

INSTRUMENTS OF PEACE

A Franciscan Resource Book for Justice,
Peace and Integrity of Creation

- Part 2: Specific Themes of Special Interest
 - 2. Peacemaking



Order of Friars Minor
Office of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation

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PART TWO

THEMES OF SPECIFIC INTEREST

As we said in the introduction to this section, this second part is composed of seven specific themes of great social and ecclesiastical importance at the present time. They could have been more but, not being able to make the book longer, we have selected these as the most apt and of greatest interest for living out our charism.

Each theme has a brief theoretical development that does not claim to be exhaustive but rather makes a presentation of the theme to stimulate reflection and action. This theoretical development of each theme is completed with the experiences and testimonies of friars from all over the world.

The theoretical part of each theme, having been written by a different author, can throw up some repetitions. However, we wanted to leave it this way because this section is not to be read at one sitting but rather each chapter should be consulted and worked on separately.

At the end of each theme or chapter a long questionnaire can be found. The reason, in effect, is to be found in its instrumental character. If these chapters are to be used for meetings on formation, both initial and on-going, or even in meetings of reflection with the laity, the long list of questions will better facilitate the group that is going to reflect.

Themes:

1. Option for the Poor
2. Peacemaking
3. Integrity of Creation / Environmental Justice
4. Life
5. Human Rights: Individual and Collective
6. Women and the Charisms of Francis and Clare
7. Dialogue: Ecumenical, Interreligious and Intercultural

2. Peacemaking



OFM General Constitutions, Article 68:

- 1. The brothers should live in this world as builders of justice and heralds and craftsmen of peace overcoming evil by doing good.*
- 2. Though the brothers proclaim peace in word, they should cherish it even more deeply in their hearts so that no one is roused to anger or scandalized because of them. Rather, the brothers should call all people again to peace, gentleness and kindness.*

From the life of Francis ...

That Francis was a peacemaker is obvious from the greeting he said God revealed to him, “The Lord give you peace” (Test). Francis's sense of solidarity with everyone created by God undergirded all his peacemaking efforts. The humility of the Friars Minor caused them to promote peace within the brotherhood (1Cel 38) and to strive for peace and gentleness with everyone (1Cel 41). Francis urged the friars that in their travels they not be “quarrelsome or take part in disputes with words or criticize others; but they should be gentle, peaceful, and unassuming, courteous and humble, speaking respectfully to everyone, as is expected of them” (RegB c.3). His own preaching proclaimed peace and salvation, uniting “in the bond of true peace great numbers of people who had been at enmity with Christ and far from salvation” (LM 3:2). Francis said that true peacemakers “are able to preserve their peace of mind and heart for love of our Lord Jesus Christ, despite all that they suffer in the world” (Adm XV). Francis was a peacemaker because of his honesty, his belief that what you are before God, that you are and no more (Adm XX). According to Francis, where there is peace and contemplation, there is neither care nor restlessness (Adm XXVII). Francis sought for everyone true peace from heaven; he urged them to love their neighbor as themselves. If they could not do that, they should at least do their neighbors good and not harm

(EpFid).

Francis was a peacemaker in several Italian cities. In Arezzo he had Brother Sylvester pray that the demons causing civil strife would leave that city (LP 81). With Francis' help the citizens of Gubbio made a peace pact with the wolf which had terrorized them (Fior XXI). Certainly the Sultan treated Francis with respect because he recognized Francis as a man of peace (1Cel 57). In response to a feud between the bishop and podestà [mayor] of Assisi, Francis added two verses to the *Canticle of the Creatures*:

All praise be yours, my Lord, through those who grant pardon
For love of you; through those who endure
Sickness and trial.
Happy those who endure in peace,
By you, Most High, they will be crowned.

On another level the Pardon of Assisi obtained from the Pope for people praying at the Portiuncula and the most famous story of the wolf of Gubbio are two of the strongest examples of Francis' commitment to peacemaking. The story of the wolf at Gubbio contains many teachings for us - even though we should realize that it appears only in later sources whose historicity is doubtful (cf. *Fioretti*, Chapter 21).

