The scene is painfully familiar: a crisis captures the attention of the world – North Korea and the U.S. are dangerously posturing, with nuclear weapons in the mix; Rohingya Muslims are fleeing brutality in Myanmar; thousands of Yazidis are caught in the Sinjar Mountains where they fled from rapidly advancing ISIS militants; hundreds of thousands of Syrians are under siege in al-Raqqa and dozens of other cities; people - especially women - are in danger from unrelenting violence in South Sudan and the DR Congo. There is no question that the world has to respond to situations like these. Yet, when we consider the options, what we find every time is that the military toolbox is full to the brim with weapons and well trained personnel while the active nonviolence toolbox is almost empty. That is surely not surprising since in the US alone we have been spending on the order of $600 billion a year preparing for war and almost nothing preparing for peace. In other words, we are well prepared to win the war, but woefully unprepared to win the peace.

We have seen the violence repeatedly horrify our own communities here in the U.S. as well (Charlottesville, Ferguson, Baltimore, Chicago, Orlando, …) and we are once again aware that nuclear weapons pose an existential threat to life on this planet. The human community simply cannot sustain the levels of war and violence that have such unconscionable consequences. We have to find a better way to live together on this small planet.

There are alternatives.

A few weeks ago I met a remarkable young Muslim woman, Alaa Murabit, who founded an organization called *The Voice of Libyan Women*. Together, these women walk into extremists’ homes, schools and workplaces and create a dialogue with those who feel they have no alternative, drawing on religious discourse and Libyan culture as entry points while using education and media campaigns to change attitudes.

In Mindanao, Philippines local people created zones of peace in a deliberate effort to stay out of the war that was surrounding them.

In Rwanda during the 1994 genocide, the Muslim community - both Hutu and Tutsi - refused to participate in the killing and actively (and creatively) protected people whose lives were endangered.
Pax Christi International is a global Catholic peace movement with 120 member organizations working for peace on five continents. Founded at the end of the second world war to promote reconciliation between the French and the Germans, Pax Christi members share a deep commitment to active nonviolence. We believe that much more creative energy as well as intellectual and financial investment in the development of effective nonviolent approaches to peacekeeping and peacebuilding are essential to addressing the huge challenges of the 21st century.

For our members around the world nonviolence is a spirituality, a way of life, a deep commitment to live the values we believe shaped the early Christian community in the first century context of occupied Palestine where violence was a way of life. For us, the so-called “hard sayings” in Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount are central. But the challenge is how to interpret that message in the context of a 21st century world immersed in extremely complex situations of violence. What does “love your enemy” mean now – yes, at a personal level, but maybe even more importantly, what does this worldview offer in the public/political arena?

In the public arena, nonviolence is often misrepresented, misunderstood, too narrowly defined or wrongly dismissed as either passive or utopian. Very strong evidence, however, suggests a different conclusion - that active nonviolence is both powerful and effective. It is also much, much more than crossing a line or chaining oneself to a fence. It is much broader than civil resistance.

In fact, one of the great gifts of our age is the growing recognition of active nonviolence as a positive and powerful force for social change; a process for ending violence without lethal force; for transforming conflict; and for protecting the vulnerable.

In recent years, groundbreaking empirical research has demonstrated the effectiveness of active nonviolence and the importance of increased investment in understanding, developing, teaching and scaling up nonviolent approaches to solving major U.S. domestic and international crises.

For example, Maria Stephan (USIP) and Erica Chenoweth conducted a landmark study of nonviolent civil resistance campaigns over the last one hundred years, *Why Civil Resistance Works: the strategic logic of nonviolent conflict.*
Stephan and Chenoweth collected data on all major nonviolent and violent campaigns for the overthrow of a government since 1900. The data covered the entire world and consisted of every known case where there were at least 1,000 observed participants, hundreds of cases.

They found that from 1900 to 2006, nonviolent campaigns worldwide were twice as likely to succeed outright as violent insurgencies. Not only that, this trend has been increasing over time, so that in the last 50 years, nonviolent campaigns are becoming increasingly successful and common, whereas violent insurgencies are becoming increasingly rare and unsuccessful. This is true even in those extremely brutal, authoritarian conditions where you would expect nonviolent resistance to fail.

The answer seems to lie in people power itself. Chenoweth and Stephan’s data showed that no single campaign has failed during the time period they studied after the campaign had achieved the active and sustained participation of just 3.5% of the population.

