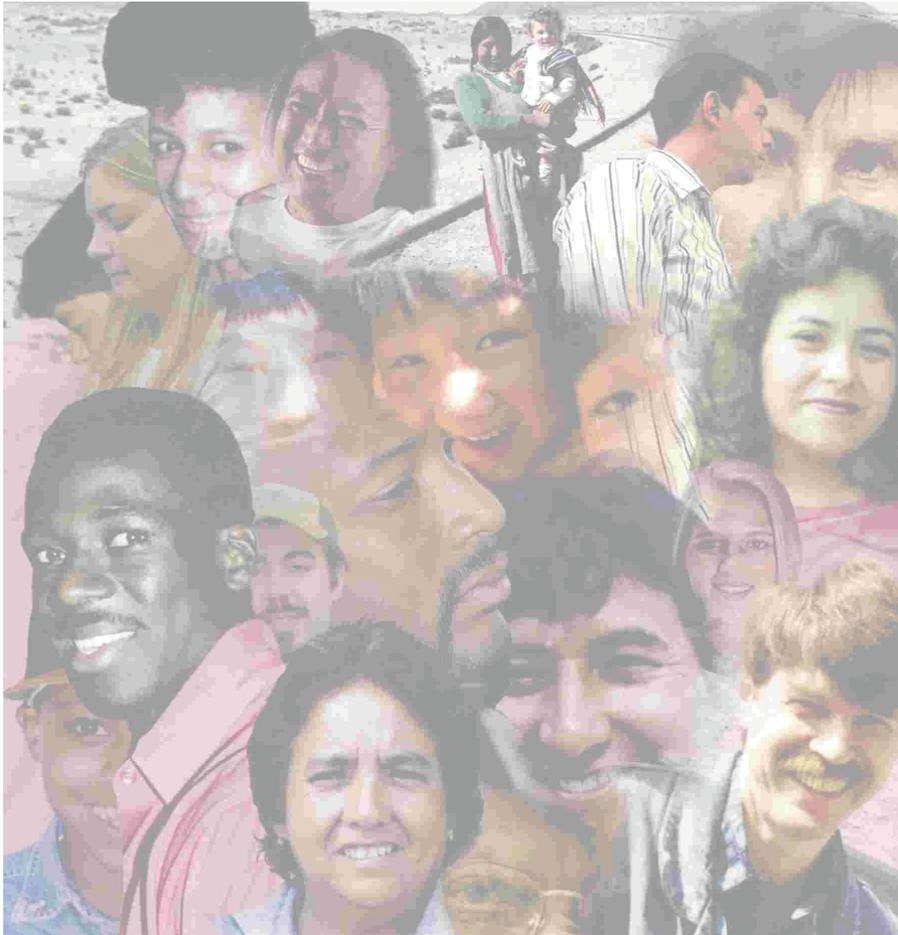


# **CALLED TO BE PEACEMAKERS**

## **The Challenge and Promise of Peace in the Twenty-first Century**



A Peoples' Peace Initiative

Convened by Pax Christi USA  
2009

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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# Called to Be Peacemakers: The Challenge and Promise of Peace in the Twenty-First Century

*"Peace is not just the absence of war. . . .  
Like a cathedral, peace must be constructed  
patiently and with unshakable faith."*

**- POPE JOHN PAUL II, AT COVENTRY CATHEDRAL, ENGLAND, 1982**

## Foreword

**W**hat does it mean to “raise up the essential vocation of peacemaking” within our faith? For decades, Pax Christi USA has attempted to answer this question in ways large and small. But with a new, explicit commitment to becoming an anti-racist, multicultural Catholic movement for peace with justice, we realized we needed to approach this work in a different way. So in 2003 we decided to employ a new process, one that began with “building a table” where a multiplicity of organizations within our Church could gather and open a discussion that would lead to a more profound and more encompassing vision of peace for our Church in the twenty-first century. This led to an unprecedented collaboration of Catholic organizations committed to creating a world that is more peaceful, more just, and more sustainable.

In all, twenty-one organizations would sign on and invest in this project to articulate our deepest hopes and dreams for peace in our world. This, perhaps, is the most prophetic aspect of the People’s Peace Initiative. This project began by modeling that most fundamental of truths: the work of peace and justice begins with relationships. And the starting point became building new relationships, especially between traditional, predominantly white Catholic peace groups and communities of color and their organizations within the Church. I believe that these new relationships heralded the beginning of a new era of working for peace with justice within our Church.



The process of creating this final document was, by its nature, rigorous and methodical, taking over six years through its many stages. But doing this project in a “new” way demanded a process that was equal to the integrity of our vision for it, and there is no way that this document could have been done otherwise and still represent the important diversity of experiences and voices represented in these pages.

What follows is both survey and synopsis, representing thousands of you and gleaned from Catholics working on issues as far-ranging as immigration, nuclear disarmament, gun violence, poverty, and everything in between. In one sense, this document is an ending, the culmination of the Peoples’ Peace Initiative. But it is also a beginning—a beginning that challenges us to expand our understanding of peace, nonviolence, and justice. The problems that confront us in this new century are too large for any one person or group to confront and address alone. The change we seek begins with recognizing that we must be about building a bigger movement, more comprehensive in scope and more profound in vision. God’s promise of peace still stands firm. Let us join hands with new friends in partnership and solidarity, listen respectfully to one another, learn from and understand one another, work together, and both proclaim and be the peace of Christ.

***Bishop Gabino Zavala***  
***Bishop-President, Pax Christi USA***  
***September 11, 2009***

# Introduction

In 2003, to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the U.S. Catholic Bishops' landmark peace pastoral, *The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response*, and the fortieth anniversary of the papal encyclical *Pacem in Terris (Peace on Earth)*, Bishop Wilton Gregory, then-president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a statement entitled "Blessed are the Peacemakers." It reaffirmed the centrality of the peacemaking vocation and included an invitation to the faithful:

We invite dioceses, parishes, schools and universities, and other Catholic institutions and organizations to consider how they might use this moment and these anniversaries to raise up the essential vocation of peacemaking. . . . We invite all Catholics to reflect on ways they can be "sentinels of peace" . . .<sup>1</sup>

In response to this invitation by the bishops, Pax Christi USA began conversations with other national Catholic organizations to explore how we might collaborate on such an effort to engage Catholics in reflecting on this "essential vocation of peacemaking." The first of several meetings of interested partner groups was held in late 2003, co-hosted by Pax Christi USA and the Office of Black Catholics for the Archdiocese of Washington, DC. The collaboration evolved into what eventually became known as "A Peoples' Peace Initiative."

The Initiative sought to "read the signs of the times" in the current historical context and apply the wisdom of Scripture, Catholic Social Teaching, and the experiences of the people to articulate the new challenges of peace we face. From the beginning, a guiding principle was to place at the center the experiences and perspectives of those most marginalized in society, particularly communities of color, women, and the impoverished in this country and around the world. Representatives from African-American, Appalachian, Asian-Pacific, Hispanic, Native American, and traditionally white Catholic organizations participated and brought rich perspectives to shape a vision of peace that goes beyond the "absence of war" to a vision that speaks to the root causes of violence in its many forms wherein the obstacles to peace are found.

Twenty-two national Catholic organizations endorsed the Initiative: Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities; Catholic Charities USA; Catholic Committee of Appalachia; Catholics Against Capitol Punishment; Conference of Major Superiors of Men; JustFaith Ministries; Leadership Conference of Women Religious; Marianist Social Justice Collaborative; Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns; Mexican American Cultural Center (now the Mexican American

Catholic College); National Association of Black Catholic Administrators; National Black Catholic Congress; National Council of Catholic Women; National Catholic Council for Hispanic Ministry; National Federation of Catholic Youth Ministry; NETWORK; Pax Christi USA; Religious Task Force on Central America and Mexico; Sisters of Mercy—Justice Office; Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur—Justice and Peace Office; Tekakwitha Conference; and U.S. Catholic Mission Association.

Since 2003, the Initiative has borne fruit in a variety of directions and locations, opening new relationships and collaborative work among the participating organizations and ministries. One of the fruits has been the publication of this document, “Called to Be Peacemakers.”

A grassroots process of reflection gathered the “wisdom of the people,” inspired by the Encuentro processes that were carried out with Hispanic Catholics, as well as the grassroots listening sessions that led to the writing of the Appalachian bishops’ pastoral *This Land is Home to Me*. A small group process book, “Called to Something New: A Peoples’ Peace Initiative” was used by groups across the country, many of which then submitted input for “Called to Be Peacemakers.” The result represents a type of “Peoples’ Peace Letter.” What was revealed in the process is that peacemaking in the twenty-first century must address the roots of violence: local and global poverty, institutional and systemic racism, and militarism.

Those participating in the grassroots discernment process came from many backgrounds: rich and poor, white and people of color, U.S.-born and immigrants. Starting from a place where the wisdom and experiences of those most acutely impacted by violence in our communities can be heard, our hope was to stay grounded in a Gospel-centered approach to these issues. God’s truth, we believe and affirm here, is often more clearly discerned from the margins than from the centers of power.

While the number and diversity of responses was not as great as we had hoped—one-quarter was from racially mixed communities—we affirm this attempt as a beginning, and as both a challenge and a commitment to build greater racial diversity in the work of peacemaking in the future. The Initiative also served to more deeply root the work for justice as an essential foundation for peace and to elevate the global common good as central to the vision of the beloved community to which we are all called as children of God.

## History and Background

In 1983, the U.S. Catholic bishops released their first pastoral letter devoted to the themes of war and peace. At that time, both superpowers (the United States and the Soviet Union) took steps that escalated the nuclear arms race in new and more dangerous ways. Some U.S. military strategists and politicians were intent on achieving the capability to fight and “win” a nuclear war in the belief that it could be “limited.”

In response to these dangerous nuclear escalations, millions of people around the world

lobbied their governments and marched in the streets to stop this costly and dangerous arms race. The U.S. bishops also saw the need to bring the wisdom of Scripture and Catholic Social Teaching to the pressing issues of war and peace. In their pastoral letter, *The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response*, the bishops made clear that they could see no possible scenario under which nuclear weapons could be used in a way that met the moral criteria of a just war, and they articulated an understanding of peace that included not just the absence of war but the presence of justice.<sup>2</sup>

Drawing on Scripture, tradition, and Catholic Social Teaching, the U.S. bishops also made clear that alongside military service, Catholics could adopt the position of conscientious objection to military service. And in addition to embracing a just war theology, Catholics could embrace a theology of nonviolence on issues of war and peace.<sup>3</sup>

This pastoral document concluded with a call for a “moral about face”<sup>4</sup> on issues of war and peace. While giving an emphatic “no” to the use of nuclear weapons, it said “no” to the wasteful and dangerous arms race. Finally, the bishops called the Catholic community in the United States to see peacemaking not as an option but as a requirement of faith.