From story of the wolf of Gubbio, let us examine the succession of the events:

- a fierce wolf terrifies the townspeople of Gubbio. He attacks animals and human beings. They do not dare to go outside the city gate,
- Francis is staying in the town and has compassion on the people,
- he goes out with a companion to encounter the wolf; some peasants join with them and quickly retreat,
- the wolf approaches fiercely,
- Francis makes the Sign of the Cross on the wolf who calms down,
- Francis calls the wolf "brother," scolds him because of his cruelty and makes a pact with him,
- they go together to the town,
- Francis exhorts people to conversion; the pact is renewed publicly and the townspeople promise to feed the wolf
- The pact is respected and everyone is happy.

In that story we can point out:

- the courage of Francis who recognizes that "Christ is the master of all creatures" and places all his confidence in Christ's power,
- the non-threatening approach of Francis, who comes with no weapons, but with the Sign of the Cross,
- his courage to confront the wolf clearly with his crimes, and at the same time he understands why the wolf commits these,
- his frankness too with townspeople pointing out their sins, yet showing comprehension of their need for security and the wolf's need for food.
- his insistence on having a clear pact publicly made.

Peacemaking

1. Francis as Peacemaker

For centuries, in some cultures when a visitor arrives and says: “**Peace** (Shalom, Salam),” that word means that he does not carry weapons and comes as a friend.

To Francis it was revealed to say: **God give you his peace**, and he started his preaching with these words. For eight centuries “**Peace and all Good**” has been used as a greeting by the Franciscan family. Any greeting can be an empty formula without a reality dwelling inside the wisher. For Francis the peace he wished sprang from his inner peace and his deep reverence for every creature that came from God's hand. The one who wishes peace and does not host seeds of that peace within **is a peace-wisher, not a peacemaker**. Such a person does not transmit a gift received from God. The secret of Francis as a peacemaker was that **he let God inside himself bring peace to those he met**. When the wolf of Gubbio ran ferociously toward him, Francis made the Sign of the Cross on the fierce animal and called him “brother.” These two actions reintroduce the wolf to his place inside the family circle of God's creatures, reconciled by Christ's love manifested on the Cross. By his cruel actions, the wolf had severed himself from this family of God. After receiving the benefit of redemption, the wolf calmed down and was ready to listen to Francis' reproaches and to his request of a pact with the inhabitants of Gubbio.

2. Francis Faces Conflicts

Erroneously some people call peacemakers “those who are nice people, soft-spoken, going along with everyone”. Psychologists tell us that some of those easygoing people agree with everyone because they are afraid of conflicts--not because of the overflowing of their peace with God. Francis invited his brothers not to get into arguments in their preaching and to be gentle, peaceful, unassuming, courteous and humble; these are fundamental characteristics and must be an integral part of the Friar Minor's being. However, this does not imply fear of truth, like Francis who did not refuse to be challenging. Respectfully but stubbornly, he resists the pope and his advisers who want to mitigate his Rule; he challenges the Crusaders and their sinful actions; he tells the Sultan that he does not know the true God; he resists his own brothers who want a less rough life; he throws away the tiles of the roof of the friary of which he disapproves; and to the wolf of Gubbio he points out his crimes without any ambiguity. Francis is not a sugarcoated man. He is firm and speaks the truth even if it is hard to listen to. His challenge, however, is not threatening. He is disarming by his lack of duplicity and by his courteous strength. Not only does he respect the sacredness of his opponent, but he tries to make opponents conscious of their own divine preciousness that they may have forgotten or disdained. Francis can be that way because he has no need to defend his property, his reputation or his ego. He has nothing to protect except the honor and love of God longing to transform the violent, and to reintegrate them into the communion of all the creatures, “his” creatures. Francis is not misled by the cloak of sinfulness and evil-doing; through the opacity of that cover, Francis sees the sacred presence of God in people. His spiritual eye allows him to see and reach the divine presence in the others, whereas many would like to kill them: “Let us kill this ferocious wolf! Let us kill this impious Sultan!” they shout convincingly.

