

Culturing Peace: With Justice, With Prayer, With Each Other, Without Weapons

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My dear friends of Pax Christi, it is an honor and a pleasure to be with you tonight. I am glad to be speaking to people who are committed to nonviolence – it makes me worry less about what you will do if you don't like what I say.

Over the last twenty-five years of my own life, Pax Christi has been for me an important and wonderful mix of the prophetic and the pastoral. In my mind, you are, on one hand, a compelling prophetic voice, a voice that seeks to speak God's call with integrity and potency. AND, you are an organization that has sought to live up to its own prophetic words. In addition, you are a movement whose work has been both challenging for and respectful toward the larger church; you have not only critiqued the powers that be of all kinds, but you have sought to craft bridges so that critique can be accompanied by new possibilities. Really, I am humbled to be asked to be here tonight. And, since I just renewed my membership, I am glad to be a *part* of you.

Much of what I have to say this evening is drawn from my experience of the impact and effects of JustFaith around the country. For those of you who are unfamiliar with JustFaith, it might help for me to describe it quickly. It is a thirty week long program that happens in the context of a group of 10-15 adults in the local parish. It is an intensive immersion into the biblical call to justice, peacemaking and compassion. It draws from Catholic social teaching, theology and church witness. It includes two retreats, more than a dozen books, a dozen videos, many guest speakers, and four immersion experiences that engage the group in the presence and testimony of someone who is at-risk. One religious sister called JustFaith the most demanding program ever offered at a Catholic parish in the history of the universe—she said it in kind of a mean way. It is designed to be a process that is AS dedicated to the transformation of the *self* as it is about the transformation of the *world*, understanding that those two things are integrally linked.

When JustFaith was originally offered at the parish where I worked in Louisville, Kentucky, here is what happened: peace and justice ministry, which could have been described at the parish as small (or even puny), peripheral to parish life, and struggling BECAME enormous, central to parish life and liturgical life, vital, effective and downright exciting. What happened was that after offering JustFaith for three years, and then four, five and, finally, six years, the social ministry of the parish became the single most vibrant component of the parish's life. Between 1989 and 1996, the parish saw the initiation of groups, committees or taskforces committed to addressing racism, meeting the needs of migrant workers, developing expertise with environmental concerns, building Habitat houses, working with the CCHD-funded group in Louisville, providing direct services to poor rural churches, developing strategies of downward mobility and simple living, participating in liturgical planning with an eye toward the links with justice, protesting at School of the Americas, addressing violence against women, creating a local Pax Christi chapter, promoting Bread for the World offering of letters and CRS's Rice Bowl Project and justice education. I could actually continue with this litany of organizations and projects, but I think you get the picture. It felt like a great big beehive of new worker bees for justice.

And then JustFaith went national. And good things happened again. Happily and wonderfully, for the last several years, JustFaith has enjoyed a partnership with three of the largest Catholic social ministry organizations in the country: Catholic Charities USA, Catholic Campaign for Human Development, and Catholic Relief Services and these three partners continue to support and promote JustFaith simply because wherever JustFaith has been offered, those organizations—and many others by the way—see a spike of interest and participation in their work by JustFaith graduates. 12,000 people in 700 churches have been through the program. People who go through JustFaith get fired up about doing the work of the Gospel and they get involved in the work of CRS, CCHD, Catholic Charities as well as Pax Christi, Bread for the World, Catholic Worker communities and literally dozens of others.

And, so, for the last several years the JustFaith experience has been a very large laboratory of social justice work. It is from this laboratory that I offer my remarks this evening. All of this is to say that you are listening to someone whose passion for the Gospel call to justice and peacemaking is sincere, but someone who speaks more as an animator than activist. I am, in fact, more of an evangelist for justice than I am an organizer for justice. I am most interested in how we can draw new people and our most committed activists into deeper Christian commitments to justice, peace and mercy. And, more recently, I have become equally interested now in how to help sustain those commitments.