Ten years later, in 1993, the bishops published an anniversary statement on the continuing duty of peacemaking, *The Harvest of Peace is Sown in Justice*. The biggest international change during those ten years was the end of the Cold War, with the collapse and break-up of the Soviet Empire. The threat of nuclear war between the United States and the former Soviet Union had dramatically decreased, but as the bishops looked at the world, they saw continuing challenges that needed to be addressed.

The 1993 statement moved beyond the crisis of the nuclear arms race and pointed to the challenges involved in renewing and reshaping our national commitment to the world community. The bishops drew attention to the human toll of violence in its many forms, including regional wars, crime and terrorism, ecological devastation, economic injustice, poverty, abortion, and capital punishment.

In particular, they echoed the call of Pope John Paul II to greater solidarity across racial, ethnic, class, and national boundaries. They warned that wherever freedom, opportunity, truth, and hope were denied, the seeds of conflict would grow. At the same time, they raised the specter of the ever-increasing gap between rich and poor peoples as a source of present and future conflict and called on the United States, along with other rich nations, to offer focused assistance that would result in sustainable development and economic empowerment for those who are poor.

The bishops also called for strengthening international peacemaking institutions. They called for the United Nations to be at the center of a new international effort to pursue justice, contain conflicts, and replace violence and war with peaceful and effective means to address injustices and resolve disputes. They called for the further development of theologies, spiritualities, and ethics for peacemaking and emphasized the importance of nonviolence as a way of achieving peace with justice.



Finally, they called for conversion and hope, stating, “We are called to be peacemakers, not by some movement of the moment, but by our Lord Jesus.”<sup>5</sup> This peacemaking is rooted in our hope and vocation as Catholic Christians. Hope is not a matter of optimism but a resource for action, a source of strength, and an indispensable virtue in the work of establishing justice that leads to genuine peace.

# I. Reading the Signs of the Times

**A**ny reflection on the challenges of peace today needs to begin with casting our eyes, ears, and hearts to the world around us, to view it particularly from the perspective of the victims of violence, poverty, and oppression. We seek to discern what is happening in the diverse communities that make up the cultural fabric of the United States, to reflect on how God is present in these places, and to discover how we might be called to participate—each with our own gifts—in what God is doing in our world. In the Gospel, Jesus talks about this as “reading the signs of the times” (Luke 12:54-56). In *The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, the Church speaks about the task in this way:

[T]he Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel. Thus, in language intelligible to each generation, she can respond to the perennial questions which people ask about this present life and the life to come, and about the relationship of the one to the other. We must therefore recognize and understand the world in which we live, its explanations, its longings, and its often dramatic characteristics.<sup>6</sup>

What can we say about the times in which we live? Do these signs look different to those who are privileged than to those who are impoverished or marginalized? What does violence look like from the perspective of the varied communities of color in our country, as well as around the world? How can we give expression to longings for peace that are common and that cross the divides of race, class, and/or gender? How can we respond to the “essential vocation of peacemaking” to address the urgent challenges of peace today?

## A. Raising our Voices: Our Lived Experience, Our Longings

**A**t this moment in history, we can witness destructive forms of political violence, economic apartheid, social exclusion, and misplaced priorities in our local communities and in our world. There is a false notion of national security based on military might and political hegemony, not on the common good based on justice and integral development for all. The economy favors irrational wealth accumulation and profits for the few and decline in the quality of life for the majority.

We find, too, that we are living in a society increasingly marked by isolation, alienation, and the disintegration of social, political, cultural, and community cohesion. In the past, this cohesion provided individuals with a sense of identity, meaning, and purpose.



Today, a “community of consumption” has been created whereby identity is more tied to the products and services we consume than to the cultural and religious identities of our ancestors. Because of the false gratification of this community of consumption, we are often left empty and unfulfilled.

As more and more people take their cues from the powerful socializing influence of popular culture transmitted by our media, traditional sources of wisdom and community are forgotten and are losing their influence. Often we feel more kinship with those who share our consumer preferences than we do with members of our families, those who live in our own neighborhoods, and those with whom we share a common cultural background. As a result of this isolation, we see the breakdown of families and traditional communities across all racial, class, and ethnic backgrounds.

This loss of family and community support is further compounded by a loss of credibility in our social institutions (political, economic, educational, religious, and scientific). At one time, these institutions were vital links of support and sources of identity, meaning, and purpose. But over time, many have become more focused on self-perpetuation and survival than with serving the needs of the communities that created them.

Without genuine forms of community from which we can receive authentic identities and meaning for our lives, we experience an increasing level of fear and distrust within ourselves and between social groups. We seldom live, worship, or socialize with people from a different race, class, or

ethnic background. As a result, there is little opportunity for mutual exchange and solidarity between our communities.

### *(1) Our Varied Communities Are in Distress but We Remain Strong*

Many of our urban communities feel under siege by economic disintegration, lack of adequate housing and employment, gun violence, the drug trade, and gangs. While the media often portray our neighborhoods as nothing more than “war zones,” the vast majority of us struggle day in and day out to create better lives for our children and ourselves. At the same time we often feel that those outside of our communities—those who control most of the resources and who regularly make decisions that impact our lives—have all but written us off. We are often dismayed and frustrated that those who know only our struggles from the distorted images portrayed in the news media and entertainment industry have come to fear us. Yet our resilience and bonds of community are strong and rooted deep.

Those who live in economically prosperous suburbs often choose these communities in hopes of finding security from the perceived threats coming from economically distressed urban communities. We may live in neighborhoods and homes that lack for nothing, allowing us to live in splendid isolation from one another. A sense of emptiness, however, is also felt. In the current global economic crisis, even middle-class communities are facing financial hardships. At our deepest levels, we know that the walls we construct to keep us “safe”

cannot provide the security we seek. Many of us are finding ways to build bridges to communities outside of our suburban world, and we are finding that those whom we have been socialized to fear can become our friends.

Those who live in rural agricultural and ranching communities have suffered an enormous amount of economic, social, and cultural disintegration. Over the years, we have seen our way of life steadily erode as

our rural towns and communities disappear along with the family farms that once provided their economic support. Our agricultural way of life is being overtaken by an agribusiness model with factory farms and industrialized animal-processing plants that are increasingly controlled by global speculators and traders. Even though powerful economic forces want to consign our family farms along with our small towns to eventual extinction, we strive to

find ways to survive and thrive, sometimes partnering young farm families with older farmers to ensure that the family-farming way of life will continue.

Many of us who live in the mining com-

munities of Appalachia and other economically distressed places also have seen our way of life steadily erode as we continue to lose control of our resources to outside economic actors who impose their will without regard for our people or our land. Often we do not even own the resources just below the surface of the land we have called home for generations. Many times mining companies come and take what they want and leave us with environmentally toxic results. We have

*Our parish in New Mexico draws heavily from the immediate inner city neighborhood that is primarily Hispanic along with a significant proportion of Anglos. Adding to this core mix is a significant presence of the Mexican immigrant community. . . . Starting out as strangers, we dared to become a small, blessed community of peacemakers and justice seekers. . . . The need to hear from the people themselves on peace issues is long overdue, especially since the institutional church has been noticeably silent in recognizing and emphasizing that the evil of war is as integral a part of a "consistent ethic of life" as the violence and immorality of abortion, death penalty, euthanasia, etc. . . . It also seemed like an opportune time to explore the relatedness and immediacy of war and peace issues to the daily struggles to find peace in our own hearts, families, neighborhoods, communities, and country. (group #54)*

learned, however, to organize and struggle to challenge the ecological destruction and to work to protect our land and our communities by creating new, locally controlled businesses that can provide sustainable development for our people.

Our migrant worker communities are undergoing an enormous amount of economic distress and dislocation. We have always struggled to provide for ourselves and our families, while demanding to be

treated with dignity and respect. Many of us, in order to survive, have been forced to leave family members and the land of our birth as global markets have destroyed our livelihoods and given us little choice but to

try to find work in this country. Our families are further torn apart by an immigration system that is broken and dehumanizing. We are deeply saddened that walls of distrust and fear have been built, even between us and our fellow Catholic brothers and sisters. However, our faith is strong, and we are beginning to build bridges to our brothers and sisters in other communities and to find ways of standing up for our rights and our dignity with people of good will across this country.

## *(2) We Are Socialized into Violence but We Seek to Embrace a Different Way*

The entertainment industry glorifies the use of violence by portraying it as powerful, manly, and sexually attractive. It promotes the myth of “redemptive violence,” portraying violence as the solution to our problems and as the most direct and satisfactory way to defeat evil.<sup>7</sup>

Our nation’s leaders, as well, too often rush to military solutions to address conflicts and demonstrate national strength. It is no surprise that violence becomes an acceptable way to express frustration, domination, and control—by many young people in our communities and by our political leaders. Communities of color become particularly subject to an “economic draft,” as young people look to enlist in the military, the National Guard, or the reserves in return for promises of job training and education. War takes a tremendous toll on military families, as particularly seen in recent years with “stop-loss” orders extending military

service to two and three tours of duty, often resulting in death or physical and mental injuries, permanent disabilities, or suicide.

Sadly, war and war-making have become a central metaphor that shapes our understanding of this nation’s history. When we look at the selection of books about U.S. history in our bookstores, we find the largest number related to war. We are a nation formed by war and characterized by a military mindset. Militaristic language has become standard vocabulary for addressing a whole host of challenges we face. We had the “War on Poverty” followed by the “War on Drugs” and the “War on Terror.”<sup>8</sup>

The use of violence and war is no longer seen as the last resort but as the first response. Often this embrace of violence is lethally combined with racist notions of superiority and inferiority, including the use of racial stereotypes to demonize and dehumanize the “enemy.” The “enemy” is portrayed as evil, distrustful, and immoral in order to justify the violence that is used.

Those who would enlist us (and our children) into these mythical battles of good versus evil have very powerful tools available to them in popular culture and virulent forms of nationalism. Video games, movies, and TV shows give the impression that violence always works and that negative consequences are minimal.