3. Is the Example of Francis Relevant in Today's Complex World?

Is the example of Francis relevant for us? How can we bring peace in world conflicts and will our own peace have some influence upon anonymous forces? Many of our contemporary conflicts come from one culture imposing itself on persons of another culture; pride, ethnicism, nationalism and economic interests play a dramatic role in many of the present slaughters. But in a more subtle way, all over the planet most of the cultures are invaded and dominated by Western culture, and especially by its North American brand. The invasion is surreptitious. It starts with the publicity for some drinks or food, for movies bought for information or entertainment, but which promote a way of life. A new way of thinking and behaving gains a foothold. The basis of that new invading culture is a faith, an almost religious faith, in the need to characterize and estimate everything by numbers. Mathematical models reign. Even further, the new culture presents the mechanisms of the free market as laws of the universe and quasi-divine.

4. Violence Which Challenges Us

Disciples of Christ and brothers of Francis are especially challenged in this most pervasive violence: the change of the foundations of the cultures. It is violent and unjust to deprive people of what their own culture gives them: the references for the journey of their life. For staying human and for becoming a peacemaker in the midst of struggles against injustices and violence, it is indispensable to recognize our own sacredness and the sacredness of those we encounter. At the opposite, what we call the market culture estimates every reality under the sun, in terms of quantity, and especially quantity of wealth. The laws of the free market giving birth to a dynamic economy are imposed as the moral basis of a new culture: the market culture. Casualness permeates everything in such a culture and sacredness tends to vanish. When a culture becomes driven primarily by the quest for monetary gain, seeing human and creation's resources as objects to be used for amassing wealth, the result is a loss of the sense of the sacred. Life is devalued. The political structures may vary, but the core of the culture is where the evil dwells.

5. Respect for the Sacredness of Every Person and All Creation

It is an awesome challenge for us to revere the sacredness in every human: a bandit, a war criminal, a torturer, a dictator, a pitiless landowner or a speculator bringing famine to hundreds of millions of people through his profitable game. It is difficult because many opponents are the representatives of impersonal structures and anonymous interests. These interests are sometimes clearly despicable, but the humans involved are not. It is also an immense challenge to respect the sacredness of every creature in the midst of the ecological crisis leading the earth to destruction. The problem is not only to be respectful and brotherly toward a fierce wolf, the plants of our garden and the water of the torrent we encounter along our way. It is the sacredness of air and water and land and species on the planetary scale that is questioning us. Earth resources belong to humankind as a whole and most dramatically we ourselves are compromised in their pollution and destruction. It is a gigantic challenge to confront the nuclear threat and all those who accumulate wealth with a power whose incalculable consequences cannot be handled now and may never be. It is an incredible challenge to see greed destroying all the resources of the earth: plants, animals, minerals, the cultivable lands and even the earth's beauty so needed for human development. All these creatures have their role in the construction of the cosmic Christ, a community of free beings able to survive and together to witness the tenderness of God. How to awaken the boards of transnational corporations or of governments when they act in an irresponsible way toward

humankind, threatening its future and already in the present bringing sufferings to many? How can they open their hearts and respect each creature? Our hearts have been opened by God, and God will open theirs if we are not judging them and if we call them to conversion by our courteous and unshakable struggle. Or at least God will show them where is the wisdom and that their own interest lies in a deep change.

If we do not recognize our own dignity, if we are not in intimate contact with the Triune God dwelling within us, if we are contaminated by the way of making every reality an "object--objects that we can count--even love ceases to be a precious mystery and becomes a thing. The presence of the One who is Love, who establishes our sacred dignity, becomes hard to acknowledge.

6. The Trinity as Model and Source of Nonviolence

The nonviolence of the Trinity is shown by God's deep recognition of the mystery of the human beings with whom God himself has shared his own sacredness. Not only does God recognize his divine presence in us, but in respecting our journey God patiently attempts to awaken in us the recognition that we are unique, precious, hosting that divine nature inside us! In his life and his death, Jesus gave us the powerful witness of these nonviolent relationships with human beings.

