

What Are We Franciscans Doing With Our Vocation Of Peace-Making?

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Introduction

We have already listened to the Global Perspective on Peace-making, and to the Franciscan vision on the theme from Franciscan sources and scholars. I will be looking at the practical aspects of our response as Franciscans – what is being done and what we can do. The title for this presentation as proposed was peace making, but I have also added the dimension of peace building as I see this as a necessary aspect of our Franciscan vocation in today's world.

PART I

What kind of peace is the UN speaking about?

This year has been proclaimed by UNESCO as the International Year for a Culture of Peace. The coming decade, 2001-2010 has been declared as the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of our world. It is significant that the need for PEACE and NON-VIOLENCE is being highlighted at all levels. In their declaration for a culture of peace, the

UNO says that a culture of peace can be achieved only when citizens of the world can:

- understand global problems of injustice and violence;
- respect life;
- respect human rights and fundamental freedoms;
- promote equal rights and opportunities for women and men;
- respect the rights of children;
- make efforts to meet the development and environmental needs of present and future generations;
- promote sustainable economic and social development;
- respect freedom of expression, opinion and information;
- adhere to the principles of freedom, justice, democracy, tolerance, solidarity, co-operation, pluralism, cultural diversity, dialogue and understanding at all levels of society and among nations; eliminate all forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, including that shown towards ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities;
- eradicate poverty and illiteracy and reduce inequalities within and among nations;
- be committed to peaceful settlement of conflicts;
- promote the educative and informative role of the media;
- increase transparency and accountability in governance;
- respect the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of States.

(Some aspects of a Culture of Peace as given in the United Nations Declaration of 13 September 1999)

***What kind of peace building and peace making are we talking about?*⁴**

As Franciscans, peace building and peace making are integral dimensions of our vocation, and not options that we are free to make or not to make. Peace building touches all that has been said above in the UNO declaration for a culture of peace. We do this there where we are inserted, in the measure possible, getting involved in one or two concrete projects, in view of a culture of peace through a culture of justice. For practical reasons, today we will be limiting our reflections to building peace and making peace in conflict situations.

I would like to begin by looking at peace making from the perspective of Neo-liberal globalization that has contributed to the increase of militarism, arms-trade, violence and other related problems. Wars between States have become less frequent, but internal wars are very much on the increase. In the last decade alone internal wars have claimed more than 5 million lives, and driven about 100 million people from their homes. At the same time weapons of mass destruction continue to cast their shadow of fear. We now think of security less as defending territory and more in terms of protecting people.

The thirty-four local wars that are being fought at this very moment are doing irreparable violence to human beings and to nature. During this International Year for a Culture of Peace, and during the coming decade, we have the opportunity as Franciscans to contribute to the global campaign for peace and non-violence: to stop the production of arms, to put an end to wars, to promote reconciliation, to be peace builders and peace makers.

The century that has just finished is referred to as the bloodiest century in history. Gill Elliot has published a book to this effect and it is entitled *The Century of the Dead*. During the 20th century over 22 million people have been killed for territorial, religious, linguistic and ethnic reasons.

As we venture into the new millennium, we stand at a significant crossroads. Will this century also bring an incessant stream of devastating armed conflicts, like the horrors we have seen during these previous years in N. Ireland, Colombia, Iraq, Bosnia, Kosovo, Sierra Leone, East Timor, and now in the Democratic Republic of Congo? Or are there alternatives to the endless repetition of such catastrophes? At the end of the bloodiest century in human history, military intervention continues to wreak enormous civilian casualties and

⁴*Much of the information shared in this presentation has been taken from a Peace Project written by Mel Duncan and David Hartsough. Their e-mail addresses are given at the end of this text.*

fans the flames of continued injustice and war.

Yet at the same time third-party non-violent intervention has progressively grown during the latter part of the 20th century. Peace Brigades International, the Balkan Peace Teams, Witness for Peace, Peace workers, the Helsinki Citizens' Assembly, Christian Peacemaker Teams, the International Fellowship of Reconciliation and others operate in numerous countries including Colombia, Guatemala, the Balkans, the U.S., Israel/Palestine, Mexico and Nicaragua. Most are carrying out small-scale, highly specialized activities designed to be an active presence to lower the potential or current levels of violence and support local peacemakers. They are creating an invaluable fund of knowledge and an experiential base of non-violent peace making. There have even been instances where violence and wars have been avoided due to third-party interventions.

Positive Examples of Peace-Making

In 1985 Guatemalan women from GAM (Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo) requested that Peace Brigades International (PBI) provide 24-hour non-violent accompaniment for their leaders after two of its members had been assassinated. Much of Guatemalan civil society had been wiped out by the military at that time leaving most of the citizens too terrified to act. For the next four years PBI provided unarmed bodyguards around the clock for GAM's leadership. No more group

leaders were killed and the courageous women were able to carry out their work. This created an opening for other citizen groups to emerge and begin rebuilding democratic institutions. GAM leader, Nineth de Garcia told the New York Times, "Thanks to their presence I am alive. That is an indisputable truth."