The title of this weekend's conference is "The Pursuit of Peace in a Culture of Violence." The title speaks to the daunting reality that we face in this poor, battered, wounded world. Throughout this weekend, exceptional speakers and facilitators will help us to understand and respond to the many versions of violence that express themselves in places all around us. It does indeed feel like a culture of violence, a world of violence. From Darfur to Afghanistan, from New Orleans to Los Angeles, from Iraq to Colombia, from the glaciers to the coral reefs, from Haiti to Louisville, Kentucky, there is violence, AND it is not random. It is systemic. It is systematized. It is coordinated and predictable, like the manufacture of some kind of product. It is indeed *cultured*. If you want milk to become yogurt, you have to culture it with the right ingredients. If you want violence, you have to culture the world with the right ingredients or, more correctly, the wrong ingredients. We have a culture of violence because we human beings have cultured violence. We have created it. It is not a surprise. It is not random. It is the predictable consequence of a recipe we decided upon and carried out. That is both the bad news and the good news. The bad news is that we are responsible. The good news is that we can choose a different recipe. The good news is called the Reign of God. And the reign of God is at hand. It is at hand. It is for the picking. It is for the choosing.

My sisters and brothers, it is true that the world is breathtakingly beautiful and wonderful. However, the daily reminders of poverty and starvation, sectarian violence, environmental degradation, global warming, the looming wars over water, the current violence in the name of oil, the battles over land and food remind us that we have much to grieve. And grieve we should. The crisis is real.

But the first and last word is a holy word called hope – not hope like optimism that everything will turn out fine; we already know that that is not true. The snuffed-out lives of starving or bombed or

macheted people every day says very clearly that everything in this world does not turn out fine. Rather, the hope I speak of is the hope of our faith that says that the things worth living for are love, reconciliation, compassion, justice, peace, solidarity and healing. The things that bring life and sustain life are love, reconciliation, compassion, justice, peace, solidarity and healing. We see, perhaps with fresh eyes, that Jesus IS the savior of the world. If we do not heed his message, we will perish. AND, if we have indeed crafted a world – perhaps blindly – that is at risk, that is in crisis, hope tells us we can live a different way and there can be healing and there can be a new possibility. It is possible, instead of culturing violence, for us to culture peace.

The title of my presentation this evening, “Culturing Peace” is offered in the hope that I might say something that will help Pax Christi and the Church and all Christian people grow the work of peace and justice. And let me make clear that my words tonight are spoken out of faith to a community of faith. These are, first and foremost, words meant for the Church. Pax Christi describes itself as a Catholic peace movement. I want what you want, namely that the movement gets bigger than it is. And if the Catholic peace movement is to get larger, it will do so because and only because it has a focused relationship to the place where most Catholics are, and that place is the parish. Most Catholics are in parishes. If you want to see something Catholic grow, the place to look to is the parish. Period. That observation colors everything I have to say this evening. I also believe that much of what I have to say will be an affirmation of everything Pax Christi is about.

By the title “Culturing Peace,” I mean it to have double meaning. First, borrowing from the biological definition of “culturing,” I want to suggest that we need to identify all of the right ingredients and commit ourselves to the full mix of the right ingredients to allow peace to happen. That is, what range of commitments must we make to see an outcome like peace? And, second, borrowing from the sociological definition of “culturing,” we need to deliberately apply ourselves to what actually makes for culture, human culture, and how to apply the science of that to crafting a *holy* human culture. That’s a lot of words. Stay with me and I will try to get practical fast.

So let’s begin. As I said, for us to “culture peace,” I am first relying on the biological image of culturing, as in culturing yogurt or culturing penicillin. Essentially, what ingredients, what conditions must be present in the mixture for something to grow. You can not make yogurt without critical ingredients: milk and some particular kinds of bacteria. If you do not have those two ingredients, there can be no fermentation, there will be no yogurt. *Our* interest, of course, is what ingredients make for peace. What ingredients *HAVE* to be present in the community of faith for it to become an effective agent of peace? Because, if they are not all there, we can do good things but there will be no peace.

