

Advancing Nonviolence Study Circles

February through April 2021

Dear participant,

Thanks so much for signing up to participate in our Advancing Nonviolence study circles, the first offering in our new program, "Love is Political: Literary Circles for Liberation". The Advancing Nonviolence study circles will be using the new book from the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative, *Advancing Nonviolence and Just Peace in the Church and the World*, beginning in February 2021 and continuing through the end of April 2021.

These study circles are aimed at deepening the Catholic understanding of and commitment to Gospel nonviolence. This program grows out of our fundamental belief that nonviolence is critical to the life of the Catholic Church and the survival of our world, and that nonviolence is an essential component to transforming violence and injustice. Participation in these study circles will lead to a deeper understanding and appreciation for nonviolence as a constitutive element of our faith and the cultivation of practical and effective tools for building a just peace in our families, local communities, churches, cities, and the world.

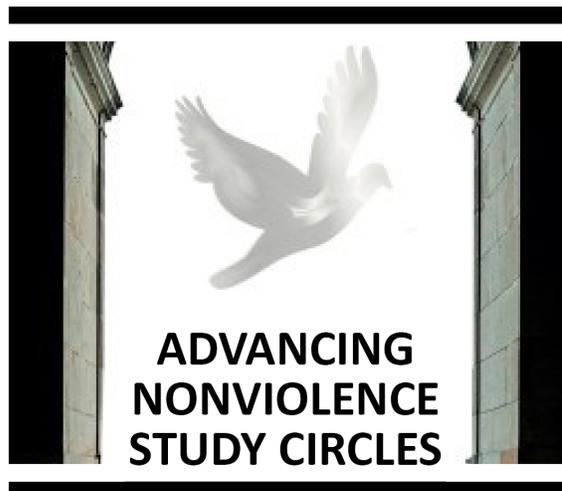
In this packet, you'll find resources for helping guide you through the book and connect you to complementary programs we are offering to facilitate your exploration of key themes featured in the book.

Read on below for more information and THANK YOU for joining us!

In peace,



Johnny Zokovitch
Executive Director, Pax Christi USA



PREPARATION

STEP ONE: Order the book!

If you have not already done so, we encourage you to purchase the book so you can get started in your reading. We have partnered with the Winchester Book Gallery in Virginia, a locally-owned, independent book store, for online orders of the book at a discount to people participating in the Advancing Nonviolence study circles. To order your copy, go to this link:

<https://www.winchesterbookgallery.com/product/advancing-nonviolence-and-just-peace-church-and-world>

Use the coupon code PCM15 to receive a 15% discount when ordering. (The book is also available through Amazon and as an e-book in the Amazon Kindle store for \$14.49.)

About the book: *Advancing Nonviolence and Just Peace in the Church and the World* is the culmination of a three-year global conversation among church leaders, community organizers, activists, social scientists and theologians about how the Catholic Church might return to its Gospel nonviolence roots and transform the world. It is part of the ongoing project, the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative, coordinated by Pax Christi International. This book shares the experiences of on-the-ground nonviolent interventions; explores the scriptural, theological and historical foundations of nonviolence; reviews the most current social science on how nonviolence has been effectively employed; and outlines a vision for how the Church might embrace active nonviolence into every aspect of its life.

Advancing Nonviolence and Just Peace is a biblical, theological, ethical, pastoral and strategic resource for anyone seeking to understand or expand Catholic thinking on nonviolence. It answers commonly asked questions about active nonviolence and Catholic social teaching, including:

- Does nonviolence work to resolve conflict?
- What did Jesus and the Bible say about nonviolence?
- What has the Church taught about nonviolence?
- Is nonviolence the same as pacifism? How are they different?

Advancing Nonviolence and Just Peace explores the foundations of Catholic thinking about nonviolence. It includes reviews of papal statements and church documents, a survey of the biblical teaching from the Hebrew Bible and Christian scriptures, a review of contemporary theological research on nonviolence, and dozens of recommendations for further discernment on how the Church might live into its Gospel nonviolence mandate. This is an essential resource for moving forward the dialogue on how the Church can lead, teach and respond to conflict in the world.