In spite of the overwhelming power of the dominant culture of violence and war, we know that we are “called to something new.” We are exploring and exercising nonviolent ways of using our power to bring about change. We are standing together by organizing marches and neighborhood watch

groups to face down the street gangs who would kill our children. We are taking back our neighborhoods through church-based community organizing. We are discovering that when we stand united, we are stronger. We are learning that we need not be victims or perpetrators of violence. We are raising our voices to resist war, and we are working to abolish war through promoting nonviolent means of peacemaking and peacebuilding.

### *(3) We Experience Violence in Many Forms, Especially Economic, but We Are Not Defeated*

In addition to physical violence, we also experience the economic violence of poverty in our communities, our nation, and around the world. Poverty is more than just the lack of the basic material necessities of life. Often those who are poor are silenced, deprived of the freedom and dignity of being considered members of the human family. To the world of commerce and consumption, people who are poor have no names and no existence. They live and breathe but have no being.<sup>9</sup> Even when poverty does not physically kill a person (and thousands do die of poverty-related causes every day), it can stunt a person's life and compromise self-esteem.

Poverty has been a part of human existence from the beginning of recorded history, but the poverty we experience today in our communities and around the world is not simply the result of natural disasters, bad personal choices, or catastrophic economic collapse. Much of our poverty is the direct result of economic decisions made in the

name of "free market capitalism" in service of profit maximization.

Over the past three decades, powerful economic actors, in coalition with political leaders in our country and around the world, have championed an economic theory that has resulted in a dramatic shift of wealth from the poor and middle class to the wealthy, commonly referred to as "trickle-down economics" or neo-liberalism.<sup>10</sup> Neo-liberalism champions the ideal of individual responsibility over the notion of the public good or community and sees the world in terms of market metaphors. Because of how economic globalization has been designed, countless families and communities have been sacrificed "for the good of the economy." Businesses move to locations that have cheaper labor markets, and schools lose their tax base. Money for affordable housing and health care cannot be found. Bridges, roads, public transportation, and other critical infrastructure falls into ruin. In short, communities are destroyed.

We live in a time of immense economic uncertainty. Our economy has been losing hundreds of thousands of jobs and, as of March 2009, posted an unemployment rate of 8.5 percent, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics—up from 5.1 percent a year earlier. Even in good times when the economy grew and wealth multiplied, most of our communities saw little or nothing "trickle down" to us. For example, in 2005, the total income for our country increased almost 9 percent, but 90 percent of us saw our average income drop slightly. The gains went largely to the top 1 percent, whose average income rose to more than \$1.1



million—an increase of more than \$139,000 or about 14 percent.<sup>11</sup>

Probably the most frightening form of economic insecurity is the fear that we will not be able to provide food for our families. We have seen the pictures on TV of desperate people caught up in food riots in places such as Haiti and South Asia because of global food shortages. Food shortages are a problem for a growing number of families in our local communities as well. While the cost of food has increased dramatically, food stamp benefits have not kept pace with inflation.<sup>12</sup> Families who depend on food stamps are finding that their monthly allotment runs out much faster than their needs. Many of our food pantries do not have enough food to meet the growing need.

Next to the fear of not having enough food for our families, the fear of losing our homes looms as a terrifying prospect. For those members of our community who were deceptively lured into bad mortgage agreements or who were ill-advised by mortgage brokers and approving bankers to purchase more than they could afford, the bursting of the housing bubble meant more than the loss of home equity: it meant having no home at all.

Finally, at a time in life when our seniors should be able to relax and enjoy their retirement years, they experience a rising level of fear and anxiety. Those of us who are retired or near retirement are fearful that we may not have enough to meet basic needs in our older ages.

In the midst of these economic challenges, however, we are learning to lean on each other more and to rebuild our communities

on different economic models: models that are designed to put the needs of people before profits. We are forming food co-ops to provide healthy food at reasonable prices. We are pursuing new forms of community housing that make it possible for low-income families to become homeowners. We are finding ways to spur economic development in our communities through micro-loans to local entrepreneurs. We are using our buying power to shape the market according to our own values. Many of us buy fair trade products, insist on sweatshop-free clothing, and want to know if the products we buy are damaging the environment.

#### *(4) We Are Being Manipulated by Fear but We Are Learning to Not Be Afraid*

Fear is a powerful emotion. It can focus the mind and help us navigate dangerous situations. However, fear can also paralyze us and make us susceptible to manipulation by those who offer simplistic answers and decisive action in the name of group solidarity.

Since the terrorist attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>, we in the United States have experienced a new and previously unknown kind of fear: fear that we and our families might be victims of a terrorist attack. The 9-11 attacks were meant to terrorize us so profoundly that we would lose our sense of security and well-being. In that sense, the terrorists succeeded beyond their wildest imaginations. Many people were so traumatized that they have been willing to give up our nation's commitment to protect the human rights of

all people for a promise of safety.

How the “War on Terror” has been carried out comes with tremendous costs. The war has been used to justify torture, curtail civil liberties, and wage war in Iraq. The costs include the loss of soldiers’ lives both in Iraq and Afghanistan and an alarming number of suicides, as well as many more people who have been permanently disabled, both physically and emotionally. The costs can also be counted in the stress and breakdown of military families and the thousands of children who suffer the unbearable loss of a father or mother. In Iraq, up to one million civilians have been estimated to have been killed and a fifth of the country displaced internally or living as refugees in other countries (4.5 million people). The war has also resulted in massive destruction of infrastructure and served to breed hatred and incite ever-expanding extremist violence.

The costs of this “War on Terror” can be measured in the loss of up to three trillion dollars of our nation’s wealth. Quite unlike the justified and merciful diversion of money that was spent on anointing Jesus in preparation for his death and burial, in the absence of that paschal sacrifice, the diversion of this money cannot be justified. This money could have been spent on schools, affordable housing, health-care, childcare, public transportation, roads, flood control levies, and other infrastructure. The cost can further be measured in terms of investments that could have been used to reduce our dependency on fossil fuels and to address global warming.

In the beginning of this “War on Terror,” many of us were too traumatized and

shocked to fully understand what was happening. Now we are beginning to see how we have too easily surrendered our consciences and responsibility to those in power. We are beginning to ask questions; we are beginning to demand accountability. With the threat of another military quagmire in Afghanistan, these questions rise up in us with heightened urgency.

While many in power or in the public eye seek to call upon our fear, we are learning that we cannot gain safety by curtailing the rights of others or acting in ways that cause physical and emotional harm. We are coming to understand that while fear seeks to divide us, our only true safety comes in community, in relying upon and trusting each other. We remember the promises of our faith tradition, urging us to “be not afraid” and to put our trust in God. We recall also the witness of our ancestors in faith and history, who banded together to find solutions to and ways out of seemingly impossible situations, relying not on false hope or on simple, dichotomous answers, but on each other and on God.

### *(5) Some Seek to Divide Us but We Are Stronger When We Stand Together*

At times, economic insecurity and fear can make us feel that we have little control over the forces that impact our lives. All too often we find groups in our society willing to provide us with scapegoats to blame. We hear their voices of hatred, fear, and distrust on the radio, TV, and internet, insisting that those with the least amount of political and economic power in our society are to blame

for our problems. Whether those blamed are immigrants, Muslims, people of color, the impoverished, gays and lesbians, or the homeless, demagogues (both religious and political) seek to keep us divided and suspicious of each other.

Each year since the 9-11 terrorist attacks, the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) has found an increase in the number of reported incidents and experiences of anti-Muslim bias, discrimination, harassment, threats, and physical attacks. Anti-immigrant hatred has reached frightening levels, particularly focusing on those who are undocumented. Anti-African American, anti-Asian, anti-Semitic, and anti-Native American sentiment is thriving in these anxious and fearful times, and hate crimes against sexual minorities remain a part of the landscape. The Southern Poverty Law Center counted 888 active hate groups in the United States in 2007.<sup>13</sup>

These powerful forces of fear, distrust, and hatred have already done a tremendous amount of damage in our communities and have kept us from constructing the bridges of care and compassion between us that we need to build a new kind of security—a security built on the size and quality of our network of friends, not on the size of our bank accounts or stock portfolios.

Some believe that our country can become stronger and more secure by subtracting certain groups from “We the People.” But we understand that our nation is great precisely because of the contributions of people from so many different cultures and lands who add their aspirations, talents, and ways of being to our understanding of “We the

People.” We remain strong and vibrant as we recognize that our strength comes from our diversity and that rich exchange and innovation springs forth from it.

We are learning that true security is inclusive security, possible only when everyone’s security is assured and everyone’s basic needs are met. We are learning to stand up for each other more. We are coming to understand that the security and well-being of our children in urban, inner-city neighborhoods is directly related to the security and well-being of our children in the suburbs. We are coming to realize that the health of our rural communities is vital to our ability to feed ourselves with healthy food. And we are convinced that we can no longer expect our brothers and sisters in mining communities to bear the burden of our insatiable need for fuel and mineral resources.

We are learning to be more suspicious of attempts to single out others as our enemies. Instead, we find that much more unites us than divides us. Finally, we are coming to the realization that true and inclusive security is only possible when our bridges of caring and compassion connect us to communities all over the world.

*(6) We Are Told that We Need to Fight to Protect Our “Way of Life” but We Must Redefine What that Means*

Shortly after the attacks of 9-11, then-Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld stated, “What this war is about is our way of life and our way of life is worth losing lives

for.”<sup>14</sup> We question, however: what exactly is this “way of life” that requires us to give up the lives of our loved ones and be willing to kill so many people around the world?

We are mindful that much of our lifestyle depends on maintaining control over important resources from all over the globe. The “War on Terror” and most of the wars our country has waged since World War II have been about protecting a way of life that depends on expanding our access to resources and markets that allow us to maintain our insatiable and addictive consumption of goods. However, it is becoming clear to us that this addictive consumerism is not only unhealthy for us and our children; it is also a source of violence and conflict within and between our communities.

Inside our communities, economic resources are scarce and hope for a better life even scarcer. In a society where the definition of the “good life” is increasingly pushed upward, it is hard to instill the values of delayed gratification, hard work, and frugality.

The never-ending chase for the “good life” confuses our children about what is really important. Parents often fall into the trap of thinking that having more is the same as being more. The social pressure to match the lifestyles of those who are significantly richer than we are comes at a great cost. As a result, we are a society drowning in debt. This pressure causes incredible stress in families.

Yet, with the help of parents and other caring adults, our young are striving to overcome incredible odds in order to grow up to be responsible contributing members

of our communities.