Active nonviolence models its methodology after God's nonviolence. Its first foundation is the dialogue of two sacrednesses: someone or a group of people who have repudiated the slavery of violence and are in touch with the center of their existence (the true self) are calling their opponents to rediscover the divine in themselves, using that rediscovery to resolve the conflicts in which they are opposed. Not all the violent ones make that inner journey which requires freedom of the will. They need to be constrained by the nonviolent to recognize that the inner strength is a power able to oppose their power and that their own interest is to accept some of the conditions of their opponent. Otherwise, in continuing their violence they will lose more. They are confronted by a courage, a love, a steadfastness which receive their power from an immaterial source. The cleverness of the nonviolent methodology, if it is well followed, will often take them off guard and push them out of their secure logic.

Let us insist: the nonviolent power comes from God, but God will not work miracles if we are inactive. Many of us Franciscans still do not realize that most of the violence and injustices are part of a complex network of causes and are highly organized. Most of the open conflicts, military or economic, are of such a magnitude and sophistication that it would be naive and irresponsible to have confidence only in the love of a few pure-hearted individuals witnessing their sacredness and challenging those who for now are forgetting or burying the divine in a hidden part of themselves.

7. Becoming Familiar with the Methodology of Active Nonviolence

If we want to be peacemakers, we need to know how to use the methodology of active nonviolence, to know when some nonviolent actions failed because of an insufficient analysis of the situation or because some phases of the nonviolent process were shortcut. Where nonviolence succeeded, most of the time a long preparation preceded the results: technical preparation, and also spiritual. Only a superficial view makes believe that it was a pure intervention of God! God will not change the hearts of decision makers if we do not do our homework, giving God a clear sign that we really want such a change. We must act wisely. We have to prepare for God's actions--and

even God's surprises. By our courage in following the nonviolent methodology, we will be channels of God's sacredness, of God's stubborn patience, of God's longing for evildoers to stop their evildoing. Our loving God cares for the doer of good and the evildoer alike: both are his children. He knows that his sacredness dwells in both, and he wants both to bear fruits of communion and not bitter fruits of destruction for themselves and the new Creation, His body growing to its completion. In many struggles our allies demonize the other camp in order to mobilize the energies of their ranks. It is common practice to slander the opposition, to paint them as evil, perverse, incapable of changing, unworthy of any respect. That division into "good people" and "bad people" is unacceptable for a follower of Christ. Each of us is a divided person, partly good and partly bad; our opponents are likewise partly bad and partly good. If we want to share God's compassion, we need to have compassion both for the victims of violence and for those enslaved by their own violence and injustice. We need to pray that our present relative liberation from such violence or injustice does not stop tomorrow; then if God removes his help we might just be as bad as the worst of our opponents.

8. The Necessity of Being Poor to be Authentic Peacemakers

Earlier we pointed out that Francis challenged without being threatening because he was not afraid to lose anything. He had almost nothing he could call his own. Becoming peacemakers is in direct relationship with our overcoming of fears, the fear of a real death, loss of our physical life, or of a quasi-death (which can be called a partial death) in losing health, reputation, friends, material goods, privileges or even fear that the love that gives us strength might vanish and lead us to fall... and to hate. We know that if we have few belongings and few privileges, we will not fear losing them. If we are not attached to a self-image, we are freer to take up the defense of those whose dignity or life is endangered. Some of our brothers and sisters have shown us through the ages that their fearlessness grew with their poverty, their life with the poor. Their true richness is the power of love, which flows from the wounded side of Jesus on the Cross.

The nonviolent struggle is the weapon of the poor and loving people. It is the weapon of those who refuse to be lone rangers; they have confidence in a collective and communitarian struggle. This does not exclude being "clever as the serpent."

Every creature, human or non-human, is our brother and sister. This is not metaphoric. It is not sentimental. God invites us and the whole of Creation to be part of this *pleroma* (fullness) headed by Christ, in which respect for the divine presence transforms every relationship. Our reverence for God's presence inside others is what will spread a true peace and respect for the integrity of Creation.

