Embracing Possibilities
Reflections for Lent

Reflections
by Kathy Schmitt, Fr. Chris Ponnet, & Tom Cordaro

Artwork
by John August Swanson

Published by Pax Christi USA
The Sunday cycle is Year A, as found in the “Liturgical Calendar for the Dioceses of the United States of America, 2014” from the Committee on the Liturgy of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

About the Artist: John August Swanson
My work is my most social act.
My art is the way I can talk to you.
www.johnaugustswanson.com

The art that came into my life was not planned. I had wanted to do many things before: I wanted to be a doctor to help people; I wanted to work in the economic area to help people with community organizing and making a change in the world. Subsequently, my path was working in a paint factory, the post office, the garment industry, auto parts delivery, and as a gasoline station attendant for many years. An important element that shaped that early time of my life was the Young Christian Workers, which used the motto: Formation Through Action. With them, I learned about getting involved in community work, getting the vote out, working for progressive candidates, being involved in labor actions and the importance of labor unions, working with Civil Rights (especially housing) and becoming more aware of racial discrimination, working with the United Farm Workers union, fundraising, and working for peace. Another important element that influenced my work was reading about Dorothy Day and reading the newspaper The Catholic Worker.

Continued on p. 55.

Pax Christi USA gratefully acknowledges Swanson’s amazing contribution to our 2014 Lenten reflection booklet.
Dear members and friends of Pax Christi USA,

We begin another Lenten season: 40 days of attentive listening to what God is saying to us about the quality of our life journey. This year Pax Christi USA invites all of us to examine *Disarmament, Demilitarization, and Reconciliation with Justice* in light of this Lenten journey.

If so inclined, we can always find someone to call “the enemy.” Whether it is a person close to home (family member, neighbor) or out of sight (the people we call “them”), we are not at a loss to perceive someone as a threat to our sense of security and well-being. This applies to us as individuals as well as to communities of which we are members.

Our goal, if we have enemies, is to keep “them” at a distance; we build a real or imagined wall to keep ourselves from interacting with real or imagined differences, points of view, theologies, ideologies, or ways of life. We close our minds and hearts to anything else that is different from the way we think or do things.

When our paranoia or national interests get to a point where we feel justified, we take up arms; we call up armies and militias. The objective then becomes to further distance ourselves and destroy the perceived enemy.
The use of weapons, be they nuclear, chemical, conventional, or technological, are the means we use to achieve that end. As we well know, violence begets violence.

Our Lenten 2014 booklet is dedicated to *Disarmament, Demilitarization, and Reconciliation with Justice*. It offers alternatives to war and destruction. It speaks of a language of dialogue, mediation, negotiation, and reconciliation. It re-frames the win/lose dynamic to an alternative where justice has a chance to flourish. It envisions a time where all parties sit at one table, with equal voice, all taking part in a dialogue where every point of view is heard and considered, and a mutually just agreement is allowed to surface. These strategies build respectful relationships among diverse and different people, done without judgment and without violence.

While it is far easier to take up arms, and to go to war, the destruction of people, land, climate, and morale is too high a price to pay. Reconciliation with justice is far more challenging and, I believe, is the asceticism for our times. The fruit of this asceticism is that life becomes fuller and more meaningful, the integrity of each individual remains intact, and the relationships that are formed stand a far better chance to lead to real social change.

Let us pray for one another during this sacred season of Lent.

*Patricia Chappell, SNDdeN*
*Executive Director*
*Pax Christi USA*
But the serpent said to the woman: “You certainly will not die! No, God knows well that the moment you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods who know what is good and what is evil.” (Genesis 3:4-5)

Just in case we missed the message of Ash Wednesday, these Sunday readings review the basic agenda of our Lenten journey: to overcome sin, evil, and injustice in the world and in our own lives. Genesis reminds us that on this journey we have to discern truth from lies. Before their disobedience, Eve and Adam’s eyes were already open wide, for they beheld God face to face, but the serpent’s lie seduced them into believing otherwise. In Romans, Paul makes the argument that Jesus healed the disobedience of our first parents, bringing grace and life in place of condemnation and death. And Matthew shows us how to defeat the devil: by speaking the Word of God (from memory) to unmask the lies at the base of temptation. Jesus quotes Scripture—but then so does the devil. It is not enough to know Scripture; we must know the God of whom it speaks and the purpose for which we were created. We are here to build the kin-dom of peace and justice, life and grace.