Maintaining and protecting our insatiable desire for more has other costs as well. We had hopes that with the end of the Cold War, our nation’s leaders would shift resources from the military to address human needs. We also had hoped that they would embrace the call issued in the bishops’ 1983 peace pastoral to see nuclear deterrence only as a step toward progressive nuclear disarmament. These hopes wore thin over time, yet on this latter issue, openings now exist, given the new Administration’s expressed intent of working toward nuclear disarmament.

In conclusion, while not an exhaustive list of the signs of our times, this summary offers a glimpse of the many sources of violence and conflict that we see in our communities and in our world, as well as a glimpse of what we see as opportunities for peace. The challenges to building a genuine peace are clearly rooted in justice, and they are many. Faced with the enormity of what lies before us, we rest in the assurance that our God is the God of history, present and at work in these times. As part of the discipleship community of Catholic Christians, we are called to discern through the lens of Scripture and our faith tradition, particularly Catholic Social teachings, what God requires of us in response to these challenges. A tremendous amount of work remains to be done to organize at the base to call for bold and dramatic changes in the direction of our country’s policies, and we must devote ourselves to this work as we live out the “essential vocation of peacemaking.”



## B. The Challenges and Promise of Peace Today

The world that now exists in the twenty-first century is dramatically different from the world of the original Peace Pastoral or the tenth anniversary statement. From our reflections, we found that the current challenges to peace are closely akin to what Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. named the “giant triplets of racism, poverty, and war” more than forty years ago. Today we might include a fourth, environmental degradation, that threatens the planet and the existence of future generations and which is closely linked to and sometimes stems from war, poverty, and racism.

### *(1) The Challenge of War and Terrorism*

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, ushered in the “War on Terror,” a new framework for looking at and dealing with national and international events that has had devastating consequences. The militarized response to 9-11 included the launch of wars on two fronts, in Afghanistan and Iraq, with the attack on Iraq being justified as a “preventive” war. While terrorism is a serious concern, an alternative response could have been more in line with an international police action, with emphasis on multilateral cooperation for a range of non-military interventions. Instead, the wars ignited a spiral of violence in the region and aggravated anti-U.S. sentiment abroad.

According to a report of international jurists in early 2009,

many States . . . ignoring lessons from the past, have allowed themselves to be rushed into hasty responses [to terrorism], introducing an array of measures which undermine cherished values as well as the international legal framework carefully developed since the Second World War. These measures have resulted in human rights violations, including torture, enforced disappearances, secret and arbitrary detentions, and unfair trials. There has been little accountability for these abuses or justice for their victims.

The “War on Terror” has itself become a cause of concern and eroded the basis of international law and human rights.<sup>15</sup>

The war in Iraq represents a clear example of how “violence begets violence.” With the United States deepening its military engagement in Afghanistan and with threats to Iran and Pakistan, it becomes increasingly urgent to examine alternatives to military strategies for addressing conflicts.

Moreover, war adversely affects the most vulnerable populations—women, children, and the elderly; it destroys infrastructure and creates refugees. War polarizes ethnic and racial differences, often leading to ethnic cleansing and inter-religious conflict. War destroys the environment and diverts precious resources toward destructive military ends.

Pope John Paul II, who knew first-hand the devastating consequences of war, was relentless in his harsh judgment on war:

I myself, on the occasion of the recent tragic war in the Persian Gulf, repeated my cry: “Never again war! No, never again war,” which destroys the lives of innocent people, teaches how to kill, throws into upheaval even the lives of those who do the killing and leaves behind a trail of resentment and hatred, thus making it all the more difficult to find a solution of the very problems which provoked the war.

It must never be forgotten that at the root of war there are usually real and serious grievances: injustices suffered, legitimate aspirations frustrated, poverty and the exploitation of multitudes of desperate people who see no real possibility of improving their lot by peaceful means.<sup>16</sup>

War and violence are always desperate measures. While it may feel daunting to imagine a world without war, we cannot deny that our deepest longings and aspirations move us toward this goal for peace. In fact,

the abolition of war forms the opening of the United Nations Charter: “We, the people of the United Nations, [are] determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war . . . and to live in peace with one another as good neighbors. . . .”

As was true of that great struggle to U.S. slavery, the Civil War, the struggle to abolish war will require great imagination and great courage, and it will require robust attention to promote alternative, non-violent means to resolve conflicts, to achieve justice, and to defend the innocent.

*Our group was a variety of folks struggling with many issues that make it difficult to feel inner peace. Everyone unanimously decided that peace had to be found within in order to project and promote it to the outside world. Our group had young people, displaced immigrants, people suffering from cancer, and people struggling with addiction. The biggest challenge to peace they found is the disintegration of families. Most of us were forced to flee our homes because of economic disparity. Now we live here in fear, unwelcome yet unable to return home with our hands empty. Once we came to the United States we were distanced from our families. Here our young folks are more occupied with the consumer culture than with their traditions. . . . The media encourages violence, pornography, and a lack of faith. The consumer culture of the United States not only is making people leave their homes and traditions behind, but it is killing the family and community. (group #40)*

## (2) The Challenge of Poverty and Economic Globalization

A second great challenge is the rise in the power and scope of economic globalization and poverty. While globalization has expanded connections between people and



places around the world in ways not earlier known to humanity, the current forms of economic and cultural globalization have caused painful dislocation in communities across the planet as people see their jobs re-assigned to nations where labor is cheaper while, at the same time, others are forced to migrate from their homelands seeking work in order to survive.

The principle goal of the architects of globalization is higher profits, but the strategies for pursuing higher profits come at the expense of those people who are supposed to benefit from globalization. In addition to massive forced global migration, the results have included the destruction of entire communities and the environment—results that can be just as violent and deadly as those caused by war. This violence is true for communities in many countries around the world, as well as in the United States.

Culturally, the open markets advocated by the architects of globalization have made it possible for Western consumer values to spread throughout the world. Embedded in this advocacy is the assumption of the superiority of Western culture—a culture rooted in whiteness, patriarchy, and colonialism. It is a culture of massive consumption that has had a dramatic impact on worldwide cultural aspirations, especially among the young. However, because of the growing gap between rich and poor, often-unattainable aspirations result in frustration and social disintegration in poor communities.<sup>17</sup>

As a result of these forces of globalization, many of the economic, cultural, and political challenges the bishops identified in their

1993 anniversary statement can no longer be considered strictly as international issues in contrast to domestic issues. One of the salient features of globalization is the melding of these two formally distinct realities. The same economic, political, and cultural forces sowing the seeds of conflict and violence around the world are sowing the seeds of conflict here at home.

### *(3) The Challenge of Institutional Racism*

A third great challenge is racism, including institutional racism and racial oppression. Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, overt racism has been on the rise in the United States, as Muslims, Arabs, and South Asians have been targeted as suspected terrorists. African Americans have continued to be profiled and subject to police brutality and extremely high rates of incarceration. Latino immigrants have become increasingly subject to raids on their homes and workplaces, abused by hate groups, separated from their families, crowded into federal detention centers, and eventually deported.

And yet, while God created humanity to be one family, the sin of racism has divided God's family. As the bishops stated in their 1979 pastoral letter, *Brothers and Sisters to Us*, "racism is not just one sin among many, it is a radical evil which divides the human family."<sup>18</sup>

Racism continues to undermine our nation's most basic promise of liberty and justice for all, and it is closely linked to poverty. African Americans, Latino

Americans, and Native Americans are about three times as likely to live in poverty as are whites, and the highest rates of poverty are among children, especially children of color. Even more serious is the stark racial disparity in the distribution of wealth in the United States. White families have on average ten times the net worth of families of color, and that disparity is growing, not declining.<sup>19</sup>

Racism was evident in the institutional neglect and irresponsibility demonstrated by the federal government to the suffering of Gulf Coast communities after Hurricane Katrina, communities that are disproportionately African American and poor, as well as in the decision of the federal government, supported by much of the population, to build a wall on the U.S.–Mexican border to keep Latino immigrants and migrant workers out of our country. Native Americans, the most forgotten and excluded community in the United States, continue to be oppressed and their lands and resources exploited by the government and wealthy corporations.

However, our commitment to an anti-racist identity is a call to heal God’s family. We have the power to restore that biblical relationship by opposing racial oppression and working for anti-racist transformation at both individual and institutional levels.

Pope John Paul, who knew intimately the devastating consequences of racism leading to the destruction of European Jews in the Nazi Holocaust, spoke directly to this challenge while on a visit to the United States:

As the new millennium approaches, there remains

another great challenge facing this community . . . [and] the whole country: to put an end to every form of racism, a plague which [is] one of the most persistent and destructive evils of the nation.<sup>20</sup>

#### *(4) The Promise of the Beloved Community*

In the effort to examine the challenges to peace and respond to the call to become peacemakers, it is no coincidence that we have found common ground as Catholic organizations and communities working to abolish war and promote a just peace, eradicate poverty and promote a just and ecologically sustainable global economy, and dismantle racism and promote racial equality and diversity.

To meet the challenges and promise of peace, we look to the example of Jesus and our Catholic tradition for the wisdom and courage to embrace the vocation to become peacemakers. We have found that we are not alone, but can draw on our faith communities for strength. We know, too, that we are surrounded by “a cloud of witnesses” (Hebrews 12:1-4), those modern-day peacemakers who have faced the challenges head-on and generously given their lives in justice, service, and love.

We think of Dorothy Day and Thomas Merton, Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks, César Chávez and Archbishop Oscar Romero, Thea Bowman and Katherine Drexel—as well as the many unnamed and courageous peacemakers who have





sustained our communities and our families over many generations through generous self-sacrifice and faithful witness to God's Kingdom. To them we owe a debt of gratitude and a commitment to keeping alive their legacy of hope.

Martin Luther King Jr. captured well the promise of peace when he shared his dream of the "beloved community" and called for a "true revolution of values" in order to overcome the "giant triplets of racism, materialism, and militarism":

A true revolution of values will lay hands on the world order and say of war: "This way of settling differences is not just". . .

War is not the answer . . . our greatest defense against communism [and terrorism]

is to take offensive action in behalf of justice. . .

Our only hope today lies in our ability to recapture the revolutionary spirit and go out into a sometimes hostile world declaring eternal hostility to poverty, racism, and militarism. . .

This call for a world-wide fellowship that lifts neighborly concern beyond one's tribe, race, class, and nation is in reality a call for an all-embracing and unconditional love for all people. . .

