

Instruments of Reconciliation

A National Campaign to Amplify Active Nonviolence in the U.S. Catholic Church

Blessed Paul VI, in the first World Day of Peace Message, boldly declared “Peace is the only true direction of human progress.”

Fifty years later, Pope Francis claimed, “Whoever accepts the Good News of Jesus is able to acknowledge the violence within and be healed by God’s mercy, becoming in turn an instrument of reconciliation.” (50th World Day of Peace, para. 3).

The Rome Conference in April 2016 issued an “Appeal to the Catholic Church to Re-Commit to the Centrality of Gospel Nonviolence.” Many Catholic organizations – Conference of Catholic Bishops of Japan, the Justice and Peace Commission of the global leaders of Catholic religious (USG/USIG), the U.S. Conference of Major Superiors of Men (CMSM), the U.S. Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR), and the United States Catholic Mission Association (USCMA) to name just a few – have endorsed the appeal. “The time has come for our Church to be a living witness and to invest far greater human and financial resources in promoting a spirituality and practice of active nonviolence and in forming and training our Catholic communities in effective nonviolent practices. In all of this, Jesus is our inspiration and model.”

Three suggested dates below in the month of May have been chosen in the United States to ask Catholics to share their hope for greater teaching and commitment to active nonviolence with their bishop and invite him to affirm active nonviolence as the nucleus of the Christian revolution: by 1) sharing and speaking about Pope Francis’ World Day of Peace message broadly within their diocese, seminaries, and other ministries, and 2) concretely committing to an initiative to scale-up practices of active nonviolence.

As Pope Benedict wrote, “For Christians, nonviolence is not merely tactical behavior but a person’s way of being, the attitude of one who is so convinced of God’s love and power that he or she is not afraid to tackle evil with the weapons of love and truth alone. Love of one’s enemy constitutes the nucleus of the ‘Christian revolution.’”

In a time when violence continues to dominate our families, our neighborhoods, and our cities – and violence is increasingly becoming the way our country deals with conflict – we want our bishops to know there are voices for active nonviolence within his diocese. We want to encourage him to embrace Pope Francis’ call to active nonviolence. We want to support him in his efforts, like Pope Francis, who pledged the assistance of the church in “every effort to build peace through active and creative nonviolence.”

In May we expect the bishops of the United States of America to receive more than 10,000 letters encouraging them to bold teaching and practice of active nonviolence—and committing ourselves to do the same.

A Call to Action

- 1) During the month of May, write your bishop, using the sample letter we provide. Share with him, as your Shepherd in the Lord, your call for a greater commitment to active nonviolence.

Individual hard copy letters mailed directly to the bishop are more powerful than form letters, emails, or one letter signed by many. **(Let us know you sent a letter by [filling out this brief form here.](#))**

Additional Ideas

- 2) Share with your friends and family your aspiration to active nonviolence. The links to Pope Francis' 50th [World Day of Peace Message](#) and the "[Appeal to the Catholic Church to Re-Commit to the Centrality of Gospel Nonviolence](#)" from the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative, which is a project of Pax Christi International, are helpful resources to pray with and share with others.
- 3) Post on your Facebook Page – or through other social media – your commitment to active nonviolence.
- 4) Form a "study group" in your parish to prayerfully consider what a commitment to active nonviolence means and where, in your neighborhood, it would help build peace.

Focused Efforts

We believe a concerted effort during the month of May will have a positive impact on our bishops and U.S. church. May is traditionally "Mary's month" and Mary is the "Queen of Peace." It is not a highly political moment in the United States of America. The bishops themselves will be meeting over the summer. Some dioceses – such as the Archdiocese of Chicago – are already experimenting with a commitment to a culture of nonviolence and practical steps to greater active nonviolence to address crime and tensions within the diocese. Pope Francis wrote them a [letter of encouragement](#).

There are three dates that may serve the campaign well for letters reaching your Bishop:

May 3 is the anniversary of The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response (1983), the Bishop's pastoral letter.

May 9 is the birthday for Daniel Berrigan (b. 1921) and Sophie Scholl (b. 1921).

May 21 is the Feast of Austrian conscientious objector and martyr Franz Jagerstatter who was beatified by Pope Benedict XVI in 2007.

Staying Connected

Please join the global Catholic Nonviolence Initiative [on Facebook](#) to receive updates on how Catholics around the world are responding to Pope Francis' leadership and recommitting to the centrality of active Gospel Nonviolence.