Then we will be contagious peacemakers.

Alain Richard OFM

Examples from the lives of the friars...

Nowhere is the need for genuine peacemaking more necessary today than in the many war-torn African nations. Significantly it was in the small East African nation of Rwanda that GIACOMO BINI, present Minister General, and two other friars first settled as they began a new Franciscan presence on the continent in the early 1980's.

There they constructed their own simple house in the local style and began a ministry that slowly spread to eight countries of the region (Rwanda, Burundi, Kenya, Uganda, Zambia, Malawi, Tanzania, Madagascar.) Today the goals of that first community, based in Nairobi, Kenya, are to support the many vocations among Africans from different countries and ethnic backgrounds and to create a truly international, multicultural community - a daily witness to the values of reconciliation and bridge-building that are so urgently needed throughout the region. Some of the friars have paid dearly for that continuing commitment to peace: in 1986 a 33-year-old friar, KEVIN LAWLOR, was killed in Uganda. As the tribal genocide began Rwanda in 1994, a minister of a new Secular Franciscan fraternity was murdered. In April of that same year, GEORGE GASHUGI, a 32-year-old Tutsi, was brutally beaten to death just months before his final profession of vows. In April 1996, VJEKO CURIC narrowly escaped death as he returned alone to the Franciscan house at Kivumu, 20 kilometers outside Kigali. Three men armed with a gun and long knives asked him for money and then ordered him to face the wall. Curic kept his wits about him and managed to flee through an open dining room door. It was not the first time he had been threatened by both Hutu and Tutsi extremists because of his commitment to helping both ethnic groups without prejudice. He has vowed to continue his mission even though it means "risking one's life, just like the other people here." On the 31st of January 1998, Vjeko was gunned down in front of the church of the Holy Family in Kigali, Rwanda. Pope John Paul II paid tribute to him saying "So another victim is added to the long list of missionaries who have with the sacrifice of their lives sealed their love for Christ and for the people of Africa".

Elsewhere on the continent friars are at the center of the complex process of healing and reconciliation that is going on in the new, democratic nation of South Africa. As members of the many Truth and Reconciliation Commissions across the country listen to victims and perpetrators telling the truth about the apartheid regime, friars are slowly helping individuals and communities to recover from more than four decades of oppression and brutality.

"It's a traumatized nation looking into its soul and being slowly and painfully reborn." Those are the words of Irish friar PADDY NOONAN, who has spent the past two and a half decades working in some of the most deprived townships south of Johannesburg where violence and injustice were a way of life. He and other Franciscans live in an area near Boipatong, famous for a massacre where he was the first person to arrive on the scene and witness the terrible carnage that had taken place during the night. "Peacemaking wasn't exactly uppermost in your mind when there were massacres like that going on around you," he explains with his gently lilting Irish accent. (Most of his work is conducted in the local township dialect since he believes that is the only way to really communicate with the people.) "The first thought that comes to mind is 'Who's behind all this?' There were so many invisible forces making it harder to bring down the apartheid regime and talk peace in the country." Didn't he find it hard to remain hopeful amidst such violence and repression? He returns to the time he spent visiting the shacks following the 1992 Boipatong massacre: "After I'd spent hours seeing all those broken and battered bodies and just listening to their families, one man came up to me in the street and whispered 'Father, we know the Lord is here.' Well, what right have we church people to doubt if the ordinary people could keep such hope alive?" Noonan was also close friends with some of the leaders of the anti-apartheid struggle, people who now hold positions of responsibility in the new government. "That was part of our

ministry, talking to some of those political street fighters, but we knew they were decent people and not the communist rebels they were made out to be.”