At about the same time, the U.S. backed Contras were trying to overthrow the Sandinista government of Nicaragua. Operating from bases in Honduras the Contras often attacked Nicaraguan villages and fields to disrupt the agricultural harvest. In December of 1983, Witness for Peace began sending delegations to the border areas of Nicaragua. Over the next seven years, hundreds of international volunteers visited, stayed in villages along the Nicaraguan border. They picked cotton and coffee and helped rebuild the war damaged infrastructure. They played a major role in reducing violence and deterring an invasion. No Nicaraguan village was ever attacked by the Contras while a Witness for Peace delegation was present.

On the island of Negros in the Philippines in 1989, over 500 refugees gathered in a church hall, were threatened with death. The Catholic bishop, Antonio Forrich, after hearing of the successes of PBI and Witness for Peace, called on religious leaders from around the world for help. Within 24 hours 25 religious representatives had joined the bishop and the 500 refugees in the church hall asserting that anything done to the refugees would also

have to be done to them. They also promised to tell the world what happened. The death squads failed to carry out their threat.

Negative Examples of Peace-Making

When faced with the brutal aggression of Slobodan Milosevic throughout the last decade, the peace movement has lacked a credible, coherent and comprehensive response. While some international activists have bravely carried out non-violent strategies with the people of the Balkans and still are, many others didn't know what to do and, in some cases, reluctantly shrugged their shoulders and supported the NATO response. The Nation editorialized about this quandary in April of 1999: "This crisis creates a profound dilemma for principled anti-militarists who do not want to turn a blind eye to ethnic cleansing but do not embrace the NATO air war."

Kosovo presented a need for substantial, well-organized, international support of the local peace movement. Kosovar Albanian President Ibrahim Rugova was asking for an international peace presence in Kosovo as early as nine years ago. There was no substantial response. David Hartsough, executive director of Peace-workers and a Balkan veteran, believes that 200 international peace workers in Kosovo three years ago could have played a significant role in averting the violence that took place there. Their activities could have included accompaniment, active support of local non-violent

actions, training and capacity building of non-violent and democratic institutions. Non-violent activists could have also organized international support and media attention for the local non-violent movement and the possibilities for peaceful resolution.

On two occasions I was part of a peace delegation to Sri Lanka and later to Croatia, but on both occasions it was after the wars had started. On both occasions it was too late to speak of non-violence. The groups with whom we met were determined to continue an armed conflict.

Experience shows that preference needs to be given to early intervention. As one woman from Kosovo said at the Hague Conference, "Peace workers need to be at the right place at the right time before violence escalates. Otherwise, we are just counting our mistakes."

How can we respond as Franciscans?

It is significant that Pope John Paul II chose Assisi as the venue for the World Day of Prayer for Peace for all the world's religions. Francis was essentially a peacemaker in the historical context of 13th century Assisi. His greeting Peace and Every Good speaks for itself.

In different parts of the world, Franciscan communities are involved in peace building and peace-making in various ways. Franciscans International (FI) is an NGO in General Consultative Status (category I) with the Economic and Social Council of the UNO. Its triple foci includes con-

cern for the poor, care for creation and peace making. Several Franciscans work with FI, either with the office in New York or with the branch in Geneva or with both. Both offer us opportunities to get involved in peace making. You will be hearing more about FI and its challenges from John Quigley.

You may all have heard about the Franciscan presence in Las Vegas, the nuclear Test Site in the USA. An inter-Franciscan group has been there for eighteen years, protesting by their non-violent presence. There are many vigils of one day to several weeks throughout the year. There are also numerous visits of persons who, with the Franciscans, pray at the Test Site. The Franciscans have sponsored an organization – Nevada Desert Experience – with the explicit mission of witness at the Test Site. Since the Franciscans began there, other organizations, National and International have also begun to sponsor vigils there. This Pace e Bene group has recently initiated a workshop entitled From Violence to Wholeness, a study program in the spirituality and practice of active non-violence. Sister Mary Littel OSF is also a part of this group. She shares with us the following:

“We are supporting the UN decade for a culture of non-violence. Sister Rosemary Lynch and I – with Pace e Bene – have initiated a program of workshops on the theme of peace that we are holding throughout the US during this first year. Then we will decide, from the information we gather, what will be a helpful next step (e.g. develop resource materials,

invite on-going groups to learn and share skills for nurturing a culture of peace in families, schools, civic groups, work through a web-site or...)

We teach about non-violence, and share skills for non-violent approaches in mediation, education, political activism, neighborhood work, community organizing, etc. and also develop materials in English and in Spanish.