Every single campaign that surpassed that 3.5% was a nonviolent one. In fact, the nonviolent campaigns were on average four times larger than the average violent campaigns, and they were often much more inclusive and representative in terms of gender, age, race, class, and the urban-rural distinction. Moreover, 75% of the violent campaigns failed, while a majority of the nonviolent civil resistance campaigns were successful.

Civil resistance allows people of all different levels of physical ability to participate including the elderly, people with disabilities, and children.

Of course, just because a campaign is nonviolent does not ensure its success. Just as for violent campaigns, flexible and creative leadership is crucial to success. A poorly managed, disunified campaign will fail.

While Chenoweth and Stephan’s work was groundbreaking, there is much more empirical research being done (including by them) that speaks to the effectiveness of other nonviolent approaches and to the importance of increased investment in developing, teaching and scaling up nonviolent strategies – from conflict transformation in neighborhoods and restorative justice practices in schools to early warning andatrocity prevention mechanisms, to unarmed civilian protection and a massive shift of resources into diplomacy and just, sustainable development.
The Catholic Peacebuilding Network, which includes Catholic universities with strong peace studies programs (Notre Dame, Boston College, Catholic University, San Diego, St. Thomas, etc.), the USCCB, CRS, Pax Christi International, Sant’ Egidio, ... has facilitated research particularly in Burundi, Colombia and Mindanao, Philippines on Catholic peacebuilding – what peacebuilding programs work; what contribution can the Catholic Church make? Their edited book on *Catholic Peacebuilding* is an extremely important resource.

The United Nations is also closely examining what makes for peace. The High Level Independent Panel on UN Peace Operations’ report from 2015 specifically emphasized the importance of preventing armed conflict and of mobilizing partnerships to support political solutions; of employing unarmed and civilian tools for protecting civilians, of emphasizing inclusion, healing and reconciliation, of addressing the underlying causes of conflict, of revitalizing livelihoods in conflict-affected economies, of rebuilding confidence in political processes and responsible state structures, of reforming police, promoting the rule of law and ensuring respect for human rights.

The International Peace Institute has been helping UN member states explore the concept of “sustaining peace” that came from the review process in an effort to focus on the need for building peace in its own right and not only in post conflict situations...

Others – the Alliance for Peacebuilding, the International Center on Nonviolent Conflict, and the US Institute of Peace - are examining closely the intersection of effective nonviolent civil resistance strategies and successful peacebuilding strategies.

I have recently discovered an amazing little book called *Opting Out of War*, which illustrated that important research, analysis of case studies, and ongoing dialogue among activists and academics, peacemakers and policymakers are beginning to reveal important lessons about what makes for lasting and just peace – what some in the United Nations are now referring to as “sustaining peace.” Authors of *Opting Out of War*, Mary Anderson and Marshall Wallace, studied thirteen case studies of communities that opted out of war, including in Afghanistan; Bosnia; Colombia; Mozambique; Rwanda; Fiji; Burkina Faso; India; Kosovo; Nigeria; the Philippines; Sierra Leone; and Sri Lanka. Their conclusion was that “… the prevention of violent conflict is doable. Normal people living normal lives have the option to say no to war.”
Anderson and Wallace have begun to identify crucial common characteristics in the different communities that deliberately avoided being drawn into war.

A rich diversity of nonviolent strategies is being employed in different contexts. They have been the “bread and butter” for Pax Christi member organizations for decades: trainings in strategic nonviolence for communities negatively affected by extractive projects throughout Latin America; accompaniment of communities at risk in the Middle East; sports for peace programs in Haiti and South Sudan; reintegrating former combatants into their communities in the DR Congo; creative advocacy to reduce military spending and support diplomatic solutions to seemingly intractable violent conflicts – the list is endless.

But as we struggle ourselves to understand the power and potential of nonviolence, we believe there is a great need to make nonviolent strategies much more central to public policy at a local, national and international level.

One interesting illustration is the research of Elizabeth Wilson on “Nonviolent Civil Resistance and International Human Rights Law” through the International Center on Nonviolent Conflict. Her critique of the “responsibility to protect” for failing to incorporate the power of nonviolent civil resistance into its analytical framework suggests a possibly important rethinking of the RtoP to include a “privilege of nonviolence” that Wilson thinks could create the legal, moral and political basis for an affirmative duty to assist nonviolent civil resistance movements in dangerous situations.

