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Pax Christi USA strives to create a world that reflects the Peace of Christ by exploring, articulating, and witnessing to the call of Christian nonviolence. This work begins in personal life and extends to communities of reflection and action to transform structures of society. Pax Christi USA rejects war, preparations for war, and every form of violence and domination. It advocates primacy of conscience, economic and social justice, and respect for creation.

Pax Christi USA commits itself to peace education and, with the help of its bishop members, promotes the gospel imperative of peacemaking as a priority in the Catholic Church in the United States. Through the efforts of all its members and in cooperation with other groups, Pax Christi USA works toward a more peaceful, just and sustainable world.

I support Pax Christi USA's Statement of Purpose and wish to become a member.

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Enclosed is my membership donation of

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A Prayer for the Courage to Love Our Enemies

by Dave Robinson

God of all creation,

*Open our hearts and eyes
so that we might see
the face of our adversary,
And recognize, as you do,
that they are our sister, our brother.*

God of Justice,

*You call us to live in truth.
Give us the strength
to admit our past transgressions,
And to build new partnerships
with old enemies.*

God of Peace,

*You call us to love our enemies.
Give us the wisdom to translate
that love into a choice for
dialogue over demonization,
diplomacy over military confrontation.*

God of Nonviolence,

*Lead us on your path to peace
that we might walk humbly with you.*

*We ask this in the name of the One
whose peace we seek, Jesus the Christ,
who lives and reigns
with You and the Holy Spirit,
now and forever.*

Amen.

ACTION SUGGESTIONS

Pray for a peaceful resolution to our nation's long-standing conflict with Iran. Incorporate in your prayer, the prayer in this brochure.

Speak out and educate your community on the history of U.S.-Iran relations and the need for dialogue over military confrontation. Make copies of this brochure and put them on your church's literature table.

Write a letter to the editor supporting the need for comprehensive discussions with Iran leading to normalized relations. Point out the difference between "preconditions" whereby Iran must accept in advance an outcome determined by the U.S., and preparations for dialogue that are essential to a successful engagement.

Contact Congressional and Presidential candidates and urge them to commit to pursuing a diplomatic resolution to all long-standing concerns that both the U.S. and Iran deem important.

Participate in the Pax Christi USA-endorsed *Campaign for a New American Policy on Iran*; go to www.newiranpolicy.org.

Visit www.paxchristiusa.org regularly for ongoing updates and action suggestions on avoiding a war with Iran.

Join a delegation to Iran. Fellowship of Reconciliation continues to send delegations to affect people-to-people diplomacy. Delegations are scheduled in August and November; www.forusa.org/programs/iran or 845-358-4601.

RESOURCES

The National Iranian-American Council, www.niacouncil.org, provides excellent analysis and resources on understanding the current, as well as long-standing, issues impacting U.S.-Iranian relations.

The Campaign Against Sanctions and Military Intervention in Iran, www.campaigniran.org, provides up-to-date news and analysis.

Iran in the Crosshairs: How to Prevent Washington's Next War, by Phyllis Bennis, published by the Institute for Policy Studies is available for free download at www.ips-dc.org.

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Peaceweavings

Nonviolence and Dialogue with Iran

Today, the stand-off between the United States and Iran over a range of current as well as long-standing disagreements offers an opportunity to employ nonviolence at the pre-confrontation stage—before great violence is unleashed.



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Nonviolence and Dialogue with Iran

by *Dave Robinson, Pax Christi USA Executive Director*

How can nonviolence inform our nation’s approach to those with whom we are in conflict? Conflicts rarely become full-blown in an instant; instead, they develop over time. At each point in the process, missteps, a lack of imagination, and a lack of authentic commitment to resolving the conflict in a mutually beneficial way foster a deepening entrenchment that eliminates options rather than illuminating them. Soon, both sides are at an impasse and the “last resort” argument to use force becomes the focus of debate. Sadly, it seems that only at this point is nonviolence even discussed, and then only to dismiss it as an unrealistic alternative.

But what if nonviolence were to inform the first stages of conflict engagement? I have come to believe with all my heart that nonviolence is a much deeper and more comprehensive concept than the avoidance of the use of military force. *Gospel* nonviolence is about right relationship. It is a way of being with one another. Nonviolence, therefore, is the fruit of truth and love—the foundations of Catholic Social Teaching and the legacy of Jesus’ Good News.

Nonviolence requires a commitment to truth—both our truth and the truth of the “other.” It seeks to establish justice in the relationship motivated by the love to which Jesus explicitly calls his followers. And nonviolence seeks mutuality, a coming together of divergent views in a respectful atmosphere that genuinely seeks a settlement beneficial to all sides.