Sister Janet Corcoran, in Santa Maria, CA works with a regional hospital, and with doctors from that institution has initiated a peace-week in the three cities served by the hospital. This week includes activities in the schools, churches, police forces, civic groups, etc. Through this week, programs for peace making have been developed in all the social institutions. It is a small step, but there is already some fruit – especially in the reduction of gang warfare.

With Capacitar (an international project to bring peace, healing and wholeness to our world), some of our Sisters are passing on ways of healing and overcoming the scars of trauma so that these are not passed on in families and so that the violence done in the context of post-traumatic stress is lessened or halted. This work is especially helpful in prisons, with street-people, refugees and people working with refugees. We are also beginning to teach these skills to civilian unarmed peace intervention groups so that their own work can be more effective.

Another form of peace making is helping multicultural groups develop “cultural competence” skills. These would include personal skills, group processes, and review of structures within organizations that may be too culturally skewed to be effective in a pluralistic situation.

In Sri Lanka, which is presently a context of war and violence, the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary have taken the initiative with another local group to start a peace-making project. Below is an extract from a letter from Sr. Placida, which gives us an idea of their efforts in view of peace-making:

“We use the scriptures of the four religions in the country (Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Islam). We have also invited some artists to be a part of our campaign so that they can inspire through art.... We begin our reflections by stressing on our common identity as human beings, that we all belong to only one race, the human race ... We continue with a study on the evolution of the present political violence ... We have special programs for school children on peace-making.... Recently, we organized an exchange program for youth between representatives of the two warring races ... This experience brought about healing and helped to build relationships.... Some have warned me that, “I am treading on dangerous ground”. I am not afraid because more than ever I am convinced of my vocation as a peace-maker is....

The above are just a few examples. No doubt you have many more. Later, in the small groups you will have the opportunity to share your own experiences of peace making.

PART II

As Franciscans, our contribution to peace building and peace-making has a two-fold dimension: active non-violence and reconciliation.

Active Non-Violence

Violence begets violence. Where there is violence there can be no true peace. Justice and peace cannot be separated. Peace comes through justice and active non-violence. We can never compromise with violence. Non-violence is not about passivity.

Active non-violence is to take the initiative to respond to situations of injustice, violence, destruction, etc. without violence, and to be creative in our response. Jesus did not accept the status quo. He took the initiative to transform his culture of violence. He did so in an active manner by reaching out to all the groups in his culture who were victims of violence. In the Beatitudes, Jesus makes a clear reference to peace-makers, and the Beatitudes also include three gospel values, which are very Franciscan, and which are indispensable for peace-making: humility, mercy and gentleness. The familiar story of Francis’ taming of

the wolf is a story of non-violence and of reconciliation.

At the dawn of this new century, it has become urgent to look for strategies that can prevent armed conflicts and violence. Peace-builders and peacemakers represent an alternative to massive military intervention that many people hope for but which does not yet exist. We need to develop a strategic, efficient and effective response. As Franciscans it is our vocation and our mission.

The use of active non-violence is on the increase throughout the world. We can build on the experiences of non-violent peace teams and others to bring this activity to a dramatic new level, a level required by conflicts around the globe. We have reached a level of maturity where this is possible. We have the capacity to make it happen in our lifetime. The ingredients abound: there are many veterans of non-violent movements; thousands of citizens have demonstrated their willingness to courageously stop violence and oppression; hard lessons have been learned and analyzed; our organizational abilities have increased; highly qualified trainers are available; the World Wide Web, already used to advance campaigns for banning land mines and establishing an International Criminal Court, is available as an organizing tool; funders are expressing an interest; and, most importantly, people are demanding an alternative to the highly militarized responses to conflict. Profound questions remain. Yet, we live in a

time when we are called to be disturbed by these questions. We need to entertain these questions, and be creative as Franciscans. We need to challenge each other.

Colonel Kent Edberg, Military Advisor to the Swedish Mission to the UN has this to say: "The world needs all the tools we can use to keep the peace. It would be the cheapest way to avoid conflict."

Profile of a Non-Violent Person

One who has right relationships with God, with herself/himself, with others and with all of nature. St. Francis of Assisi is a perfect example of such relationships.

One who seeks to live the Gospel values and attitudes, whose constant reference is the non-violent Jesus.

One who is a peacemaker and peace-builder.