We still have a choice today: nonviolent coexistence or violent co-annihilation.<sup>21</sup>

## II. Theological Reflection

### A. We Proclaim Our Catholic Heritage

#### 1. We Proclaim: Jesus the Risen Christ and Prince of Peace

Our theological reflection on the challenges of peace begins with our own encounter with the Risen Christ. This encounter is described by the author of the First Letter of John in declaring “what we have heard, what we have seen with our own eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life” (1 John 1:1). We have come to believe that this Word of Life, Jesus the Christ, is the Anointed One and our Prince of Peace. We testify also that we are being transformed by the Holy Spirit and are being made into a new people.

**WE HAVE HEARD** of the wonders of our God. From our families, we first heard the words of faith that brought us into the community of believers. Our parish families gave us a language to talk about God and to talk about the healing acts of Jesus. Teachers and loved ones preached the Good News to us through the witness of their lives and through their words of challenge and solace. They called us to serve the poor, protect the vulnerable, and work for peace with justice.

**WE HAVE SEEN** the Word of Life in our parishes and in the cultures of our people. We have experienced Jesus through rich traditions of signs and symbols from our Catholic faith: our veneration of saints and the Blessed Mother, our pilgrimages,

festivals, and devotional practices. We have seen Jesus in the many social services in which our faith communities are engaged: feeding the hungry, providing homes for the homeless, visiting the prisoners, clothing the naked, and healing the sick.

**WE HAVE LOOKED AT AND TOUCHED WITH OUR HANDS** the Word of Life in the Eucharist. When we gather at Mass we experience the Body of Christ in three ways: first, in the assembly of believers, second, in reading and reflecting upon the sacred scriptures, and third, in the breaking of the bread and in the sharing of the cup of salvation. Around the Eucharistic table we are reminded also that we are one in mind and heart, one body, rich in the diversity of our many cultures, languages, genders, and races.

It is our encounter with Jesus that shapes our understanding of peace. It is our experiences of the Risen Christ in our families and communities that gives expression to that understanding and our faith as Catholics. It is this intimate encounter with Jesus that informs our response to the challenges of peace identified in our reading of the signs of the times, deeply rooted in the wisdom of our tradition and in the sacred scriptures.

As Christians, we begin with the earliest tradition of Jesus’ encounter with those who would become his future disciples. Discipleship begins with this transformative encounter and understanding of the “Good News” that Jesus proclaimed, that all are called to follow him and so to enter into peace now and in heaven. Empowered by this

Good News received through our families, our communities, and the sacramental life of the Church, we find both our home and our identity as disciples of Jesus.

What do we really know about the historical Jesus? Our theologians and scholars tell us there is very little that we can know except the fact that he was a Jew living in Israel; his people were under Roman occupation; he was born into poverty and raised in a small village; and he became the center of a charismatic religious movement, which eventually led to his crucifixion by the Romans.

When we reflect upon the kind of people whom Jesus gathered to himself, we recognize them in our own time as those who are poor, who have few opportunities for a decent life, and whose very survival is always tenuous.<sup>22</sup> In our identity as disciples of Jesus, we are called to define ourselves in relationship to him and in relationship to those with whom he identified: people who were poor, oppressed, marginalized, or otherwise disenfranchised.

The inclusiveness of Jesus' community defines our understanding of what Martin Luther King Jr. described in our times as "the beloved community." Our discipleship is a call to communal activity and solidarity in action.<sup>23</sup> We know from the scriptures, our tradition, and the witness of the martyrs and saints before us that upon encountering the passion, love, and teachings of Jesus, a person is never quite the same.

In spite of all the violence and suffering

we experience in our communities, in spite of the efforts of those who would lead us deeper into fear, and in spite of all those who would turn us against one another, we are a hopeful people. Our hope is not based on optimism—the belief that in time things will get better. Our hope is grounded in the belief that God is compassion for the world. Our hope is grounded in the conviction that God's grace is sufficient for today—and tomorrow. And it is this hope that gives us the courage to love where others hate, to give without the desire for repayment, and to forgive when others seek retribution. In short, in spite of all the violence and suffering, we stand steadfast in solidarity and action on behalf of justice and God's peace in the world.

*As faith communities, we must live differently, practicing what we preach, living the Church's social teachings everyday in the workplace, in our communities, and in our own homes. The Church must recognize and support diversity in our communities. Calling together other church communities is an essential vocation of peacemaking. For example, after shooting incidents in several Cleveland neighborhoods, faith communities came together for prayer services which drew people into a sense of healing and supported the grieving process. (group #26, in Cleveland)*

## 2. We Proclaim God's Kingdom of Peace With Justice

Jesus continually invites us to become his disciples, to be what we were born to be: children of God, brothers, sisters, and heirs of the kingdom. It is in the Sermon on the Mount that we find the principles of the kingdom described by Jesus.

It is a kingdom of great reversals: where the hungry are filled but those who are full go without and where the poor are blessed but the rich find no consolation (Luke 6:20, 24). It is a kingdom where the call to love does not stop at the boundary of tribe, nation, race, or class but extends unconditionally to even embrace our enemies (Matthew 5:43-48). It is a kingdom whose citizens are content praying for their daily bread and trusting in God's providence to provide for their future needs. It is a kingdom where forgiveness of debt and offenses becomes easy because of the gratitude experienced at being forgiven by God (Matthew 6:11-15).

Even though Jesus had no knowledge of our cultural addictions to violence, consumerism, and exclusion, he did have a clear understanding of the human compulsions that drive this culture of death. In his Sermon on the Mount Jesus describes those who live by kingdom principles as birds of the air who do not sow or reap but are cared for by God (Matthew 6:26). They know that their identity and self-worth do not come from the clothes they wear or the consumer products they buy (Matthew 6:27-32). Rather, their identity comes from being created in the image of and loved by God.

Jesus did more than talk about the kingdom; he gave witness to it by the way he went about his mission of healing and teaching. No practice better exemplified the principles of the kingdom than Jesus' custom of table fellowship. In the time of Jesus, much as in parts of the world today, table fellowship followed strict protocols and taboos.

In a society where taboos on social mixing were maintained as a way of reinforcing

social status, the practice of Jesus sharing meals with tax collectors, prostitutes, and other social sinners caused a great deal of scandal. Jesus went out of his way to mix socially with beggars and other groups of people who were considered unclean (c.f., Luke 15:2, Mark 2:15, and Matthew 11:19).<sup>24</sup>

This extraordinary practice of table fellowship punctuated Jesus' entire public ministry, and it became the basis of the memorial meal his disciples celebrated after his death and resurrection. This is how he wished to be remembered, "Do this in memory of me" (1 Cor. 11:24, 25). Every time we celebrate the Eucharist we recreate the table fellowship practiced by Jesus as a sign of the kingdom where all are invited and welcomed into the community of the beloved.

We are invited and called to model and live out the ministry of Jesus and his disciples in our time as we contribute to and await the fullness of the kingdom of God.<sup>25</sup> The model is inclusion; the ministry is service.

## **B. We Reject the Idolatry of Violence in All of Its Forms**

### *1. We Reject the Myth of Redemptive Violence*

**A**s noted in our reading of the signs of the times, our society has increasingly come to believe that violence can be redemptive. Violence is thought to have the power to conquer or save us from evil and to establish justice. The power of violence seems more

seductive each day as it becomes the preferred way to resolve conflict instead of the last resort.

Our theological reflection on violence begins with the Catholic Catechism's teaching that idolatry "not only refers to false pagan worship. It remains a constant temptation to faith. Idolatry consists in divinizing what is not God."<sup>26</sup> Violence is idolatry of power.

Moreover, violence in all of its forms is sinful because it destroys human dignity and the common good. When violence becomes institutionalized—as poverty, war, or racism—it becomes a form of idolatry because it denies the sovereignty of God and the redeeming power of the love of Jesus Christ and instead affirms that violence itself has the power to redeem. As we are reminded in the Gospel of John, instead of truth, we get lies; instead of light, darkness; instead of freedom, slavery; instead of life, death.

Throughout history and especially evident since the dawn of nuclear arms, war is the greatest destroyer of human dignity and the common good. War makes development impossible and destroys the hopes of future generations.

We look for another way of redemption, the way of the nonviolent Jesus, who came into this world of political and religious conflict to preach a new way. It is clear from the gospels that Jesus rejected violence as a means of bringing about the kingdom (c.f., Matthew 5:43-48 and 26:48-52, Luke 6:27-36, John 8:53-11, 18:10-11, and 33-37). At the same time, he did not flee the cities or their poverty to escape religious impurity nor did he believe that strictly observing

the law would bring about true liberation (Matthew 12:1-21).

Instead Jesus showed us a different way: the way of nonviolent resistance to evil. This way of nonviolent resistance is described in Jesus' counsel to people who were poor and powerless who gathered around him to hear him teach about a way of resisting the violence and oppression they experienced that turned the oppression upside down.

Often we are faced with institutional and systemic violence. In the late 1960s and early 70s, our brothers and sisters in the Latin American Church first identified the challenges we face today as institutional forms of violence. The Latin American Episcopal Conference, held at Medellín, Colombia, in 1968, made insightful and fundamental criticisms of a society that perpetuated misery through the oppression of the many for the benefit of the few and also called for a strong commitment to those who are poor.

The documents of the Medellín conference also stated the need for structures that promoted liberation from oppression and for salvation in the form of participation: participation in political reform, participation in individual and communal conscientization, and participation for an end to violence. The doctrinal basis of Medellín reminds us that God created us and gave us the power to transform this world from sin and violence and to follow in the footsteps of a loving Jesus.

These words of mercy and change promote an authentic liberation that requires both personal and structural transformation and can put an end to sin, hunger, oppression,

and misery. Key to this participation was the necessity for a more just economic system and an end to violence in all its forms.