• Do you recognize what is good and what is evil?
• What are the lies that operate in our culture, bringing alienation and death?
• Does the Word of God live in you, strengthening you to refute lies and evil?
• Do you know why you are here?
struggles and all evil will fail in the embrace of God. I remember standing for long silences in the various rooms and outdoor spaces at Terezín, breathing in the air of a place that in history was created for evil but is also a place of God’s beauty and serenity. We remember the words of Pope Paul VI: “No more war, never again war.”

• Who will you be in solidarity with as we approach the “Seder,” the “last supper” this Holy Week?

Wednesday of the Fourth Week of Lent
Isaiah 49:8-15 • John 5:17-30

I will never forget you. (Isaiah 49:15)

During this Lenten season, the feast of St. Francis of Paola, a hermit, gives us pause around the Lenten practice of fasting. St. Francis was clearly a vegetarian and saw this as part of his Christian/Catholic value system. His spiritual discipline allowed him to be an instrument of healing for physical needs, and in his time he also was used by the powers of the empire to bring about healing in the community and among the developing nations.

Following the murders of the Jesuits and companions in El Salvador in 1989, interfaith leaders in Los Angeles started a group called the Wednesday Morning Coalition for Justice and Peace in El Salvador. Each Wednesday we would gather in the basement of La Placita church and march to the Los Angeles Federal Building for a spiritual moment of reflection and then civil disobedience. We followed the example of the organizers in El Salvador and highlighted one segment of the community affected by the war and the weapons of war from the United States. We told the stories of teachers, children, medical staff, etc. Following this growing movement, a delegation of
our leadership went to El Salvador. Bishop Gumbleton and others from Pax Christi USA had returned from there with concrete examples of the U.S. bombs being used against the people. It was Lent, and I had joined in fasting with union organizers in El Salvador. For over 80 days of Lent and Easter, we had been on a liquid-only solidarity fast until the breaking of the fast on Pentecost. Then I made my personal vow: to remain a vegetarian as an act of daily solidarity with all those affected by the bombs and weapons of war.

Fasting is both a public act of civil disobedience and a spiritual act of reflection and also a statement against political and spiritual leaders who “bless war” and the weapons that kill people. ICUJP.org is one of our partner organizations, and their beginning principle is that “religions should stop blessing wars.”

• How might you practice fasting during this season in a way that links you with persons caught in the endless “war against terrorism”?

Thursday of the Fourth Week of Lent
Exodus 32:7-14 • John 5:31-47

Remember, us, O God, as you favor your people.
(Psalms 106:4)

It was a cool morning. I had joined my friends, the Los Angeles Catholic Workers, to protest the proposed cutting of beds and the possible closing of our federal hospital. The Board of Supervisors had not heard our voices and was still considering various options, all bad for people who were poor in our city and southern California. Having decided to bring to City Hall our concern about how
Jesus answered him, “You would have no power over me. . . .”
(John 19:11)

The gun or the cross: which is the source of true freedom; which is the path to a life that is fully human and fully alive? For those who live at the heart of empire, who are born into power and privilege denied to others because of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, religion, or national origin, the gun guarantees the status quo. For those denied power and privilege, the gun represents the desire to seize control, to upend the status quo, and to replace the overlords.

Good Friday poses a choice: do we put our trust in the power of redemptive violence (the belief that peace can be gained through violence) or the power of redemptive suffering (the belief that peace becomes possible through the practice of reconciliation and unconditional love at personal cost)?

The NRA and the military-industrial-complex spend millions of dollars lobbying for the virtues of redemptive violence. But the way of the cross, practiced by believers for over two thousand years, has thwarted the plans of armies and empires. The cross also reminds us that victory does not come without costs, and those costs must be borne by those who pick up their cross to follow Jesus. Those who trust in the gun are prepared to kill and destroy to achieve victory. Those who embrace the way of the cross are prepared to sacrifice their lives to achieve victory.

