



# Where Justice and Truth Meet

December 2016

**“With active hope we choose to imagine the world we want to inhabit and accept the urgent responsibility to collaborate in bringing it to birth”** *(Together – Birthing Anew, 2014)*

God is Love

God is love. That is the fundamental Gospel message. And Jesus demonstrably refused to hate his enemies, to retaliate or to seek their destruction. Yet as followers of the non-violent Jesus, our attitudes toward war and peace are too often scarcely recognizable as those of Jesus. We presume the unfortunate inevitability of armed conflict. We lose little sleep over the fact that our country sells more weapons to other countries than any other. We become accustomed to hearing politicians talk of using nuclear weapons and hearing news about errant drone strikes hitting hospitals.

God’s love and Jesus’ nonviolence challenge us to articulate a different vision: no longer as guardians of a *Just War* but rather as prophets of a *Just Peace*. The vision is a radical one. Pope Francis has chosen for the 2017 World Peace Day: [Nonviolence: a style of politics for peace](#). It’s time to explore how we can transform Jesus’ most basic instruction to his followers, ‘*Love your enemies!*’ into a practical program of acts of reconciliation, and the creation of spaces of dialogue and friendship that reach across all the barriers and brokenness of our world.<sup>1</sup>

## Nonviolence: A Style of Politics for Peace

Albert Einstein said that insanity is doing the same thing again and again and expecting different results. And we keep on throwing weapons at the problem of military conflict. How, logically, can that achieve the effect which we as disciples of Jesus seek—reconciliation, a world at peace? It doesn’t make sense, but it seems that we too often lack the imagination or the will to seek another way.

We have a long history of ethical reflection on what might constitute a ‘*Just War*’. The intention was certainly a very good one—limiting both the grounds for warfare and the effects on the innocent of such armed conflict. But unfortunately it gave the illusion that there can be such a thing as a good (or even a holy) war. Modern warfare does not respect the rights of non-combatants, either directly (because many bombs are inherently ‘weapons of mass destruction’, due to their sheer force) or indirectly (as the flows of refugees across our continent testify). There is no good war. It is always a terrible failure of the human spirit.

So now Pope Francis is calling us to switch our attention, from defining *Just War* to identifying what would allow *Just Peace* to break out. A *Just Peace* approach offers a vision of human flourishing with a corresponding ethic to guide our actions. It includes a commitment to the social conditions which illuminate human dignity and cultivate thriving relationships.

It focuses on actions to:

- transform conflict,
- break cycles of violence,
- build more sustainable peace.



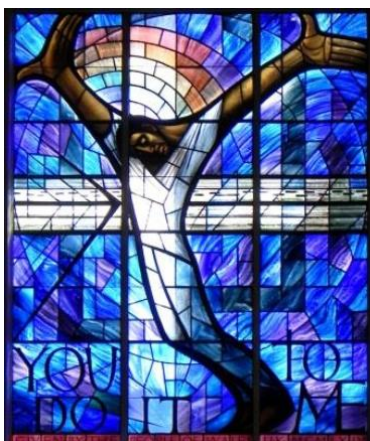
It means both setting up new (often difficult) international conversations between competing nations *and* learning new ways of undertaking such conversations, drawing on the various successful examples of conflict resolution around the world—which always involve people at the grassroots level, as well as those who participate in international negotiations. It means rethinking our own way of doing politics domestically—and our own way of talking about



<sup>1</sup> Reflection adapted from Pax Christi, London’s booklet, *Peace Sunday*  
<https://nonviolencejustpeacedotnet.files.wordpress.com/2016/10/final-2017-peace-sunday-booklet.pdf>

those we disagree with. It means our own willingness as disciples of Jesus to get involved in politics and to speak up against the easy resort to violence as a 'solution' to conflict. And, above all, it means our profound personal change of heart, rooted in prayerful contemplation of the "Prince of Peace".

Personal conversion of heart—letting our basic responses be refashioned by Christ—implies reaching beyond the rhetoric of conflict to try to hear the real hopes and fears of our opponents and to identify what we have in common. Then initiatives to promote dialogue must follow, together with measures which can de-escalate tensions and resolve disputes, learning both from recent conflict resolution processes and from our own Christian tradition of peacemaking. And through all of this must run an effort to articulate a vision of the sort of people we want to be and the sort of world we wish to create: how can we make it easier to live together in harmony?



*Welsh artist John Petts made a stained glass window for the 16<sup>th</sup> Street Baptist Church, Birmingham, AL, after hearing that four young girls had been killed when the church was bombed in a racist attack one Sunday morning in 1963. His black Jesus shows the two hands*

*of nonviolence: one stopping the oppression, the other reaching out in forgiveness and reconciliation. The window was donated to the church by the people of Wales.*

## Active Nonviolence

Active nonviolence is 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.

It is a virtue that recognizes the truth of our equal dignity and ultimate unity. It is a process for ending violence without violence or lethal force; for transforming conflict; and for protecting the vulnerable. Active nonviolence is a stand for justice and a method for helping to create it. It pursues this goal, not with passivity or violence,

but with creative engagement and determined resistance.

By mobilizing courageous and creative people-power, nonviolence does not escape conflict but actively and powerfully engages and transforms it. People throughout the world have used active nonviolence to end injustice and foster reconciliation, to resist war and build peace, to safeguard the infinite worth of the human person, and to care for creation.

Key practices of active nonviolence include:

- [Trauma-healing](#),
- [Restorative justice](#),
- [Nonviolent resistance](#),
- [Unarmed civilian protection](#), and
- Nonviolent civilian-based defense like the [White Helmets](#) in Syria

### ***Prayer for the Grace of Nonviolence***

Recognizing the violence in my own heart, yet trusting in the goodness and mercy of God, I seek to practice the nonviolence of Jesus:

- by striving for peace within myself and seeking to be a peacemaker in my daily life;
- by refusing to retaliate in the face of provocation and violence;
- by living conscientiously and simply so that I do not deprive others of the means to live;
- by actively resisting evil and working nonviolently to abolish war and the causes of war from my own heart and from the face of the earth.

God, I trust in your sustaining love and believe that you will give me the grace to live out this prayer.

*Pax Christi USA, adapted*

## Additional Resources

- [The Courageous Nonviolence of Jesus](#)
- [Prayer for Conversion to Gospel Nonviolence](#)
- [Litany of Disarmament](#) Prayer Service
- [Prayer/Activity for Children](#)
- [Peace Sunday](#) booklet/resources