## 2. We Reject All Forms of Systemic Violence as Sinful

(1) Economic violence operates under a system of oppression, greed, indifference, and ignorance. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' statement, "Economic Justice for All," calls Catholics in the United States to work for greater economic justice. The bishops remind us that the economy exists for the person and not the person for the economy. All economic policies should be based on sound moral principles to ensure that all people have the basic necessities of food, clothing, shelter, education, health-care, and a safe environment.<sup>27</sup>

The economic forces that cause so much poverty in our world also have a dramatic impact on our environment. Pope John Paul II recognized the link between the consumption habits of the rich and the devastating effects on the planet. In 2005, he said,

Since the good of peace is closely linked to the development of all peoples, *the ethical requirements for the use of the earth's goods* must always be taken into account. The Second Vatican Council rightly recalled that "God intended the earth and all it contains for the use of everyone and of all peoples; so

that the good things of creation should be available equally to all, with justice as guide and charity in attendance".<sup>28</sup>

(2) Environmental violence operates under a system of exploitation and anthropocentrism. As our own bishops remind us, at its core, like the global economic crisis, the environmental crisis is a moral crisis. "It calls us to examine how we use and share the goods of the earth, what we pass on to future generations, and how we live in harmony with God's creation." The bishops continue, "The whole human race suffers as a result of environmental blight . . . But in most countries today, including our own, it is the poor and the powerless who most directly bear the burden."<sup>29</sup>

(3) Racist violence operates under a system of oppression, exploitation, and dehumanization. Racism is often thought of in terms of personal attitudes and behaviors, but racism is more than just race prejudices expressed in individual attitudes and behaviors. Race prejudice becomes racism, a grievous sin, when the prejudices of the dominant group become institutionalized for the purpose of enforcing and protecting the dominant group's power and privilege.

In addition to the U.S. Bishops' pastoral *Brothers and Sisters to Us*, local bishops have written on racism. The Catholic bishops of Illinois have reminded us,

Racism is a personal sin and social disorder rooted in the belief that one race is superior to another. It involves not only

prejudice but also the use of religious, social, political and economic and historical power to keep one race privileged. . . . Institutional racism allows racist attitudes or practices to shape the structures of organizations. . . . Cultural racism is the extension of this sinful attitude in the mores, standards, customs, language and group life of a whole society.<sup>30</sup>

When we look at the struggles of the early Christian community in the Book of Acts we find that, while they had no experience of our modern notions of race, they did struggle with issues of prejudice and exclusion. At that time, the divide was between Jewish believers and Gentile converts to the Way. These early, mixed Christian communities were challenged to embrace new identities that allowed them to transcend their old divisions and create new understandings of family. As Paul wrote to the people of Galatia, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is not male or female; for you are all one in Christ" (Galatians 3:28).

We are all members of the same human family and any effort to divide us by race, immigration status, ethnic background, or other false divisions must always be rejected. More than this, as Catholic Christians we are called

to speak out against racism and stand in solidarity with those who are attacked. "If anyone says 'I love God,' but hates his brother or sister, they are a liar; for whoever does not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. This is the commandment we have from him; whoever loves God, must also love their brother and sister" (1 John 4:20-21).

(4) The violence of sexism operates under a system of hierarchies and purposive gender power imbalances. Like racism, sexism is more than sexist attitudes and behaviors. It is the institutionalization of male superiority in economic, political, religious, and social systems that maintains male privilege. In addition, many social institutions treat women (our sisters, daughters, mothers, and friends) as sex objects in order to sell products and services. "God created humanity in God's own image; in the divine image God created them; male and female

*While we take inspiration from Scripture and Catholic traditions of nonviolence and peacemaking, other voices also inspire us . . . . Christian peacemaking addresses racism and other forms of oppression nonviolently, giving special emphasis to overcoming the culture of death, as seen in the sins of the wars we wage and the incidence of so many homicides in our cities. We find in the reconciliation process that has taken place in some countries a model for allowing Shalom to replace the troubles and strife our world knows too much of. We seek to extend the presence of Shalom to all of creation by addressing global warming and other critical environmental issues. We seek concern for the well being of persons over concern for "the economy," the primacy of services to persons over the manufacture of objects. (group #11)*

God created them” (Genesis 1:27).

We know that Jesus lived in a world where women could be treated like property, that is, held under the full control of men. But in spite of all of the social taboos and prohibitions in the law, Jesus mixed freely with women and they were among his followers. The Good News of his incarnation was announced to Mary and then affirmed by Elizabeth (Luke 1:39-45); women were counted among his company (Luke 8:1-3); and when he rose from the dead he first appeared to Mary Magdalen and the other Mary and gave them instructions to proclaim the Resurrection to the men (Matthew 28:1-10).

(5) The violence of war, looking at cases like ancient Rome, Adolf Hitler’s Germany, and twentieth and twenty-first century United States, among others, operates within a system of superpower myths, global ambitions, and idolatry. The ultimate form of institutionalized violence is war. If violence is a form of idolatry, then war is its temple. War is the most exalted form of violence and the most deadly. War requires the total submission of all social, economic, political, and religious systems, requiring them to work together for the purpose of justified killing. It is the totality of war that makes it so dangerous to the community of believers. “War makes the world understandable, a black and white tableau of them and us. It suspends thought, especially self-critical thought. All bow before the supreme effort. We are one. Most of us accept war as long as we can fold it into a belief system that paints the ensuing [required] suffering as necessary for a higher good.”<sup>31</sup>

The language of war is couched in absolutes: you are “either with us or against us.” Moral precepts that are held in the highest regard during peacetime are tossed aside. In times of war, all voices of dissent must be silenced. Those who would question the dominant narrative of war must be condemned as heretics if the myth of redemptive violence is to hold.

In this way the “War on Terror” has become a mirror image of the terrorism it combats—a kind of “state terrorism”—justifying violence in the name of “national security” and institutionalizing war by means of a permanent war economy. This permanent state of war is what President Dwight D. Eisenhower warned against when he criticized the “military-industrial complex” in a speech upon retiring from the presidency.<sup>32</sup>

More often than not, the roots of war can be found in conflict caused by economic exploitation and oppression. Those who suffer from the violence of poverty rise up to resist their circumstances, only to have those in power crush their aspirations. This struggle over resources and economic self-determination lies at the root of most wars.

Racism, too, often becomes a tool of war as racist stereotypes are used to demonize the “enemy.” This same racism also stigmatizes members of our own communities who share the same race, religious, or ethnic background as the identified enemy. Equally disturbing, in times of war we see an increase in the level of violence against women both at home and on the battlefield, with rape a nearly expected and standard instrument of war.

From our Catholic Social Teaching we see that throughout the course of history, and particularly in the last hundred years, the Church has never failed to teach that:

War is a scourge and is never an appropriate way to resolve problems that arise between nations. It has never been and it will never be because it creates new and still more complicated conflicts. . . . War is an adventure without return that compromises humanity's present and threatens its future. Nothing is lost by peace; everything may be lost by war. . . . War is always a defeat for humanity.<sup>33</sup>

In the past two decades, the social teaching of the Catholic Church has become increasingly pointed in its condemnation of war as a means of resolving conflict. Wars of aggression are understood as intrinsically immoral. Preventive wars, waged in anticipation of some future threat, are also regarded as immoral.

In an address commemorating the twenty-fifth anniversary of the bishops' peace pastoral, Pax Christi USA's Bishop President Gabino Zavala spoke on our nation's over-reliance on war as a means of addressing international conflict and applied this reliance on the myth of redemptive violence to the war and occupation of Iraq:

While nothing can restore the precious lives which have been lost and damaged on all sides in this war nor quickly

repair the social fabric of an ancient nation that has been ripped apart, a change in U.S. policy to replace reliance on military measures with support for a multilateral and diplomatic peace process would seem to offer the best hope for beginning to heal the divisions created by six years of war and occupation.

It would also help repair the damaged U.S. reputation abroad and demonstrate our willingness to rejoin the community of nations.<sup>34</sup>

The Vatican has spoken repeatedly about diplomacy and the importance of multilateral institutions in addressing conflicts, particularly urging recourse to the United Nations. The Church teaches that "international law [is] the guarantor of the international order; that is, of coexistence among political communities that seek individually to promote the common good of their citizens, aware that the common good of a nation cannot be separated from the good of the entire human family."<sup>35</sup>

### C. We Embrace Our Catholic Social Teaching

**A**s we come together to meet the challenges of peace in this new century, we have as a resource and guide our rich tradition of Catholic Social Teaching. Our peacemaking work begins with the insight

that, in Catholic social thought, peace is understood in positive terms. Peace is more than the mere absence of violence or war; it is the fruit of justice. As the Psalmist reminds us, “Justice shall march before you, and peace shall follow in your steps” (Psalm 85:13).

The Church’s vision of peace is grounded in the understanding of peace as both a gift of God and a human work. It is constructed on the central human values of truth, justice, freedom, and love. Pope Paul VI laid out a marker by which all notions of this positive view of peace are measured. Speaking to the UN General Assembly in 1972, he made this passionate plea:

Why do we waste time in giving peace any other foundation than Justice? . . . Peace resounds as an invitation to practice Justice: “Justice will bring about Peace” (Is. 32:17). We repeat this today in a more incisive and dynamic formula: “If you want Peace, work for Justice.”<sup>36</sup>

In Catholic thought, a peace based on justice is grounded in the following principles of Catholic Social Teaching:

**1. THE LIFE AND DIGNITY OF THE HUMAN PERSON:** The foundation of our social teaching is the conviction that all human life is sacred and a reflection of the divine. The human rights of all people should be protected from womb to tomb. Every person is of intrinsic value. Every person should be afforded the basic necessities

of life, including housing, food, clothing, education, and health-care. In our efforts to build peace this principle needs to be the starting point of all our efforts to work for justice.

**2. THE CALL TO FAMILY AND COMMUNITY:** We are social beings. We develop our identities and realize our fullest human potentials in the context of family and community. Every government policy and every economic decision should be evaluated in terms of its impact on families’ ability to nurture their children and in terms of the larger community’s ability to support family structures. Our strategies for building peace must take care to protect vulnerable communities.

**3. RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES:** Life and dignity, family and communities, will thrive only when each person and every community can exercise their rights responsibly and advocate for those whose rights are jeopardized by the violence of poverty, racism, and/or militarism. Everyone has a right to determine, without force, how to realize her or his potential. And everyone has the responsibility to realize that potential for the sake of that peace which comes from the three-fold love of God, neighbor, and self.

**4. THE DIGNITY OF WORK AND THE PREFERENTIAL OPTION FOR THE POOR:** Work is more than a way to make a living. Our economic life should be structured in a way that allows each member to contribute to the good of the community through work. That work should provide workers with a living



wage. A basic moral test of any society is how the most vulnerable and poor members are doing. Those who cannot work or who do not earn enough to support their families should hold a preferential place in the political and economic policies of a nation to insure that their basic needs are met.

Peace will only become possible when each member of the human family has the opportunity to fully participate in the economic, social, and political life of the community. When we work for economic justice in our communities, our nation, and the world, we are doing the work of peace.