Reconciliation

The three-fold crisis in our world is often described as alienation from God (spiritual crisis), from others (social crisis) and from creation (ecological crisis), and it is this analysis which has given rise to a whole new understanding of right relationships with God, with others and with all of creation. Bob Schreiter has pointed to reconciliation as the way of mission – reconciliation that is grounded in relationships. Our Franciscan vocation focuses on relationships. Jesus' whole life is a witness to his relationship with his Father, and to people. We see a similar pattern in the life of Francis and

Clare. Their concern for reconciliation was due to their concern for right relationships among people. We see this in the initiative Francis took to meet the Sultan. We see this again in the way he made peace between the Bishop and the Mayor of Assisi. Clare's concern for reconciliation comes through very clearly in her Rule that she wrote after having lived forty years in the same monastery. There can be no right relationships without a constant experience of reconciliation. To be a reconciler we first need to be reconciled – with God, with myself, and with others. We do not have a prepared or pre-fabricated formula for doing so. We enter into a situation or relationship from the space of our vocation – being a Franciscan.⁵

Conditions for Reconciliation

- Both parties need to acknowledge that there is a need to be reconciled.
- Both parties need to recognize their part of the blame.
- The need to recall/remember (not deny the historical past with its facts).
- Franciscan minority (humility, vulnerability).

The need for reconciliation is a priority in the world today. It is not a cheap path to peace. It is very costly. For us Franciscans, it needs to become a way of life in our own personal lives and in our communities, so that it can become an integral dimension of our mission.

Suggestions

To orientate all our ministries – educational, health, socio-pastoral, parish – to forming people to non-violence as a way of life. We can form peace-teams in our parishes, centers and institutions that can, in their turn, form others in peace building and peace making. Such teams need to be preferably international, inter-religious, multi-ethnic groups of peace-makers, and should be formed in non-violent strategies and tactics, so that we could prevent conflicts in potentially violent areas, or bring about peace and reconciliation in post-conflict areas; to be trained to act strategically in co-operation with local groups to prevent or defuse violence and create the space for peaceful resolution of conflict; to engage in peaceful actions that inspire hope, and call people to higher values.

To review our pastoral and catechetical programs in view of including reflections and discussions on peace building and peace making; There is still a tendency to concentrate on a sacramentalization that forms pious and individualistic Christians. We have come to a stage in our pastoral and catechetical evolution for re-thinking the contents, method, preparation and rites of the sacraments bringing to it a community and social dimension. For us Franciscans, we need to include the aspect of peace, non-violence and reconciliation.

To encourage women to build peace and make peace, invite them to be a part of

⁵ cf. *Mary Motte FMM, Words of Penance – Deeds of Penance, An Approach to Franciscan Evangelization. June 2000.*

the global project, Women Building Peace. < gender.campaign@international-alert.org >

www.international-alert.org/women

To establish Truth and Reconciliation Commissions.

Strategies and Methods Could Include:

Accompanying (activists, leaders, returning refugees).

Facilitating communication between conflicting parties.

Monitoring (elections, cease fires, treaties).

Training trainers in conflict transformation.

Interpositioning between conflicting sides.

Modeling alternatives to violent behavior.

Providing an international emergency response network to support local peace-making efforts.

Working relationships with governmental units will be important.

Cooperation with UN agencies and non-governmental organizations, both local and international.

Networking with local and international groups, especially with other Franciscans, using modern communications technology when and where possible.

Franciscan values that need to be stressed:

To be a witness to Franciscan minority.

Commit oneself to active non-violence.

We are being called to communicate the hope and promise of non-violent

peace making to a world that can be cynical and skeptical yet hungers for new approaches for dealing with violence.

To be convinced that reconciliation is mission in a world in which hatred, animosity and revenge are on the increase.

To create a transcendent image that communicates faith, integrity, strength, hope, truth and love to the general public in meaningful symbols as well as in concrete action.

Conclusion

Last spring 10,000 activists from about 100 countries converged on The Hague asserting that “peace is a human right” and that “it is time to abolish war.” This proposal was drafted as a consequence of a series of formal and informal discussions during The Hague Appeal for Peace Conference. It has since been reviewed, discussed and critiqued by over 300 non-violent activists, scholars and military veterans from various parts of the world. It truly is a work in progress that will continue to unfold, based on the wisdom and experience of many co-creators of peace.

As Franciscans we have much to contribute to such a process. We have a special vocation to be instruments of peace and non-violence. We have a responsibility to build peace and make peace; to be mediators in conflict situations; to promote dialogue and reconciliation between opposing parties and groups.

We are over one million Franciscans in

the world. We can be a powerful presence if ours is a meaningful presence. Where do we need to put our energy? In which domain do we need to concentrate? What are the criteria for our choices and priorities? Basically, it is a call to us as Franciscans to re-image our concept of mission in today's world.

We Franciscans can make a difference if we become more conscious and more convinced of our peace-making vocation.

For more information on some of the groups mentioned in my presentation you can connect with:

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Pace et Bene: 1420 W. Bartlett Avenue, Las Vegas, Nevada 89106

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The International Fellowship of Reconciliation: IFOR, Spoorstraat, 38, 1815

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CAPACITAR: International project to bring peace and healing to our world:

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