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

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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

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.

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