STEP TWO: If you are reading the book with an already existing group, schedule days and times to get together over Zoom or other video conferencing platforms to meet and discuss virtually OR how you'll gather together in a safe, socially-distanced way to meet and discuss in person. Below you'll find a suggested schedule that coheres with events that we have planned at the national level to complement your reading.

For those of you who are reading the book on your own, we'll have 90-minute sessions on Pax Christi USA's Zoom platform every other week starting the week of March 1st where we'll hear from contributors to the book followed by break-out rooms with a small group of people to share and discuss each of the major sections of the book. See more below as to the reading schedule these national Zoom calls will adhere to.

STEP THREE: Look over the resources and suggestions in this packet, incorporate them into your planning as best suits you, and then start reading!

SCHEDULE

This is a suggested timeline/schedule for your reading which includes proposed dates for our communal Zoom discussions.

> End of February through March 1 – Read the preface

- **Proposed Zoom Event:** An Introduction to the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative and How the Book Came to Be. **Proposed date:** Wednesday, March 3. Question for break-out discussion sessions: Why are you interested in this study circle? What has been your own experience with nonviolence? What do you hope to glean from the book and the study circle?

> March 2-15 – Read Part I: Returning to Nonviolence

- **Proposed Zoom event:** Rediscovering Nonviolence, Reading the Signs of the Times. **Proposed Date:** Wednesday, March 17. Break-out discussions will revolve around what was read in Part I.

> March 16-29 – Read Part II: Foundations of Nonviolence

- **Proposed Zoom event:** Building on the Foundations of Nonviolence. **Proposed Date:** Wednesday, March 31. Break-out discussions will revolve around what was read in Part II.

> March 30-April 11 – Read Part III: The Practice and Power of Nonviolence

- **Proposed Zoom event:** The Power of Nonviolence – Action and Resistance. **Proposed Date:** Wednesday, April 14. Break-out discussions will revolve around what was read in Part III.

> April 12-25 – Read Part IV: Embracing Nonviolence

- **Proposed Zoom event:** Advancing Nonviolence and Just Peace in the Church and the World. **Proposed Date:** Wednesday, April 28. Break-out discussions will revolve around what was read in Part IV and include pledges of commitment for next steps.

SMALL GROUP PROCESS GUIDE

What follows is one suggestion for how you might format your meetings, guiding questions for discussion, and more.

Opening Prayer:

(Start each of your sessions with this short opening prayer or another of your choosing.)

God, thank you for your great love and all that you give to me.
Give me the grace and the courage to live a life of nonviolence, so that I may be faithful to Jesus.
Send me your Spirit that I may love everyone as my sister and my brother and not fear anyone.
Help me to be an instrument of your peace;
to respond with love and not to retaliate with violence;
to accept suffering rather than inflict it;
to live more simply;
to resist death and to choose life for all your children.
Guide me along the way of nonviolence.
Disarm my heart and I shall be your instrument to disarm other hearts.
Lead me, God of nonviolence, into your reign of love and peace,
where there is no fear and no violence.
In the name of Jesus. Amen.

~ Rev. John Dear, Pax Christi USA Ambassador of Peace

Brief Check-Ins:

Invite each member to briefly introduce themselves if this is the first meeting, maybe sharing why they have joined this group and what they are hoping to get out of this study circle. At subsequent meetings, invite people to share any insights they have had from the previous meeting's conversation during the time in between your gatherings. Did anything happen in the interim that led someone to recall something you had discussed or read?

Study and Reflection:

Below are a few guiding questions you may use for each part of the book as you read. Feel free to use these questions or allow the conversation to proceed as the Spirit leads. For each study and reflection period, make sure that there is an opportunity for everyone to speak, to share what impacted them from what was read. A few general questions for any session would include:

- What was most striking to you in what we read in this part?
- What did you find most challenging in terms of your own life or lifestyle?
- What one concrete suggestion, insight or action can you take away from this part of the book and incorporate into your life or the life of your family, community, church?
- What are the repercussions of what we read for our local parish? The diocese? The larger Church?

Suggested Study Questions for Part I

“God’s vision for humanity is the nonviolent life. The Church is thus called to practice, teach and be a sign of this Gospel nonviolence, inviting people of faith and all people everywhere to live this way of light and truth.” (p.24)

- What do you think might be the basis of saying that God’s vision for humanity is the nonviolent life?
- How could the Church more effectively “practice, teach and be a sign of Gospel nonviolence”?