Such an inside view of the situation in South Africa led the churches to play an increasingly active role in support of the anti-apartheid movement. “We always worked as a united Christian front,” stresses Noonan. “When the political and civic groups were banished or exiled, it was the churches which stepped in to fill the vacuum.” He cites the example of a rents and services boycott that lasted for some seven years. “All the Franciscan parishes participated and refused to pay any municipal fees because it was one of the most effective means of nonviolent protest.” When local officials threatened to switch off the city lights, he and a group of other ministers went to try and negotiate a way out of the deadlock. Their efforts failed and riot police were called in to arrest the group. Such a personal experience of the struggle for peace made the final liberation of South Africa an event of almost indescribable joy for Noonan. He was on hand in the same townships to monitor the first democratic elections that took place in April 1994. Paddy and ULRICH ZANKANELLA from Austria held official positions as Election Observers--Paddy as a local observer and Ulrich at the invitation of the South African Bishops' Conference to serve as an International Election Observer. “In terms of my Franciscan mission I felt that monitoring these elections was like walking the last mile alongside of the people. It was a gesture of being with them as they ushered in a new era of peace and democracy after the hell and sinfulness of the apartheid years.”

DAVID BARNARD of the Province of Our Lady Queen of Peace (South Africa) underwent a powerful experience during his sabbatical year in England. There he had the chance to reflect on the racial and tribal prejudices that continue to plague South Africa. For the first time in his life he was able to discuss over a sustained period of time how he felt as a black African friar within a predominately white community. Through this important international experience, he was able to share his anger and discover the power of forgiveness within the larger Franciscan family on his return to his homeland.

The experience of reconciliation in South Africa has been quite different for rural pastor PETER WILSON. It was in jail that Peter first came “to accept white people, to forgive them” and to feel free of his bitterness: “It was a wonderful feeling. After all, it is part of the African culture to accept everyone. I don't want to talk in terms of Black and White. Afrikaners have long been a part of Africa. My own people never wanted revenge. We wanted justice. We were fighting their policies, not their people.”

In Latin America and Asia too, friars have remained committed to peace in their communities and watched as repressive regimes have been overthrown and fragile democracies set in motion. In the Philippines, for example, they stayed in the front line in the fight for justice and peace under longtime dictator Ferdinand Marcos, who was finally toppled by the People's Power revolution in 1986. During that popular uprising the friars played a key role in keeping the protests at a nonviolent level, despite the extraordinary oppression suffered by the majority of the people for so long. Even in the decade since Marcos was removed from power, the friars continued to call for greater social justice among the people. Though the economy of the populous island nation is slowly beginning to recover from the devastation of the Marcos years, the legacy of the dictatorship, combined with continuing corruption and a string of natural disasters, means that poverty and violence continue to plague many parts of the country today. On the island of Mindanao in the south, the government has so far proved unable to

resolve the problems of the large Muslim community, whose leaders are demanding some form of autonomy for the region. Sometimes friars are caught in the whirlwinds of violence around them. For example, in October 1992, AUGUSTINE FRASZCZAK was kidnapped at gunpoint and held captive for more than two months by Muslim extremists. In a statement announcing the release of their brother, the friars said, "The most important step toward eliminating the crime of kidnapping is to improve the social and economic conditions of Basilan."

In Japan friars PHILIP HAMADA and JOB TODA took the initiative to promote deeper reconciliation and understanding between people in the Asia-Pacific region. In August 1995, as Japan marked the 50th anniversary of the end of the Second World War, they drew up a statement asking for forgiveness from the Korean people for the many acts of aggression which cost the lives of more than twenty million people in the region. In the statement the friars recognize the many difficulties faced by the Catholic Church in Japan in the prewar period. But they also apologize for the Church's failure to stand up to the government and protect those who were being so brutally oppressed, especially in China and Korea.

In other post-conflict situations, such as Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia, the friars are working to promote reconciliation as a precondition for lasting peace. There has been a Franciscan presence in the region for over seven hundred years; three friars were killed during the recent conflict while others were injured or forced to flee from their homeland as convents, churches and other Franciscan centers were destroyed in the fighting.