Given what we now know about the consequences of war – physical economic, psychological, ecological, environmental, ecological - and what we have witnessed over and over as wars fail to accomplish whatever was their stated purpose and war begets violence begets war, it seems evident that if we are ever going to achieve the kind of real security for which we all long, we collectively need to fill the public policy toolbox with effective conflict prevention, peace building and other nonviolent tools.

The Catholic Nonviolence Initiative, a project of Pax Christi International, is a partnership of prominent Catholic organisations already deeply engaged in peace-building, with networks of thinkers and peace practitioners around the globe who strongly believe in a renewed Catholic social teaching on nonviolence and a recommitment of the Catholic Church to Gospel nonviolence.

CNI defines active nonviolence as a way of life, a positive and powerful force
for social change, and a means of building a global community committed to the well-being of all -- of promoting the in-breaking reign of God. Active nonviolence is a multilayered approach that is fundamental to the teaching of Jesus (just as it is fundamental to the teachings of other faith traditions) and recognizes the humanity of every person and the intrinsic value of every being, even in the context of terrible violence. It is a process for ending violence without violence or lethal force, for transforming conflict, and for protecting the vulnerable.

In the last century Catholic teaching on war and peace has shifted in significant ways. Renewed attention has been given to the practice of nonviolence -- not only as a personal option, but as a tool for public authorities to use as well. Twenty-two years ago the Catholic bishops of the United States said, "... nonviolence ... consists of a commitment to resist manifest injustice and public evil with means other than force. These include dialogue, negotiations, protests, strikes, boycotts, civil disobedience and civilian resistance... National leaders bear a moral obligation to see that nonviolent alternatives are seriously considered for dealing with conflicts. New styles of preventative diplomacy and conflict resolution ought to be explored, tried, improved and supported ... Nonviolent strategies need greater attention in international affairs." (The Harvest of Justice is Sown in Peace 1993)

Last year in April, 85 people from around the world gathered in Rome for what has been called a “landmark” conference on nonviolence and just peace. Invited by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace (now the new Dicastery for the Promotion of Integral Human Development) and Pax Christi International, participants came together to imagine a new framework for Catholic teaching on war and peace that could help the world move beyond perpetual violence and war. Central to our conversation were the voices of people promoting active nonviolence in the midst of horrific violence.

Many participants came from countries that have been at war or dealing with serious violence for decades: Iraq, Sri Lanka, Colombia, South Sudan, the DR Congo, Mexico, Afghanistan, Palestine, El Salvador, the Philippines, Northern Ireland, Lebanon, Burundi, Guatemala, Uganda, South Africa and more. Their testimony about the power of nonviolence and the urgent need to end war was extremely powerful.

Iraqi Dominican Sister Nazik Matty whose community was expelled from Mosul by ISIS said, “Which of the wars we have been in is a just war? In my country, there was no just war. War is the mother of ignorance, isolation, and poverty. Please tell the world there is no such thing as a just war. I say this as
a daughter of war. We can’t respond to violence with worse violence. In order to kill five violent men, we have to create 10 violent men to kill them. This encourages the spiral of violence up and up. And the people are so exhausted because they don’t know what’s happening. It’s like a dragon with seven heads. You cut one and two others come up ...(so) we try to create an environment of nonviolence."

Ogarit Younan, who co-founded the Academic University for Nonviolence and Human Rights in Lebanon, shared her positive experience of equipping youth, educators and community leaders throughout the Middle East with nonviolent skills to end vicious cycles of violence and discrimination.

Jesuit Francisco DeRoux talked about the use of the just war paradigm by all sides (guerrillas, paramilitaries, official army) in Colombia’s civil war to rationalize 50 years’ worth of killing, kidnapping and enormous destruction. Over and over again as Francisco and his team moved around the country, they heard from campesinos, native people, afrocolombians – people whose youngsters had joined the guerrilla groups, the paramilitary groups and the army: "Stop the war, stop the war now, and stop the war from all sides!"

Gathered in Rome we heard similar stories from many of the conference participants - courageous people in local communities living with unimaginable danger ... people like Archbishop Odama from Northern Uganda whose diocese was terrorized by the Lord’s Resistance Army ... who said stop the militarization, stop the bombing, stop the proliferation of weapons - rely on nonviolent strategies (as Archbishop Odama and the Acholi Religious Leaders did) to transform conflict and stop the marauding of violent groups.