“The Second Vatican Council taught us to see and respond to ‘the signs of the times.’ Today we discern two critical ‘signs’: the global crisis of violence with the unspeakable suffering it unleashes and, by the grace of God, the spread of active and powerful nonviolence.” (p. 29)

- What are concrete examples of the “global crisis of violence”?
- How do you think “active and powerful nonviolence” is responding to this crisis of violence?
- What is your own experience of violence and nonviolence (share at whatever level you feel comfortable)?

“Nonviolence is a powerful ‘third way’ beyond fight (action-reaction) or flight (silent submission) when confronting violence and injustice. As Joan Morera Perich, SJ writes, ‘This third way is a path that requires great lucidity, creativity, faith and constancy.’ Qualitatively different from violent conflict, nonviolence combines active noncooperation with any violence and steadfast regard for the opponent as a human being.”

- Nonviolence is often thought of as passive or weak. How do the seven stories presented in Part I (p. 34-58) concretely challenge these assumptions, especially in light of this idea of nonviolence being a “third way” beyond violence or passivity?
- Can you think of a time when you put this “third way” into action in your own life, even if you didn’t call it “nonviolence”?
- Can you think of movements for social change that put this “third way” into action? In what ways did they do this?

Suggested Study Questions for Part II

“In his 2017 World Day of Peace message, Pope Francis shared with all Christians and all people on earth a landmark call to learn, practice and mobilize the humanizing power of active nonviolence... This message built on the accelerating articulation by the leadership of the Church over the past half-century of the critical need for humanity to nonviolence in our lives, our societies and our world.” (p. 75)

- How can our reading of Church teaching documents on peacemaking and nonviolence help to transform our study of the Bible, our prayer life, and our participation in the Mass?
- How familiar were you with the Church’s teachings on nonviolence prior to reading this section? What surprised you?

"[I]t is important to realize that the most effective 'official' teachers of Gospel nonviolence in local contexts are the local episcopacy, accompanied by clergy, religious, pastoral ministers, catechists, community workers and members of base communities." (p. 88)

- What ways do we see the Church's teachings on nonviolence and just peace evident in our local parish, diocese, Catholic schools and universities? What opportunities are there for deeper exploration of those teachings in these settings?
- In what ways can we better incarnate the nonviolent love of Jesus in our family, parishes, friendships, schools, workplaces?

"In summary, the Gospels show Jesus as a full spectrum nonviolent peacemaker. ... [H]e shows us how to live a life of nonviolence to the full and to the end." (p. 147)

- Of the Biblical passages and examples shared in this part of the book, which passage or passages were most compelling to you? Why?
- How can we work with groups outside of Christianity to cultivate active nonviolence and build movements for social transformation?

Suggested Study Questions for Part III

"Over the past century active nonviolence has spread all over the world ... successful nonviolent social and political change has demonstrated the efficacy of nonviolent action in addressing injustice and constraining evil." (p. 227)

"... Catholics have always been part of these nonviolent movements, bringing spiritual grounding, prayer, courage, strategy and organization, along with healing, restorative justice, trauma-care, pastoral presence and solidarity." (p. 230)

- What gives you reasons to be hopeful or thankful from what you have read about the transforming power of nonviolence? Have you seen signs of this in your own community in recent months?
- What active nonviolence movements have you participated in? Were any previous generations of your family participants in a nonviolent movement for justice? What prompted involvement? What lessons were learned?

"Mel Duncan, co-founder of the Nonviolent Peaceforce, said: 'Local churches are well placed to support localized approaches and provide bases for the ongoing reflections required to adapt nonviolent approaches. Churches can also provide venues for training. And they can play an important role in mobilizing the resources for trauma treatment. An encyclical on nonviolence by Pope Francis is required to set the direction for churches and to emphasize the scale of the violence that is engulfing the world.'" (p. 234)

- Where is violence closest to you? What are the efforts taking place as interventions to disrupt that violence or are there processes to restore relationships?

- What local churches are hosting nonviolence trainings? Can you create a list of the best nonviolence-related trainings near you?
- We read of “pragmatic” and “principled” approaches to nonviolence. What do you see as the strengths of each approach? What do you see as the main contribution that faith-based communities bring to these?