**5. THE COMMON GOOD AND UNIVERSAL DESTINATION OF THE EARTH'S GOODS:** The common good can be understood as “the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as a group or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily.”<sup>37</sup> This good is based on the conviction that every person is important to the whole and that no person should be left behind or abandoned.

While the Church upholds and defends the right to private property, it also teaches that we should regard goods that we own “not merely as exclusive to ourselves but common to others.” Further, the Church teaches that “goods of production—material or immaterial—such as land, factories, practical or artistic skills, oblige their possessors to employ them in ways that will benefit the greatest number. Political authority has the right and duty to regulate the legitimate exercise of the right to ownership for the sake of the common good.”<sup>37</sup>

Building peace means recognizing that

the needs of the many outweigh the wants of the few. The crisis of the common good that we now face in this age of globalization is realizing that the common good of any particular nation cannot be realized apart from the needs of the entire human family.

**6. SOLIDARITY AND SUBSIDIARITY:** The principle of solidarity is based upon recognizing that we are all members of the same human family and that in an age of globalization, our fates are tied together. Solidarity calls those with privilege to stand with those who are poor or vulnerable in their struggles for dignity, respect, and fundamental human rights. The principle of subsidiarity reminds us of the importance of putting checks on the power of political and economic institutions by insisting that social, political, and economic needs be addressed at the level that is closest to the communities most affected.

Both solidarity and subsidiarity require that any efforts to build peace must follow the lead of those who are poor and struggling for justice. For those with privilege (economic, social, political, or other), solidarity means going to those places where there is suffering, exclusion, and oppression and committing to building relationships of mutuality and trust. A genuine peace built upon justice by way of the principle of subsidiarity can only come about when those who are poor and marginalized directly participate and control the social, political, and economic institutions that affect their lives.

**7. CARE FOR CREATION:** Because the fate of humanity is forever tied to the fate

of the earth, we cannot hope to build a world of peace with justice without recognizing the duty to protect and repair the web of life that ties all of creation together. As our bishops remind us, "Guided by the Spirit of God, the future of the earth lies in human hands. . . . Even as humanity's mistakes are at the root of the earth's travail today, human talents and

invention can and must assist its rebirth and contribute to human development."<sup>38</sup>

We cannot build peace among people while waging war on the planet. The ecological crisis we face is intimately connected to multiple forms of injustice imposed upon those who are poor.



# III. We Celebrate Signs of Hope and Resistance

**“The authentic conversion of hearts represents the right way, the only way that can lead each one of us and all humanity to the peace that we hope for . . . It is the way indicated by Jesus: He—the King of the universe—did not come to bring peace to the world with an army, but through refusing violence.”**

*- Pope Benedict XVI, Call to Volunteer Peace Workers, March 29, 2009*

We conclude with affirmations of faith and suggestions for shaping an agenda for Catholic peacemaking for the twenty-first century.

## Affirmations of Faith

One of the religious communities that participated in the People’s Peace Initiative—the Marianist Social Justice Collaborative—engaged many of its members in the discernment process. The following affirmations of faith, submitted by the Trinity Marianist Community in Dayton, Ohio, summarize well the input we received from other groups in response to the reflection question: “What is essential to our Church’s understanding and cultivation of peace in the twenty-first century?”

1. We Christians live under the sign of the cross: we commit ourselves to entering the Paschal Mystery with Jesus Christ. We understand our journey of faith to include self-sacrifice and self-transcendence. We must remember this commitment and apply it to decisions about economic and political systems as we pursue peace.

2. Similarly, we must emphasize that what we long for is a peace the world cannot give, but which only God can give. We must enter our efforts for peacemaking with prayer and openness to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

3. Catholics ought to promote the vision of security “as lying in the effort of assuring that the blessings of creation are enjoyed by all.” Yet we must also admit that we have to overcome fear in order to live this way, in order to live under the sign of the cross. A strengthening of faith in God whose perfect love casts out all fear will be necessary for us to do this.

4. We must make it clear that the Church must be counter-cultural in its witness to peace. The Catholic Church must be a global Catholic Church, not a national church. It must hold up concern for everyone, not just for U.S. citizens. Furthermore, our real call is to love fundamentalists, communists, terrorists, whomever our enemies may be.

5. Our Catholic faith must be active, not passive. We must put our faith in action. Matthew 25:1-45 emphasizes the practical, hands-on nature of feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, caring for the sick and

imprisoned, etc. We are called to recognize that we are in relationship with those who are poorest around us. John Paul II drew upon this to explain that God has made us responsible for our neighbors, especially those “who are poorest, most alone and most in need.” Our eternal salvation depends on our active response to those in need.

6. In the pursuit of peace, the Catholic Church must insist that we cannot find excuses for who we are not going to help, including, for example, undocumented immigrants. Isaiah says, “Come, without money, and receive food. . .” (55:1). Someone in need has a right to food, even if that person is a criminal or terrorist. Our temptation is to believe that we deserve what we have, but it isn’t true.

7. The Catholic Church leadership needs to voice these truths, not just the grassroots. When the Pope, the Vatican, or the U.S. bishops have spoken out strongly and clearly on behalf of peace, justice in the economy, against war, violence, and all taking of human life, this has been very helpful. We need to hear more clear and powerful teaching and preaching on these issues from the Church hierarchy.

8. We are convinced of the transformative power of education in converting hearts and cultures and in building communities of faith. A key dimension to a “People’s Peace Initiative” must be a strong educational plan for educating about Catholic Social Teaching, especially on peace, the true costs and horrors of war, about options beside war for dealing with criminals, terrorists, rogue nations, etc.

9. Christ gives himself as peace to his

people. The Church today must give witness to peace by being witnesses of peace in our world. Leaders in the Church need to present Christ as peace to the Church and the Church as peace to the world.

10. We must engage Catholics from other nations and other people of good will from other nations in this quest for peace. We can’t afford to go it alone. John Paul II’s writing about the culture of death and the call of the Church to develop a Culture of Life has potential as a useful tool in this process. Part of the Culture of Life is that we not kill or harm each other.

## Conclusion: Invitation and Call to Become Peacemakers

**P**ax Christi USA uses the framework of four priority areas to organize its work: (1) the Spirituality of Nonviolence; (2) Disarmament and Demilitarization; (3) Economic and Interracial Justice; and (4) Human Rights and Global Restoration.

The responses we received during the discernment process of the People’s Peace Initiative reaffirm a commitment to these four priorities. We also found that they adhere closely to the challenges—militarism, poverty, and racism—identified by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. as the forms of oppression that must be overcome for the beloved community to truly become a reality.

A summary of our conclusions follows, as well as considerations for action.

(1) **Abolishing War and Promoting a Just Peace.** This century began on a note of optimism with the beginning of the Third Millennium, but we soon faced the grave

challenge of international terrorism with the attacks of September 11, 2001. While we unequivocally condemn those terrorist attacks, and all forms of terrorism, we believe the “War on Terror” was the wrong framework for a just and effective response.

The war on terror served to polarize the world into “friends” and “enemies,” squandered the sympathy of the nations of the world for our country, led our nation to justify a war of option as a “preventive war” and torture as “enhanced interrogation,” and led to military expenditures for two wars that will exceed \$3 trillion.

The people believe that our peacemaking efforts must address the very roots of war and terrorism: the scandal of poverty, institutional racism, and a permanent war economy.

The people know that we must resume action on the challenges laid out in the 1983 bishops’ peace pastoral and the ten-year anniversary statement. It seems particularly important to seize this new moment for nuclear disarmament by working for dramatic and fundamental changes in U.S. nuclear weapons policy and building momentum toward an international treaty to outlaw nuclear weapons once and for all.

The people are aware that it is important to redefine security and promote a vision of inclusive security. We urge our nation’s leaders to seek a new direction in our country’s relations with our global

*We need support from the Church to live out the peacemaking to which we are called. We must teach nonviolence and social justice in our seminaries as well as in lay settings. The hierarchy of the Church must advertise and encourage participation in programs such as JustFaith which emphasize interconnectedness. We must speak up for peace in words that are not ambiguous. Our bishops must be clear and definitive in statement, and we must all live out the words we share in Mass each week: “Peace be with you.” We must not let them be simply spoken words. We must give them life. If we truly believe Christ’s words, we will believe peace is possible and we will work for it. Living the Gospel means working for peace. And we take heart in Jesus’ words to us—“Do not be afraid.” The Church has power when it works together. If we collectively decide to act for peace, it will make a difference. (group #62)*

neighbors—one that emphasizes diplomacy, multilateral cooperation, and interreligious dialogue to build greater understanding and acceptance of differing traditions and aspirations.

And the people recognize that it is essential for us, as Church, to elevate a clear moral voice to call for an end to all war as a means to resolving conflict. War truly is a defeat for humanity. We must lead a global movement to abolish war, just as those of a previous generation led the movement to abolish slavery, and we must promote peace-making, peace-building, and peace-keeping alternatives to establish justice and the conditions for enduring peace.

(2) **Eradicating Poverty and Promoting a Just and Sustainable Global Economy.** The people affirm that justice is the foundation of peace, as our Catholic tradition has taught us. Millions of people around the globe and in our country have been deprived of justice,

and for that reason many exist in a state of poverty, often times better characterized as misery. Moreover, the people have experienced firsthand that poverty is “institutionalized violence” and, as such, denies the human dignity of those who are poor while it destroys the global common good.

As Catholics, we believe the Church is called to work for the eradication of poverty, both in the United States and globally. “Poverty in the United States is a moral and social wound in the soul of our country.”<sup>40</sup> In terms of those who are poor around the globe, “*the special place of the poor* in this moral perspective means that meeting the basic needs of the millions of deprived and hungry people in the world must be the number one objective of international policy.”<sup>41</sup>

The past thirty years have witnessed the reversal of the federal government’s commitment to the poor and the dismantling of the social contract put in motion by the New Deal and the Great Society. Trickle-down economics and free-market globalization strategies have led to greater economic disparities and decreasing quality of life for those who are poor. Deregulation and corporate greed have led to the collapse of financial markets, putting in jeopardy the global economy, and forcing people across the globe into a state of grave economic insecurity.

“[A]ll people have a right to life, food, clothing, shelter, rest, medical care, education, and employment.’ . . . Society as a whole, acting through public and private institutions, has the moral responsibility to

enhance human dignity and protect human rights. . . . government has an essential responsibility in this area.”<sup>42</sup>

The people appreciate and understand that the Church is in a unique position to lift its moral voice to call for a bold restructuring of an economic system that currently puts profits over people and to challenge scandalous military spending in the face of massive human need. We also believe that given global warming and our nation’s over-reliance on non-renewable energy sources—a dependency that contributes to the degradation of the air, water, and land and creates conflicts over resources—care for creation and global restoration must be essential elements of our work for peace.