So, first things first. Let’s get one definition straight. This probably goes without saying but, to draw from Pope Paul VI’s words, there will be no peace without justice. So I need to admit that as I continue, my understanding of the relationship between peace and justice is that they are so closely tied together—theologically and practically—that it is nearly impossible to speak of one without the other. Having said that, then, the question restated, is what ingredients have to be present for an outcome that looks like peace and justice, peace with justice, justice with peace?

I want to describe, my sisters and brothers, six critical elements that it seems to me *HAVE* to be present for there to be peace. Here is my hunch: we say we want peace, we even work, and work

very hard, for peace. But all the necessary ingredients are not present. And because all of the ingredients are not present, the recipe simply can not make for peace. I believe we sincerely desire peace and therefore we must not do it in sloppy or lazy fashion. I would like to suggest we must become more scientific, more exact, about this work of our heart, so that we do not invite each other into endless frustration and disappointment.

Here then are six ingredients I want to propose are all critical, all essential for the church to be a potent agent of peace with justice.

First, the Church must always be deliberate about its relationships with those who are at risk in the world. Catholic social teaching describes this, in part, as the “option for the poor and vulnerable” and as “solidarity.” I begin here, not because any of *you* need convincing, but because our churches, our parishes do. It is my experience of doing social ministry for the last twenty-five years, that the single biggest obstacle to the church’s mission and vision of peace with justice is the fact of the segregation of the poor/the oppressed/the exploited/the neglected/the stranger from the comfortable/the secure/the satisfied. The result is a divide that convinces the comfortable and secure that all is well and persuades the poor that there is no hope. The long term result is death – dead bodies and dead dreams by starvation, drive by shootings, desperation and war AND dead *souls* and dead *hearts* by self-preoccupation and over-satiation. Together they create what looks like real hell.

Let me speak for a moment to those of you who come from communities that are somewhat comfortable or even affluent. And I want to be very specific, very practical. I want to suggest that each one of us sitting in the room today, regardless of what else we do, must stay connected in some kind of face-to-face way with the persons and the places at risk.

The single biggest obstacle to the work of justice, to the work of peace, is not militarism, it is not consumerism, it is not political ideology. Those are all obstacles, to be sure, but in some ways they are simply symptoms of a bigger obstacle. The biggest obstacle is the absence of authentic compassion, a derivative of *agape*. People do not really care about each other. It sounds harsh, but it is not meant as an indictment. It is simply an observation. So many of us do not really care about each other. And we do not care, I think, not because we are malicious or unfeeling or mean but because we simply do not see each other. Our lives, our cities are all crafted like subtle little apartheid: all the rich people live with rich people, all the middle-class people live with middle-class people and the poor live with the poor in the places left behind. And so we do not care, perhaps we can not care, about what we do not see, about what we do not know. Two weeks ago I was in Greenville, South Carolina listening to a group of JustFaith graduates who had participated during the program in a poverty tour of their own city. Some mentioned with distress and sadness and even shock that they had lived in Greenville all of their lives and never knew how desperately poor parts of the city were. AND, this is important, having seen those places, having prayed at those places, having considered those places through the lens of faith, some of them, many of them, most of them were obviously CHANGED. And now they CARED. And their care now drives them into the first steps of active engagement.

Fr. Greg Boyle, a Jesuit priest who works with gangs in Los Angeles, perhaps one of the most faithful and holy people I have ever been in the presence of, makes this observation, “There will be

no peace without justice. But there will be no justice . . . without kinship.” We will not know what needs to be done in this world without seeing the world through the lens of those who see it from the bottom. There will be no justice without kinship. There will be no peace without kinship. Perhaps this is why so many of our greatest peacemakers choose to be with and among the poor. It is not enough for the church to sit at our computers in suburbia, clicking on every good message to a member of congress. The reign of God is critically relational. We must be connected in real life in real time, in kairois time. Richard Rohr, speaking to a group of middle class Catholics, said, “We discover God in the eyes of the poor.” And we discover that the world is much different than we thought. And we discover that we have a capacity—a holy capacity—to love bigger than we might have dreamed.

