme cases.

12. Most Pax Christi member organizations would agree with Professor Emeritus of Philosophy *Nick Gier from the University of Idaho* that “The virtue of nonviolence, along with patience and fortitude, should be taught as central virtues in any character education program. As future citizens, children should be taught that violence is never morally necessary, and that conflicts should always, whenever possible, be resolved peacefully. In a world where moral character is understood to be internal — as taught by the examples of Christ, the Buddha, Gandhi, and King — nonviolence would not just be optional personal virtue, but a required civic virtue.”ⁱⁱⁱ

13. Long-time Pax Christi member, Mary Evelyn Jegen, says, “Nonviolence in international affairs is analogous to good nutrition and exercise as a way of promoting and maintaining health. Nonviolence ...is a way of life that requires courage and sacrifice. It holds promise for displacing war if sufficient human resources are invested in its study and in training for its practice”^{iv}

14. Virtue ethics may in fact be the most practical route to bringing the practice of nonviolence into the political debate, nationally and internationally.^v

15. Pax Christi International also believes that there is no real peace without reconciliation, which is both a vital element in Pax Christi’s spirituality and a significant tool in Pax Christi’s peace building toolbox. Reconciliation was the founding motivation for Pax Christi as a movement and our commitment remains strong to support practical

steps toward the healing of relationships broken by war and injustice. The work of a Pax Christi member organization, the Centre for Peace Osijek in Croatia (http://www.paxchristi.net/international/eng/show_mo.php?id=33&bug=74) is a good example. During the war in the Balkans, the Centre for Peace prepared the ground for the peaceful return of displaced persons and refugees, building confidence across ethnic divides and initiating interethnic cooperation toward the recovery of war torn multi-ethnic communities.

16. Pax Christi meetings in Vukovar, Croatia almost 20 years later continued this impetus to reconciliation and underscored the importance of truth-telling and memory in the process of reconciliation. Completely destroyed by Serbian forces 20 years ago, the wounds of Vukovar, Croatia are not healed, but many citizens and the local government are promoting inter-ethnic trust. To accompany their move toward reconciliation, participants in Pax Christi meetings in Vukovar visited the Memorial Center Ovcăra, which served as a concentration camp for non-Serbian prisoners during the war. Two hundred civilians and soldiers imprisoned in the camp were killed and buried in mass graves; 62 people disappeared. To honour their memory, the Pax Christi group held a prayer service at the place of execution. In part, we prayed:

God of all goodness, you have called us together in these days to remember the victims of a terrible atrocity. We do remember them – each one. We have heard their stories retold. We have listened with care and allowed these stories to open our hearts, to fill us with compassion.

We are standing on holy ground.

Too many times we have stood on ground made holy by human suffering

Too often we have been to places where violence overwhelmed life –

Throughout the world, communities of resistance to violence, people yearning for a just peace, enact liturgies of memory that have profound creative power. ...

But death by horrific violence continues; so does a spirit of irrepressible resistance. That's why we come together this afternoon. Resistance to death is impelled by memory. Those who were so brutally killed in all of the places we have named as sacred become more and more alive if we remember - even though life has been taken from them.

With them and in their names we re-establish claims of justice and love and sustain the audacious power to refuse death.

Each step toward truth, each effort to uncover the roots of the violence, each movement toward a better world, honours the whole cloud of witnesses.

God of life, you who are the Good in a world broken by hatred and violence, hear us this day. Let our small gathering nourish the possibility that truth and justice will prevail. Grant us compassion – the capacity to suffer with another, even the bitterest of enemies. Let us become the better world we yearn for, the peace we seek - by who we are, by how we live, by the work we do. Amen.

17. Growing from this commitment to reconciliation, Pax Christi's spirituality also reflects a deep valuing of diversity. Although ours is a Catholic peace movement, people from many different faith and cultural traditions share and enhance our journey toward peace.

18. In New Zealand, for example, Pax Christi members have learned from the Maori culture that the key to peace is awareness; sensitivity to who we are and where we are that involves a continuing dialogue with self, neighbour, communities, nations, the earth and its creatures. Maori

believe that to reconcile is to re-establish right relationships, to reveal the reality of the violation and damage to victims and perpetrators and to ensure truth and integrity in repairing the damage, introducing compassion, sacrifice and generosity into the healing. ^{vi}

19. We also recognize that “difference” is often used to evoke fear and as a basis for violent repression, the abuse of human rights, social and economic injustice and war. In many parts of the world, Pax Christi is responding to the demonization of Islam by encouraging greater tolerance and by increased interaction and cooperation with Muslim communities and organizations. Recognizing the importance of symbols to promote respect for diversity, Pax Christi Austria countered a wave of protests in their country against the building of even very modest minarets in the “country of Catholic bell towers” by publishing a prominent statement that attracted the attention of the media.

20. As another example, in the United States, Pax Christi has made a 20 year commitment to transforming itself into “an anti-racist, multi-cultural movement for peace with justice. Because racism inflicts violence on people of colour; because violence anywhere is injustice everywhere; and because injustice is a sin against humanity and against the God, who creates, redeems, and sanctifies us, racism is contrary to who we are called to be: brothers and sisters all.”

<http://paxchristiusa.org/programs/brothers-and-sisters-all/>

21. Since the beginning, Pax Christi has sustained attention to the spirituality that nourishes our movement and has an impact on the priorities and

effectiveness of our work for peace. This spirituality, with roots in, for example, the dignity of every person, active nonviolence, reconciliation and the gift of diversity is richly influenced by the Catholic tradition in which our movement has been nourished. Almost every member organization of Pax Christi International produces culturally and contextually appropriate resources for personal and communal prayer and integrates prayer, reflection and sacramental expression into their programs on a regular basis.

22. Our activities for peace are likewise influenced by Catholic culture and make full use of Catholic political and ecclesiastical connections locally, regionally and internationally to enhance our networks and capacity.

Small Groups

The following questions can be shared:

- a) Which situation of conflict, violence or war has deeply touched you and/or challenged you? Describe this situation in its complexity and your own feelings, responses and other experiences. How did you act in/with this situation? What was your attitude towards the use of violence? What was the meaning of nonviolence in this situation?
- b) How did you experience God in this situation/process? Or God's absence? Or God's "coming-and-going"? Has your understanding of God been changed in the process/situation? In addition, have you noticed a changing experience of your way of praying, celebrating the liturgy, experiencing Christian community or understanding of being Church?
- c) What inspires and motivates you on the journey towards peace? What keeps you going? How would you describe your own spirituality in relation to peace? (Your understanding of God, the human condition, worldview, creation, good and evil, etc.) Mention some examples or ways of peace building which in your own experience are most successful

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ⁱ Stepping Stones: A Pax Christi International Peace Spirituality (2012)

<http://archive.paxchristi.net/2012/2012-0245-en-gl-PS.pdf>

Pax Christi Latin America peace Spirituality document

ⁱⁱ Ibid p. 10

ⁱⁱⁱ Nicholas F. Gier, "Nonviolence as a Civic Virtue" (2005)

http://www.ikedacenter.org/themes/peace_gier.htm

^{iv} Stepping Stones p. 17

^v Eli McCarthy's book

^{vi} Stepping Stones p. 22.