Today, the stand-off between the United States and Iran over a range of current as well as long-standing disagreements offers an opportunity to employ nonviolence at the pre-confrontation stage—before great violence is unleashed. Unfortunately, the Bush Administration has refused to embrace the practical and potentially fruitful path of nonviolence through dialogue and engagement and instead offers only ultimatums, sanctions, and preparations for military action. None of these approaches offers much hope.

In 2003, under the leadership of reformist President Khatami, Iran made the Bush Administration a remarkable offer: they would recognize Israel, end aid to Hamas and Hezbollah, and negotiate a suspension of their uranium enrichment—all for a chance to normalize relations with the United States. The Bush Administration dismissed this offer out of hand. Subsequently, based on internal Iranian political and economic realities, a new president was elected. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the fiery populist mayor of Tehran, a fundamentalist, and a leader in the 1979 revolution against the Shah and his Western benefactors, soon found the Iranian economic problems much more difficult to solve than he originally believed. So he turned to an old and reliable strategy common to politicians of every culture: he began blaming Iran’s problems on others, demonizing old enemies (the United States and Britain), and championing the development of nuclear technology as a matter of national pride.

While politicians and their demagoguery pass away, the power of nonviolence remains steadfast as an alternative always available for leaders who show wisdom and courage. The current candidates for President of the United States should look closely at the practical wisdom of nonviolent engagement—beginning with authentic dialogue—and muster the courage to lead the United States in a genuine engagement with Iran.

Nonviolent engagement and dialogue do not require “preconditions”—the notion that the outcome of negotiations is accepted before the dialogue can begin. However, that does not mean that much preparation is unnecessary for successful engagement. For the United States, such preparation must begin with a recognition of the truth of U.S.-Iranian relations over the past 50 years. It is a dangerous mistake to see the only history between Iran and the United States as beginning and ending with the Islamic Revolution and hostage crisis in 1979. A commitment to truth is primary for nonviolent engagement, and it requires that

the United States recognize publicly and in official communications with Iran, the very destructive role that the United States has played in that nation over many decades. This would include acknowledging the part the U.S. played in the coup against the democratically-elected Prime Minister, Mohammed Mossadeq, in 1953; the U.S. role in the installation of the brutal Shah and the establishment of the secret police known as the Savak; U.S. support and encouragement of Iraq’s Saddam Hussein and his unprovoked invasion and subsequently the 10-year war with Iran; the United States shooting down an Iranian passenger jet in 1988, killing all aboard; and the U.S. bombing of Iranian territory.

Truth is a critical component for genuine dialogue, especially in a relationship that has suffered from mistrust and duplicity. Love, then, must be the motivation for renewed engagement. As Scripture tells us: “You have heard it said, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. But I say to you, love your enemies.” Jesus’ words offer wisdom in our current moment and particularly with regard to potential engagement with Iran.

In 2003, under the leadership of reformist President Khatami, Iran made the Bush Administration a remarkable offer: they would recognize Israel, end aid to Hamas and Hezbollah, and negotiate a suspension of their uranium enrichment—all for a chance to normalize relations with the United States. The Bush Administration dismissed this offer out of hand.

What is this “love” that Jesus calls us to if not the genuine concern for the “other?” Love is a harsh master inasmuch as it calls us out of our comfortable, self-centered denials, and asks us to be truthful about our own motivations and goals, as well as being just in our evaluations of the motivations and goals of our adversary. This is the power of nonviolence: the ability to transform ourselves as much as those with whom we are engaged. Such mutual transformation must become the preeminent goal of U.S. foreign policy if we are to break the malevolent spiral of violence upon which current and long-standing U.S. policy rests.

In this dynamic, engagement based in truth and love is hardly appeasement. It is, in fact, a supreme act of courage and wisdom. Only a nation with true inner strength and conviction can embrace nonviolent dialogue and engagement as national policy. Similarly, it is a profound weakness when a nation refuses to accept the truth of its own history, refuses to take responsibility for past actions, and fails to engage in authentic nonviolent dialogue with adversaries. The rush to military solutions hides such startling weakness under the cloak of false patriotism and pushes forward the old lie that “might makes right.”

But right now, what we have is a new moment. As the presidential election nears and concrete policy proposals are evaluated by U.S. voters, we who embrace nonviolence must lead the call for a truly transformative U.S. policy with Iran. Candidates of all parties must be challenged to employ a new approach to our relations with our global neighbors, particularly with those with whom we have a history of mistrust and disagreement, like Iran. Wisdom and courage must be recognized as the indispensable elements of U.S. leadership that lead us not to false patriotism and brute force, but rather to constructive dialogue grounded in truth and hope.

Dave Robinson is the Executive Director of Pax Christi USA, the national Catholic peace movement. Robinson is an internationally-recognized expert in foreign policy and nuclear disarmament. He has been on two recent delegations to Iran, meeting with Iranian religious and political leaders, including the President of Iran. Robinson was one of the key organizers of the Catholic delegation which dialogued with President Ahmadinejad during his visit to the United Nations in September 2007.