To conclude, our work for peace must be linked integrally with the experience of those on the bottom. Only when *they* know peace will peace be. As long as poverty is, violence will be. This means on a practical level that our recipe for peace must be a commitment to connect OURSELVES with those at the margins AND a deliberate strategy of inviting others to SEE what they had not seen before. And we must hold each other accountable. If any one of us in the room does not know well someone who is poor, can not tell stories of conversation and interaction with someone who is poor, we are missing an ingredient for peace.

The second critical ingredient, which flows out of the first, is what we sometimes call justice education or peace education. It doesn't sound very sexy, but it really involves the matter of reclaiming our tradition as a Church. The single most repeated phrase in the Gospels is the phrase that Jesus uses to describe the vision and focus of his ministry: the Reign of God. We find it 142 times in the four Gospels. And as we gather the evidence from Jesus' teaching, this reign of God is the reign of service, justice, generosity, compassion, and peacemaking. Jesus calls disciples to THIS vision. Is it fair to say that Jesus did not call disciples to follow him for the purpose of idolizing or honoring him? Rather, the reason to follow him is that he is pointing toward a new possibility, as described in this vision of the Reign of God.

One important appropriation of the biblical themes of justice is articulated in the language of Catholic social teaching. Catholic social teaching speaks to dignity, solidarity, the option for the poor, the rights of workers, care of creation, peace and so on. It is, in fact, an extraordinary tradition. Period. The only problem is that it is not integrated in the life of the local faith community, the parish. It is, to use a tiresome and even pathetic phrase, our best kept secret. Many if not most pastors never studied Catholic social teaching while in seminary; most catechists are unfamiliar with the tradition. It is possible and usual for people to go through Catholic grade school, Catholic high school, Catholic college, Catholic youth group, the RCIA, Catholic spirituality programs, Catholic discipleship study groups and never encounter Catholic social teaching. And so often if they do, it is an afterthought, a kind of addendum or extracurricular activity. Twenty-five years ago, I spent three years at the University of Notre Dame getting an M.Div. degree. Most of my classmates were men preparing for priesthood. Guess how many courses in Catholic social teaching were required as part of the curriculum – zero. That was 25 years ago. Guess how many courses are required today, 25 years later? Zero.

I will say this: to the extent that people in the pews are not engaged with the poor, not involved in justice work, not committed to active peacemaking is an indictment of every single expression of

Catholic education and formation – from the seminaries and spirituality centers to Catholic colleges and preparation for first communion.

This means on a very practical level that WE must provide opportunities for our fellow Catholics to become educated. And when I say “we,” I mean bishops and priests and deacons and religious and parishioners. And so whatever category you fit in, when I say “we,” I mean us – you and me. If that means working with your DRE, your pastor or your bishop, good for you. If that means offering to facilitate a group using one of Pax Christi’s Prayer, Study and Action Packets, great. If that means doing JustFaith, I’m all for it.

We simply must be true to our tradition. We are really talking about the most critical work of naming what God we believe in. For the last three years we have offered a program called JusticeWalking to high school youth. And it is so very heartening to see how engaged and excited young people can become about their faith when they hear it spoken through the lens of God’s intimate care for the world, for the poor, for the stranger, for the vulnerable, for the enemy. Similarly, it sometimes surprises our staff to hear from JustFaith graduates who remark that they had been away from the Church for years and that the experience of JustFaith is the reason that came back to the parish. People want to know that Catholicism is not primarily about bingo, picnics or basketball leagues. The excitement, passion, energy and draw of the Gospel await.