“Peace is mentioned at least 39 times in Laudato Si’. ... The call to ecological conversion can only be answered through active nonviolence. Creation itself and its natural regenerative process, threatened and under attack as it is, reminds us of our pascal faith that life does overcome death.” (p. 245-246)

- In what ways does the earth teach you about how to act nonviolently? What stories have been passed down to you about how to live rightly with the earth?
- How are nonviolence and earth-tending mutually reinforcing?

“Women bring particular priorities to nonviolent movements based on their experience. They use tactics that are often unique and that leverage their authority as women—as faith leaders, scholars, journalists ... to advance the nonviolent cause.” (p. 249)

- The Catholic Church models an exclusionary priesthood and institutional power rather than an inclusive model. How might this inhibit the institutional church from offering leadership in nonviolent movements?
- What are the stories from women about women who have served as violence preventers, interrupters, or post-violence repairers? Have these women been given the full support of the community and the church institution or have they been marginalized?

Suggested Study Questions for Part IV

“We hope to refocus the evangelizing energy of the Church on nonviolence and just peace.” (p. 256)

- What impact would a commitment to nonviolence and just peace have on the moral guidance the Church would give to voters, political decision-makers and business or military leaders?
- What difference would it make if the 1.3 billion Catholics worldwide had a full understanding of the power and effectiveness of active nonviolence and the connection of nonviolence to the heart of the Gospel?

“Nonviolence and peacebuilding should become a core element of Catholic identity, culture and way of life.” (p. 288)

- Based on your own experience, of all the opportunities for discernment about how to integrate nonviolence and just peace into the life and work of the Church listed on pages 289-302, which strike you as most urgent in the short-term and which are most likely to have a long-term positive impact in nurturing a more just and peaceful world?
- How would a commitment to nonviolence and just peace affect the Church’s pastoral practice?

“Within nonviolence and Catholic Social Teaching there lies the foundation for dismantling abusive systems of power and for promoting accountability among Church leaders and other decision-makers.” (p. 303)

- For the Church to recommit to the centrality of Gospel nonviolence will require an examination of the Church’s own violence. What might be the result of the Church’s internal commitment to nonviolence?

“Faced with the challenges of this age, let us be transformed. Let us become nonviolent people, a nonviolent Church, and a nonviolent world dedicated to faithfully healing our planet and honoring the infinite worth of every being.” (p. 306)

- What next steps can you concretely take as individuals or as a group to model this commitment? What can you do within your community, your parish, your school or university, your family?
- Are you familiar with the Vow of Nonviolence (see below)? Would you be willing to take the vow for the next year?
- The Catholic Nonviolence Days of Action take place each year between September 21 and October 2. Consider how you, your local group, or parish may participate in this year’s events. Watch the Pax Christi USA website for more information.

Closing Prayer:

(End each of your sessions with a few moments of silence, allowing the insights and challenges of the session to sink in, and then use this short closing prayer or another of your choosing.)

I bow to the sacred in all creation.

May my spirit fill the world with beauty and wonder.

May my mind seek truth with humility and openness.

May my heart forgive without limit.

May my love for friend, enemy, and outcast be without measure.

May my needs be few and my living simple.

May my actions bear witness to the suffering of others.

May my hands never harm a living being.

May my steps stay on the journey of justice.

May my tongue speak for those who are poor without fear of the powerful.

May my prayers rise with patient discontent until no child is hungry.

May my life's work be a passion for peace and nonviolence.

May my soul rejoice in the present moment.

May my imagination overcome death and despair with new possibility.

And may I risk reputation, comfort, and security to bring this hope to the children.

~ Mary Lou Kownacki, OSB, Pax Christi USA Teacher of Peace

The Vow of Nonviolence

Recognizing the violence in my own heart, yet trusting in the goodness and mercy of God, I vow for one year to practice the nonviolence of Jesus who taught us in the Sermon on the Mount:

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons and daughters of God...You have learned how it was said, ‘You must love your neighbor and hate your enemy’; but I say to you, Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you. In this way, you will be daughters and sons of your Creator in heaven.”

I vow to carry out in my life the love and example of Jesus:

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

God, I trust in Your sustaining love and believe that just as You gave me the grace and desire to offer this, so You will also bestow abundant grace to fulfill it. Amen.