**(3) Dismantling Racism and Promoting Racial Equality and Diversity.** We know that to end war and poverty, and to achieve peace and ensure justice, we must work untiringly to end racism in all of its forms, from individual prejudice to institutional racism and systemic racial oppression.

Racism is both a root cause and a consequence of war. It is intimately linked to poverty, as a disproportionate number of people living in poverty, in the United States as well as throughout the world, are people of color. The increasing anti-immigrant sentiment coupled with the post 9-11 attacks on South Asian, Arab, and Muslim communities are particularly alarming faces of racism that have fomented a culture of fear.

From colonial times to the present, racism has been intimately linked to white privilege. White privilege means “there are opportunities which are afforded *Whites*



that *People of Color* simply do not share.”<sup>43</sup> White privilege shifts the focus from how people of color are harmed by racism to how white people derive advantages because of it. “White privilege is the result of social policies, institutions, and procedures that deliberately created a system that advanced the welfare of white Americans and impeded the opportunities of persons of color.”<sup>44</sup>

The people acknowledge that we must renew our commitment to racial equality as a national goal and priority. We must support public policies that directly enhance the quality of life for people of color, such as comprehensive criminal justice reform and comprehensive immigration reform, as well as progressive affirmative action policies in education and employment and equal access to affordable housing and affordable health-care.

For people who are white, the key to dismantling racism and renouncing white privilege begins with “cultivating a stance of proactive solidarity and strong partnerships with communities of color . . . as a step toward overcoming our blindness to racial privilege and becoming better advocates for racial justice in both our church and society.”<sup>45</sup>

The people hope that we, as Church, will courageously stand up to the forces promoting fear, hatred, and division in our communities and stand with those who are being blamed, victimized, or oppressed.

**(4) Building the Beloved Community and Promoting the Global Common Good.** Finally, the people are committed to building the foundations of the beloved community. We affirm that we have heard the cries of

our people, whose suffering has pierced our hearts and whose aspirations have filled us with hope. With them and with people of faith throughout the world, we seek a world at peace, where the dignity of each person, racial equality, social and economic justice, and the integrity of the whole creation are at the heart of our peacemaking efforts.

The people expect to continue to build right relationships within our communities and with all peoples of the world, reaching out to communities of different backgrounds and to the most marginalized sectors of our society, and promoting cross-cultural dialogue and cooperation. The globalization of solidarity, a just and sustainable global economy, and global restoration of the planet must be central to these aims.

The people oppose violence in all of its forms, be it the institutionalized violence of poverty and racism or the violence perpetrated by terrorists or by war. Peace can only be achieved by guaranteeing human security for all peoples.

Finally, the people lift up the impassioned plea of Pope Paul VI on October 4—the anniversary of St. Francis—in 1965 to the General Assembly of the United Nations when he cried out: “War no more, war never again!” And we re-echo the cry of Pope John Paul II that “war is always a defeat for humanity.” We are people of faith; we believe that another world is possible—a world without war—and we commit ourselves and our Church to helping birth it.

As Pax Christi USA, together with the Catholic organizations that participated in the Peoples’ Peace Initiative and with all people of good will, we affirm our “essential

vocation of peacemaking,” a vision for peace and inclusive human security grounded in the Gospel. As individuals, as a Church, as a nation, we are “called to something new,” called to be peacemakers, and called to resolutely face together the challenges and promise of peace in the twenty-first century.

This peace is the foundation of the beloved community to which we are called, as brothers and sisters in Christ. This is the invitation and the call we have received—to be peacemakers. This is the promise of peace with justice, biblical *Shalom*, that is God’s gift of peace to all peoples and all nations of the earth.



# Appendix: Executive Summary

In 2003, to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of their landmark peace pastoral, *The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response*, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a statement, "Called to be Peacemakers." It reaffirmed the centrality of the peacemaking vocation and included an invitation to the faithful to reflect on ways they can be "sentinels of peace."

Responding to this invitation by the bishops, Pax Christi USA began conversations with other national Catholic organizations to explore how we might collaborate on an effort to engage Catholics in reflecting on this "essential vocation of peacemaking." The collaboration evolved into what became known as "A Peoples' Peace Initiative."

The Initiative sought to "read the signs of the times" in the current historical context and to apply the wisdom of Scripture and Catholic Social Teaching to articulate the new challenges of peace we face. From the beginning, a guiding principle was to place at the center of reflection the experiences and perspectives of those most marginalized in society, particularly communities of color, women, and those who are impoverished. This attempt was both a challenge and a commitment to build greater racial diversity in the work of peacemaking in the future. The Initiative also served to more deeply root the work for justice as an essential foundation for peace and to elevate the global common good as central to the vision of the beloved community to which we are all called as children of God.

## Reading the Signs of the Times

At this moment in history, we witness destructive forms of political violence, economic apartheid, social exclusion, and misplaced priorities in our local communities and in our world. We find, too, that we are living in a society increasingly marked by isolation, alienation, and the disintegration of social, political, cultural, and community cohesion. As more and more people take their cues from the powerful socializing influence of popular culture that is transmitted by our media, traditional sources of wisdom and community are forgotten and are losing their influence. This loss of family and community support is further compounded by a deterioration of credibility in our social institutions.

The world of the twenty-first century is dramatically different from the world of the 1983 Bishops' Peace Pastoral. From our reflections, we found that the current challenges to peace are closely akin to what Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. named more than forty years ago the "giant triplets of racism, poverty, and war." To these three we add a fourth, environmental degradation, which threatens the planet and the existence of future generations. In the effort to examine the challenges to peace and respond to the call to become peacemakers, it is no coincidence

that we have found common ground as Catholic organizations and communities working to abolish war and promote a just peace, eradicate poverty and promote a just and ecologically sustainable global economy, and dismantle racism and promote racial equality and diversity.

## Theological Reflection on the Challenges of Peace

Our theological reflection on the challenges of peace begins with our own encounter with the Risen Christ. It is our encounter with Jesus that shapes our understanding of peace. It is our experience of the Risen Christ in our families and communities that gives expression to that faith. That faith then impels us to look at the world and to examine the obstacles to peace.

Our society has increasingly come to believe that violence can be redemptive. Violence is thought to have the power to conquer or save us from evil and to establish justice. The power of violence seems more seductive each day as it becomes the preferred way to resolve conflicts.

However, violence in all of its forms is sinful because it destroys human dignity and the common good. When violence becomes institutionalized—as poverty, war, or racism—it becomes a form of idolatry, denying the sovereignty of God and the redeeming power of Jesus Christ’s love. As in the Gospel of John, instead of truth, we get lies; instead of light, darkness; instead of freedom, slavery; instead of life, death.

## We Celebrate Signs of Hope and Resistance

As we go forward to meet the challenges and promise of peace, we look to the examples of Christ and our Catholic traditions for the wisdom and courage to embrace the vocation to become peacemakers. We have found that we are not alone but are surrounded by “a cloud of witnesses” (Hebrews 12:1-4), peacemakers who have faced challenges head-on and given their lives in a generous offering of justice, service, and love. Through their example, we see the work we must continue, the hope we must foster, and the resistance we must demonstrate even in the face of great challenge.

We believe it is essential for us, as Church, to elevate a clear moral voice to call for an end to all war as a means to resolving conflict. War truly is a defeat for humanity. We must lead a global movement to abolish war, just as those of a previous generation led the movement to abolish slavery. We must promote peace-making, peace-building, and peace-keeping alternatives to establish justice and the conditions for enduring peace.

We recognize that the Church is in a unique position to lift its moral voice to call for a bold restructuring of an economic system that puts profits over people and to challenge scandalous military spending in the face of massive human need. We also believe that given global warming and our nation’s over-reliance on non-renewable energy sources, care for creation and global restoration are essential elements of our work for peace.

We know that to end war and poverty, and to achieve peace and ensure justice, we must



work untiringly to end the violence of racism in all of its forms, from individual prejudice, to institutional racism and systemic racial oppression. Together, as people of color and white people, we must cultivate solidarity, strong partnerships, and an understanding of each other and ourselves.

Finally, we are committed to building the foundations of the beloved community. We affirm that we have heard the cries of our people, whose suffering under the many disguises of violence has pierced our hearts and whose aspirations have filled us with hope. With them and with people of faith throughout the world, we seek a world at peace, where the dignity of each person, racial equality, social and economic justice, and the integrity of the whole creation form the heart of our peacemaking efforts.

As Pax Christi USA, together with the Catholic organizations which participated in the Peoples' Peace Initiative and with all people of good will, we affirm our "essential vocation of peacemaking," a vision for peace and inclusive human security grounded in the Gospel. As individuals, as a Church, as a nation—we are "called to something new," called to be peacemakers, and called to resolutely face together the challenges and promise of peace in the twenty-first century.

# Endnotes

1. Bishop Wilton Gregory, "Blessed are the Peacemakers: Reflections on Two Anniversaries," August 4, 2003. Available at <http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/international/cpanniv.shtml>
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3. *Ibid.*, No. 233 and No. 73.
4. *Ibid.*, No. 333.
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6. Pope Paul VI, *Gaudium et Spes (The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World)*, No. 4, Rome: Vatican II, December 1965.
7. A full treatment of the myth of redemptive violence can be found in Walter Wink, *The Powers that Be: Theology for a New Millennium*, New York: Galilee Doubleday Press, 1998, pp. 42-62.
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# Reflection Questions

## Reading the Signs of the Times

- How are we (am I) building authentic community?
- Where and with whom can we practice finding “common ground” within our local communities?
- How can we practice and promote an ethic of the “common good”?

## Theological Reflection

- How have you heard, seen, and touched Jesus the Risen Christ, the Prince of Peace?
- How has your identification with Jesus deepened your understanding of peace?
- What are the idols in our individual lives and in our culture that work against human dignity and the common good?
- What spiritual practices or disciplines root you in the work of peace and justice for the long haul?
- How do you carry out the principles of Catholic Social Teaching in your life: your family, your community, your work/school, your church?

## We Celebrate Signs of Hope and Resistance

- How does your prayer life involve peace and peacemaking?
- Who inspires us in the work for peace and justice?
- What wisdom does our religious faith and the tradition of our Church have to speak to the world today?
- How will I model what I proclaim to believe?

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