We are not suggesting that these are the only voices from war zones or that all people in war zones believe in the power and possibility of active nonviolence, but these people have tried nonviolence and found it effective

During the conference we wrote an Appeal to the Catholic Church to Re-commit to the Centrality of Gospel Nonviolence, urging the Church to “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” and to consider adopting JustPeace as one example of a new nonviolent framework for Church teaching
Our message on “just war” was very clear: *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 asked Pope Francis to write his World Day of Peace message, and someday an encyclical, on nonviolence. Obviously, we were delighted with his 2017 World Day of Peace message on “Nonviolence A Style of Politics for Peace.”

Nonviolence as a style of the politics for peace (Pope Francis’ phrase) sides with those who are most impacted by the monumental violence and injustice of our time (think of people trying to eke out a living in Afghanistan, of Syrians seeking refuge in Lebanon and Jordan, of Africans crossing the Mediterranean in flimsy boats to get to Europe, of Salvadorans, Guatemalans and Hondurans crossing the border into our own country.) Nonviolence as a style of politics for peace mobilizes our communities, our nations, and our world to promote the things that we know make for peace: economic justice, human dignity, a flourishing planet, mutual respect and a world free from every form of violence, whether physical, structural or cultural.

The Catholic Nonviolence Initiative that grew out of the Rome conference on nonviolence and just peace as a project of Pax Christi International believes that the our Church can play a major, positive role in making this happen.

The Catholic Church, with its diplomatic presence in almost every country and at all major multilateral organizations, has a well-developed network of universities, seminaries, religious communities, parishes, publications and media outlets, a membership of over one billion people and rich spiritual and theological resources that could make a tremendous contribution to the development and acceptance of nonviolent approaches to a more peaceful world.

*What if … Catholics were formed from the beginning of life to understand and appreciate the power of active nonviolence and the connection of nonviolence to the heart of the Gospel – trained to understand the implications in the 21st century of *love your enemy*?*

*What if the Catholic community understood as vocation the call to be builders of peace, promoters of a nonviolent approach to our personal and our political relationships – with each other and with the rest of creation?*
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 atrocities, to protect people and the planet in a dangerous world?

In the past two years, the CNI has engaged in a very serious conversation with the Vatican and with the local Church around the world, including in many war zones, about the breadth and potential of active nonviolence to further sustaining peace. An ambitious international round table process of discussion and discernment involving 85 theologians, peace practitioners, activists and academics is well underway. We believe this process will bear fruit in more fully developed Catholic teaching - possibly an encyclical - on active nonviolence.

Many additional events and encounters are energizing the conversation about active nonviolence in different countries. Religious congregations and universities in particular are involved: from Marquette, John Carroll and DePaul to Louvain and Leeds. In two weeks San Diego University will host a formal dialogue between Catholic Nonviolence Initiative leaders and high ranking military and Catholic Church officials.

We are working to identify and support more and clearer public policy proposals at the U.N., in Washington, in Brussels and elsewhere, that promote peacebuilding and nonviolent approaches to national and international conflicts, so that the world will have alternatives to military action when crises occur in the future.

We will also be listening very carefully to people from different contexts, believing that nonviolence in the context of occupation in Palestine; nonviolence in the context of poverty or street violence in Haiti; nonviolence from the perspective of liberation theologians in Latin America; nonviolence intersecting with structural racism in the U.S.; nonviolence in post-colonial Africa; nonviolence in Asia and the Pacific where the nuclear threat is all too real ... may well look very different.

And finally, we have initiated a global campaign #ThisIsNonviolence using social media and a variety of other formats to help people imagine and invest in developing more robust nonviolent tools.

In many ways Pope Francis is already beginning to do what we asked the Catholic Church to do by talking often about the power of nonviolence and by
stirring the imaginations of people, including political decision-makers, who should be desperate to prevent war and protect vulnerable people without resort to arms.

The obstacles are huge, including the powerful forces behind the big business of making war, but we can live our way into this challenge by nurturing a spirituality of nonviolence -- by learning to interact with our neighbors nonviolently -- by working for a just peace wherever we are planted -- and by advocating for nonviolent ways to conduct the affairs of a broken world.

Marie Dennis
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Pax Christi International