Third, the third critical ingredient necessary for a culture of peace and what may be the biggest challenge I issue this evening, we must learn a new lifestyle, a simpler lifestyle. As Wendell Berry puts it, “We must learn to live poorer than we do.” The call to a simpler lifestyle is partially prompted by the observation that the world is at war because parts of the world are literally sucking the life out of the other parts. The history of exploitation is the history of war. Our lifestyles require the plunder of the earth, require the cheap labor of other places, require the poverty of others. Our lifestyles require a war in Iraq. There is no other way to put it. For us to live as we live in this country, we need to dominate others so that they can not use the limited resources that we want.

And our lifestyles not only put us at war with each other but with the natural order. The reality of global warming is sobering indeed. Yesterday, in Louisville, KY, another record high temperature was established. The recorded sad images of polar bears drowning in the ocean because their hunting grounds have simply melted under temperatures never before recorded is only one ominous warning of what most likely is to come, and not just to polar bears. On a practical level, the two most significant lifestyle choices we can make to reduce our ecological footprint are to reduce or eliminate our use of planes and cars and to move to a plant-based diet. I do not pretend to know how to negotiate the contradictions of saying those things after flying from Louisville to Seattle to be here. But to say we can’t change is the excuse of the addict, says Berry. We can’t continue to rely on that which will destroy us.

And, my brothers and sisters, it is not enough to say that we must learn to reduce, reuse and recycle. We need to learn a very different way of living. If the American lifestyle requires, on average, four times its share of resources, it is not enough to snip around the edges of our consumerism. It is not enough to thumb our noses at the malls. We must learn how to reduce by 3/4 what we consume. Authentic love will not allow us to continue to ask the rest of the world to continue to put itself at

the physical mercy of our conveniences. We will, I think, have to recover the language of sacrifice from our religious heritage. We can not continue to draw from the booty of war and deprivation.

Again, we need to hold each other accountable. We need to encourage each other to live in smaller homes, to buy less, to need less.

Some may argue that living a simpler life will not impact the war in Iraq, for example. And, in one sense, that is true. But if our lives say “more,” our lives say “war,” and our words for peace become pious but empty gestures. As we peacemakers speak peace with their lips, our lifestyles must also speak peace.

The fourth ingredient for culturing peace is that we must pray. We must learn to pray. We must take the time to pray. My sisters and brothers, prayer has multiple meanings, many expressions, and a thousand functions. But let me speak to its importance for culturing peace.

Prayer is a way of connecting with our Source. It is about being centered, grounded, mindful of the holy, the presence of the sacred and the precious. When I settle myself in the quiet and prayerful consideration of the reflections of Dorothy Day or Jean Vanier or Thomas Merton, I re-connect. The hope is for integration, singleness of purpose, openness to a deepening relationship and a deepening commitment.

Kathleen Norris describes prayer this way: “Prayer is not asking for what you think you want, but asking to be changed in ways you can’t imagine.” We must be people of prayer, people who are centered, people who draw from a deep well. When I am in the presence of prayerful people, I am always struck by the sense that they are drawing from a source of goodness that only comes from attentiveness to the deepest places in their hearts.

And, of course, the language of prayer is the language of spirituality. When my Protestant friends and I are trading denominational stories, they are always quick to mention the rich tradition of spirituality in the Catholic lexicon. Sadly, if Catholic social teaching is the best kept secret in the Catholic Church, the traditions of spirituality are the second best kept secret. You just don’t find too much of it at the local parish level.

My thought is that we must be as good at praying as we are at strategizing for the peace rally. And then the two will become linked. Prayerful people host prayerful rallies, prayerful actions. Our work can become like a prayer – integrated, thoughtful, and wise.

The often unpublicized experience of those who pray is that prayer that can help us to connect with the poor with open eyes and hearts. It is prayer that can allow us to educate with patience, love and understanding. It is prayer that can enable us to move to a simpler lifestyle. And it is prayer that will allow us to do this with conviction and joy.

And whether or not we pray is as obvious as whether or not we have put our clothes on. For example, the compulsive, frantic, unintegrated rambling from project to project—even from peace project to peace project-- may speak of good intentions, but an uneasy and untended inner life. It is possible—I have committed this sin—it is possible to do much harm because we have not taken the

time to pray. Untended hearts and spirits, like untended gardens, can go to weeds. Our good work for the world will be hampered if we do not do good work for our souls.