As part of the efforts to heal these scars, BOZE VULETA and members of the Franciscan family have set up The Franciscan Institute for the Culture of Peace. The Institute, which opened in April 1996, is based in Split with centers for interethnic and interreligious dialogue in the Bosnian capital, Sarajevo. Its aim is to make a detailed study of all the issues relating to peace in the region, promoting dialogue between former enemies and above all providing peace education programs for young people. Boze is optimistic about the institute's chances for success. "If the people of Bosnia and Croatia are willing to listen to anybody today, it is the Franciscans," he says with a wry smile. "They trust us, so we must put their confidence to good use in the search for peace and reconciliation. Our aim is also to prevent further conflicts by building up mutual understanding and respect for different cultures and religions - something which was completely destroyed under communist rule." The friars also held a widely publicized conference on forgiveness, bringing together scientists, psychologists, social workers, catechists and experts in interreligious dialogue. The conference was so successful that the friars have now published a book on the subject, which is being widely used as an aid for those dealing with the problems of postwar trauma.

In another effort to promote peace, the friars from Herzegovina who cared for the wounded throughout the war have developed a project to assist those who have lost limbs as a result of landmines. The friars liaise with an orthopedic factory in Germany and in 1996 alone, were able to provide 204 people with prostheses. Over the same year a similarly structured dental practice provided much needed dental care to another 1,286 people.

Franciscan missionaries from Ireland have regularly been in the forefront of peacemaking efforts throughout Asia, Africa or Latin America. Yet rather ironically, our friars only

recently returned to Northern Ireland after centuries of absence dating back to the Protestant Reformation. In 1984, LIAM MCCARTHY joined three other Irish Franciscans who responded to a request for assistance by a group of Poor Clares and founded the first “new” community at St. Joseph's Church in the industrial Docklands area of Belfast. For Liam it marked a long overdue event in Irish Franciscan history and a wonderful opportunity to solidify the process of reconciliation and forgiveness among the sectarian communities of Northern Ireland. Peace and Reconciliation groups began to spring up throughout the North, including the interreligious Shalom Prayer Group. In 1993 the friars opened a second house, a so-called inserted community in Ballymurphy, which offers an outreach program among the people of West Belfast--a heavily Republican and Catholic community. Their openness encourages dialogue among Secular Franciscan fraternities from both the Protestant and Roman Catholic traditions, and their presence has helped to strengthen ecumenical initiatives for peace throughout the North.

At an empty friary in Cori, the OFM Province of Rome has established a residential formation program for young people entitled “Young Educators for Peace.” According to PAOLO MAIELLO, many young people who have been touched by the lives of Francis and Clare and the ongoing witness of today's Franciscans seek new ways to become active peacemakers in their own society.

Franciscan collaboration for peace often includes efforts undertaken on an inter-provincial or inter-conference level. During the summer of 1995, two friars from Toledo, Spain, EMILIO ROCHA and JULIAN MARTIN ARAGON, collected truckloads of medical supplies from Spanish chemists which they delivered to refugees in Bosnia. In solidarity and support for friars in the region, Emilio and Julián lived for several weeks in the Fojnica friary in Bosnia where friars LEON MATE MIGIC and NIKOLA (NIKICA) MILICEVIC were killed on November 13, 1993 by members of a Muslim militia.

In North America the antinuclear movement, and in particular the Nevada Desert Experience, is one example of the way in which friars work together with other religious and lay people of all different backgrounds who are committed to peace. Training in the U.S. Airforce is not the typical background of an antinuclear activist, but for LOUIS VITALE his experience of the American military establishment and his exposure to the changes of the Second Vatican Council formed the background to his commitment to the Franciscans and the peace movement as a whole. After completing a graduate degree in sociology, Louis was asked to go to Las Vegas to set up a social justice office for the diocese. Gradually he became aware of the Nevada nuclear test site where the U.S. and British governments were conducting underground nuclear explosions. He began to ask why there was so little interest in what he would later describe as “perhaps the greatest environmental disaster of all time”.

“It was clear to us” says Louis, “that as long as governments continued to test and develop new weapons' systems, the arms race would go on. We committed ourselves to raise awareness of testing in Nevada and to organize protests and other events to achieve the limited goal of a comprehensive test ban.”

