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Nonviolence Conference Reflection Paper

I feel somewhat inadequate in addressing some of these questions because we do not face the conflict, violence and war that exists in other parts of the world. I first got involved in Pax Christi in 1998 towards the tail end of the Indonesian presence in East Timor, after its 1975 invasion, and the violence perpetrated by militias that were sympathetic to the Indonesians which created immense violence and destruction. At the time as East Timorese people engaged in hunger strikes in Sydney to call on the Australian government to send peace keepers to the country, Pax Christi joined the hunger strikers in solidarity outside the UN offices in Sydney by having a Eucharist (sometimes ecumenical) on the footpath each afternoon as people finished work and passed by to draw attention to the plight of East Timor. The intention was to continue this action until the government capitulated and sent peacekeepers to East Timor – which it finally did. This continued for some months as other organisations rallied for the same reasons.

In recent times, though personally involved with refugees and asylum seekers for 43 years, I have joined a movement called *Love Makes a Way* where people of different faiths gather non-violently at the office of a Government minister or the Prime Minister to protest the inhumane treatment of asylum seekers in this country and detention of children, women and men in overseas detention centres. I have now engaged in six of these since April 2014. Four times, we were arrested for resisting these inhumane asylum seeker policies through prayer and nonviolent love in action. The last time was in November and we now have to face court. We were arrested for 'breach of the peace'. This movement operates throughout the country. The aim was to draw attention to the plight of children in detention but also to seek through prayer and witness to the challenges of Pope Francis and the Australian Catholic Bishops, the Uniting Church leadership and other denominations of the harm (violence) being perpetrated in our name. The publicity and support has been phenomenal. In all, Catholic, Baptist, Anglican, Uniting Church, and Metropolitan Community Church denominations were represented in these sit-ins of prayer and song. Some may question such actions but these make up a long tradition of civil disobedience when it becomes imperative to standing again injustice in the community or in the church. It is not possible to just talk, and write but also somehow put one's own body on the line and risk arrest. In recent weeks, the sanctuary movement has been revived by many churches to offer sanctuary to asylum seekers.

As we have just marked the centenary of the beginning of World War I, the focus in Australia has been on the centenary of Gallipoli invasion in 1915 where we once again invaded a country that was no threat to us. The war to end all war has been nothing of the sort, with regional and international and hostilities as well as interpersonal violence reported such as the abuse of children in many institutions and domestic violence, inordinate incarceration of Indigenous people usually young, poor and people with disabilities.

One of our concerns in Australia is the close ties that Australia has had, and continues to have, with the USA, which we see at a threat to peace in our region. Though we have not had a war on our land, apart from the wars of invasion of Indigenous land, we have joined in, and often been the first to join, in foreign conflicts when called upon by the USA which has many bases in our country. As people continue to treat each other and the environment in brutal and destructive ways, the challenge for us is to listen to the stories of struggle to defend

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the earth and the rights of people to land and water, forests, seeds and biodiversity from the indigenous people with their wisdom and openness. More and more we hear that individual people and governments resort to violence or even perceived threats or to promote economic and trade interests rather than taking the long and mature way of listening and sharing. Living in a continual state of poverty or fear or racial or gender prejudice does not constitute peace. Violence is not just physical as in murder but for a person who is hungry or needing medical care, violence is evident when these are ignored or not addressed. Psychological, emotional and economic abuse as well as abuse of the environment or creation are also violence. Peace must be connected with the pursuit of justice whether it is personal or social or environmental. Unfortunately, we focus very much on violence from below, the poor, and neglect or fail to see that which is caused by the industrial-capitalist complex.

The challenge for Pax Christi is to seek in all communities that it finds itself listening to the stories of struggle to defend the earth and people's rights to land and water, forests, seeds and biodiversity. A paradigm shift is required - a shift towards an earth-centred economics, politics and culture. For those not fearful of the word – we need a 'new spirituality of peace' that steers away from conflict to one that is earth-centred. The growth miracles in various countries are based on a kind of war that is deepened by inequalities and erosion of democratic ideals and principle; the rich biodiversity and cultural diversity is destroyed through ecological destruction and imposition of monocultures; and millions of people lose their livelihoods so that a few global corporations and billionaires can control markets and resources. We have to show the neo-liberal model of economic globalisation which is based on the assumption that there is no alternative, that there are alternatives everywhere. These alternatives are found in indigenous cultures and local economies where people from the Amazon to India are defending with their lives. The alternative is growing in developed countries as people work together to form community gardens.

The paradigm shift, the spirituality of peace, must begin with the recognition that we are part of nature. We do not own it or its masters. We must see ourselves as members of the earth family, with the responsibility of caring for other species and life on earth in all its diversity. It creates the imperative to live, produce and consume within ecological limits and with our share of ecological space, without encroaching on the rights of other species and peoples. We need to go beyond the popular but artificial false categories promoted by those in politics of perpetual economic growth, free-trade, consumerism and competitiveness. To have peace we need to develop a consciousness of the rights of the earth, of our duties towards earth, our compassion for all beings on the earth. It means challenging the capitalist patriarchy on which capital, corporations and growth are founded and which unleash destructive forces upon the earth. It means that we need to make peace with the earth, or face extinction as we humans push millions of other species to extinction. We need them as much as we need other humans! We need to overcome the illusion of separateness of humans and nature. We are part of nature and earth, not apart from it. We are one with the earth as the web of life is woven through interconnectedness.

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