The fifth ingredient I will mention only briefly, but only because you are who you are. The fifth ingredient is a commitment to nonviolence. In almost any other context than the pleasure of your company, I would have to make a strong case why nonviolence, the presumption against violence, is a critical dimension of our faith. But I don't have to do that here.

However, before I move on, let me mention one understated benefit of a commitment to a nonviolent, peace-making love. The lens of peacemaking gives us a capacity for discernment, a critical kind of discernment. During this week in August in which we remember the terrible bombs, the presumption against violence frees us to see what the world so often wants to hide its eyes from. Violence is wrong. Violence is ugly. Violence is the saddest of human acts. And to the extent that any human institution relies on and promotes violence is the extent to which it must be eyed suspiciously by the church. Again, the point is discernment. Where is life honored? Where is it betrayed? It is so very difficult to lead people into a willing critique of their politics, their country, their allegiances, without some awareness of how violence is so often the handmaid of greed and power. Enough said. You would not be here if you weren't already convinced of this point.

The sixth and most often unacknowledged ingredient of effective peacemaking is community. The historical template of our religious tradition is that so often those people most committed to peacemaking and justice were also people committed to community. It would seem that the generativity of compassion and care that characterize a Gospel life, issues into community. Big-heartedness always draws close to the other, always draws the other close. Francis of Assisi, Benedict, Dorothy Day, Jean Vanier—like Jesus himself—draw people naturally into relationship. And the hunger of the human heart that God put in us is not just for casual and recreational relationships. We long for relationships of meaning. We long to be connected, for healing, for vocation, and for mission.

Community is the most neglected and probably the most difficult ingredient for us to hold to in the U.S. context. And for the most obvious of reasons – we have come to worship at the altar of independence, individualism and autonomy. As much as there is a deep hunger for connection, common purpose, and kindred hearts, there is a merciless, deep-rooted entrenchment in the forces of competition, freedom and self-rule. We have, I fear, come to think of loneliness as necessary or inevitable.

The challenge before us, again, is to claim our tradition. From the description in Acts of the early Christian community that “shared all things in common,” to the early monastic families, to the development of the hundreds of canonical communities around the world, some of whom are represented here tonight, to the Catholic Worker communities of the 20th and 21st century, intentional community ‘R us. Or at least it ought to be.

And the spiritual logic of local communities of faith is that they can live a smaller but living version of what they seek for the larger world. Communities of faith speak that peace is possible and here's an example, right here in our midst. It may not be perfect, it doesn't have to be perfect, but it is a

sign of how life can be nurtured and revered. The community of faith can be a place that witnesses to what is holy, good, loving, and life-giving by what it lives, by what it embodies. But like the other ingredients for peace mentioned so far, community is a commitment, a choice. And it involves effort, discipline and struggle. It is certainly not easy.

As you might guess, when I say community I do not mean the bowling community, or even the church bowling community. Rather, I mean a community that involves very intentional commitments, including those I have mentioned so far: engagement with those on the margins, peace and justice education or formation, simplicity, prayer, and peacemaking. And, for most people in most parishes, parish participation is also not where a robust experience of community like this happens. And even as small faith community movements and programs have started to become more and more popular across the country, most of the small faith communities I have witnessed at parishes have been woefully lacking in mission. They may pray, they may study, they may share a meal, but at the end of the day many of these communities dissolve simply because there was no mission that gave deeper meaning and purpose to their prayer and their learning and their fellowship. Small faith communities without a mission are just pious potlucks.

Our tradition suggests that it is very difficult to live a life of integrity apart from the support, encouragement, witness, challenge and celebration of a community. Community is, if you will, the medium in which so many other important things of the Gospel can happen. Community is an engine for peace, it is fuel for justice. We are made for each other. As a species we have always known that we could not survive, could not flourish without each other. Whatever is to prosper, grow, or multiply will only happen with the nourishment of people who are FOR each other in a significant way. Perhaps we need to borrow from the language of being a tribe. A peace tribe.