• What would it mean to pick up your cross and follow Jesus?
About the Artist, continued

I was 30 years old when I took a night class in lettering at Immaculate Heart College in Hollywood, with Sr. Mary Corita I.H.M. (later known as Corita Kent). She was my mentor; I was inspired by her years of working for peace and justice in her artwork, as well as the playfulness of her work and the boldness of her colors. Her art spoke of social justice and peacemaking, and was ecumenical in scope. Someone gave me an old silkscreen frame, and told me I should start to do printmaking. Working with very rudimentary equipment, I began teaching myself by looking at others’ work and being part of the movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Most of my life’s work was involved with print-making (silkscreen-printing or serigraphy).

I had no plan that this would be my life and my passion; I kept thinking that this was all temporary. But after forty-six years, I realize that this path was my life. I am part of the Pax Christi movement in Los Angeles.

About the Authors

Kathy Schmitt

(reflections for Ash Wednesday through the second week of Lent)

Kathy Schmitt, M.Div., is Director of Evangelization for St. Nicholas Catholic Church in Laurel, Maryland, and Associate Editor of Seminary Journal for the National Catholic Educational Association. Kathy first joined Pax Christi while in college at Virginia Tech and served as the representative from the Pax Christi USA Youth Forum to the Pax Christi International Youth Forum from 1994-1996. She enjoys leading Bible studies, teaching about Catholicism, and helping adults connect faith to social justice issues. Kathy is the author of the Catholic Schools Week Liturgy Guide, proud aunt to nine nieces and nephews, and makes her home in the Maryland suburbs.
About the Authors

Fr. Chris Ponnet
*(reflections for the third and fourth weeks of Lent)*

Chris was born and raised in the Los Angeles, California, area, the youngest of eight children. Chris’s work around justice and peace began in 1971 with the local Catholic Peace Coalition/Pax Christi. He was ordained a priest of LA Archdiocese in 1983. His first Civil Disobedience (CD) prayer action was at the nuclear test site north of Las Vegas and includes many CD actions at the LA Federal building. Chris was part of extensive fasting against the wars in El Salvador, Persian Gulf, and Iraq. Chris has been pastor at St. Camillus Center for Spiritual Care (www.stcamilluscenter.org), serving as a chaplain at LAC + USC Medical Center for the past 18 years. He has been a leader with the following ministries: Office of Catholic HIV/AIDS Ministry, Catholic Ministry with Lesbian and Gay Persons, Death Penalty Focus, Interfaith Communities United for Justice and Peace (ICUJP.org), and the hospital Ethic Committee. He was a member of the Pax Christi USA National Council as well as the local Southern California Region leadership. He enjoys creating a team of chaplains, spending time with his extended family, and researching his family genealogy. The Consistent Life Ethics and the parables of Jesus/Disney give the context for his talks around the United States on social justice.

Tom Cordaro
*(reflections for the fifth week of Lent through Easter)*

Tom Cordaro is the director of Justice and Outreach Ministry at St. Margaret Mary Parish in Naperville, Illinois. He has served as chair of the Pax Christi USA National Council and has worked as a professional writer, organizer, and activist in the faith-based peace movement for more than 30 years. He is the author of the award-winning book, *Be Not Afraid: An Alternative to the War on Terror*, and *To Wake the Nation*, an introduction to nonviolent civil disobedience. Tom is also one of the founding members of Pax Christi USA’s anti-racism team and the anti-racism initiative, Brothers and Sisters All.
About Pax Christi USA

In a world that settles differences by armed violence and defines “justice” as “revenge,” Pax Christi USA dares to break the cycle of violence by fostering reconciliation.

Pax Christi USA is the national Catholic peace movement, reaching more than half a million Catholics in the United States each year. Our membership includes more than 130 U.S. bishops, 800 parish sponsors, 650 religious communities, 75 high school and college campus groups, and 350 local groups.

The work of Pax Christi USA begins in personal life and extends to communities of reflection and action to transform structures of society. Pax Christi USA rejects war and every form of violence and domination. It advocates primacy of conscience, economic and social justice, and respect for creation. Pax Christi USA commits itself to peace education and, with the help of its bishop members, promotes the Gospel imperative of peacemaking as a priority in the Catholic Church in the United States. Through the efforts of all its members and in cooperation with other groups, Pax Christi USA works toward a more peaceful, just, and sustainable world.

Pax Christi USA is a section of Pax Christi International, the international Catholic peace movement with consultative status at the United Nations.