Gradually, through a series of annual prayer events and growing cooperation with other Christian and Native American groups, participants began to realize how every test was damaging the local environment and the livelihood of the indigenous Shoshone people.

Despite growing scientific evidence of the harm being caused by the testing, the annual vigils met with harsh resistance from both local and national authorities. The number of people who attended and were arrested at the site grew steadily during the 1980's, but the movement was strengthened by the support it received from people all over the world. After his election as Minister General in 1991, HERMANN SCHALÜCK went into the desert at the Nevada test site to pray on his first pilgrimage as Minister General. Visits from government leaders, bishops and representatives of different religious traditions highlight the steady impact that witness had on public consciousness. Gradually workers at the test site began to know some of the peace activists on a more personal level and the tensions of the early years began to subside. Following the demise of the Soviet Union, a comprehensive test ban treaty became possible, yet the peace movement keeps up its commitment to ban the testing of all weapons' systems.

ALOYSIUS FLORIO of the Holy Land Custody remembers the practical commitment of the friars during the Gulf War in 1991, when the Franciscan community stayed with the local population as many others fled. "Our peaceful presence among people of all faiths, feeding them, listening to their stories and burying the dead, was a tangible sign of our 800-year commitment to the inhabitants of the Holy Land." This commitment was demonstrated once again when the massacre of over twenty Palestinians at prayer took place in the Mosque of Hebron in 1994. The Custody responded by publicly condemning what it called "the criminal act" committed by a Jewish settler. CLAUDIO BARATTO, representative of the Custos, ALBERT ROCK, PAOLO MASTRANGELI, HALIM NOUJAIM, GEORGE ABU KHAZEN immediately visited the Hebron City Council and the hundreds of wounded as part of their ongoing peace mission among the Palestinian people who feel they are often "forgotten and ignored" by Christians in the West.

General Constitutions

Article 1:2. They are to give witness to a life of penance and lowliness and, with love for all, they are to bring the Gospel message to the whole world, proclaiming reconciliation, peace and justice by their works.

Other references: articles 33,1; 39; 69,1-2; 70; 95,1-3; 96,2; 98,1-2.

Discussion Questions

1. How have you experienced being a peacemaker? In your apostolic work? your community? your family? your provincial fraternity?
2. What are the biggest obstacles to peace in the city where you live? in your country?
3. What contribution to peace could you make in the city where you live? could your local fraternity make?
4. Have the bishops of your country or region identified priorities for peacemaking? How could you personally assist those efforts? How could your local community become involved? Your provincial fraternity?
5. What are the most important personal characteristics of a peacemaker? Are those characteristics growing in your life?
6. Do you have a favorite story about St. Francis as a peacemaker? Has that story helped you in your peacemaking efforts?
7. Do we have compassion not only for the victims of violence and injustice, but for

those who, because of their passions or blindness, impose upon others suffering of violence or injustice? Do we pray for them? Do we want without pretentiousness to liberate them in accepting the risks in confronting them? and to have to change ourselves?

8. Did we discover “the wolf” inside us, ready to devour? Is the wolf about to be tamed?
9. Is it possible that the fear of being poor with the poor is our greatest obstacle in participating in a nonviolent combat?
10. In our personal and community life style, is there a feeling of concern for justice, human promotion, liberation, peace?
11. Do you think that your fraternity could prompt any action(s) for justice and peace or take part in those initiated by others? Do you think that this could “complicate” the life of our fraternity or that of our groups or Christian communities and that therefore it would be better for us to stay on the sideline?
12. What place do the dimensions of human promotion/justice and peace occupy in the Evangelization Project of your fraternity/of your province? What should be done by way of planning or further promoting an existing structure?
13. What do you know about nonviolence? Do you think it could be a valid instrument for us in the commitment to justice and peace which the GG.CC. propose to us?
14. Evaluate the perception and the reply that you have been giving in conflict situations. How has your vocation and your type of education influenced you in this area?
15. Observe your environs as a fraternity and point out the seeds of violence which you perceive. Analyze the different kinds of replies that are surfacing.