I am interested to see many more forms of intentional community than what we see today. And, I am interested to see the integration of intentional community within the parish. I would like to see the equivalent of Jesuit Volunteer Corps communities connected to every parish, where young people might commit to live for a term of two or three years, committed to the work of justice and peacemaking. I would like to see the parish encourage members to purchase homes in the vicinity of one another and in neighborhoods where there is greatest need, as an expression of the parish's work. I would like to see dioceses invite black and white and brown households into the faith-based mission of a covenant community, in which they meet weekly for the purpose of seeing where friendship and Gospel love will take them and teach them. I would like to see every parish have a version of a L'Arche community. I am interested in the construction of simple homes, affordable and available for both poor and rich, to create neighborhoods where all can live and interact and be helpful to each other.

So, my brothers and sisters, I am suggesting that these six ingredients are essential elements of our faith tradition, essential elements of peacemaking – connection with those who suffer, the study of right relationships or peace & justice education, simple lifestyles, prayer, a commitment to nonviolence and community. On one hand, they seem like just basic, standard ordinary Gospel mandates. On the other hand, they represent significant challenges and opportunities for a Church that seeks to live out a Gospel vision of relationships that are transformative and healing.

I would like now to briefly address the matter of culturing peace, as in creating a culture of peace. And for just a few minutes I would like to make use of a diagram that I hope will be helpful.

[This section of the presentation was offered as commentary on a diagram that was projected on to a large screen at the site of the conference and was not prepared in written form. This section emphasized the importance of establishing institutions that speak of peace and justice. The written text continues below.]

My brothers and sisters, our work to cultivate or culture peace means that we must be reactive; we must resist the forces of violence. *And* we must be proactive; we must create a human culture that speaks to peace and justice. We must imagine what God's peace and justice look like on this earth, and we must begin the work of crafting structures, institutions, human realities that are the antithesis to division, hate, greed, and scarcity.

So, here is what I imagine: I imagine 50 Catholic Worker communities in Seattle and 50 Catholic Worker communities in Louisville and 50 Catholic Worker communities in every major city in the country. I imagine diocesan-sponsored Pax Christi peace academies in every diocese. I imagine diocesan-promoted intentional neighborhoods of black and white and brown. I imagine Catholic construction companies that as part of their charter only build houses for integrated communities. I imagine peace newspapers in every diocese, peace T.V. networks – “Good evening and welcome to Peace TV, I'm your host and my name is Dave Robinson.” I imagine Peacemaking high schools – magnet Catholic high schools for those interested in studying Catholic social teaching, peacemaking strategies and liberating lifestyles. I imagine construction companies that only build modest homes out of local materials with conservation and simplicity as the key philosophies. I imagine designated prayer houses in those neighborhoods where violence is greatest, so that all people across the city can pray for a new possibility, and they work for what they pray. I imagine annual peacemaking awards in every parish and in every diocese, and that the event is the biggest banquet on the church calendar. I imagine parish picnics that are open to all and free to the poor. I imagine institutes to train would-be or veteran politicians in the ways and needs of peace. I imagine the churches encouraging bicycling – lots of racks, with opportunities to turn in our cars and our guns in for a new way. I imagine conflict resolution and Catholic social teaching and the study of justice as core courses in every Catholic high school and Catholic college, even Notre Dame. I imagine Green companies being started with CCHD funding. I imagine the repopulation of farming communities with the financial support of the parish communities, which the farmers can then serve in a personal and direct way. I imagine, in an era of privately owned and run prisons, that the Catholic Church would buy and run a prison, simply to demonstrate what it means to try to LOVE and help RESTORE those who are inside. I imagine a church that tells its members to get rid of their guns, to get rid of their video game guns. I imagine a church filled with peacemakers and prophets, where seeking justice, making peace, loving the broken and dreaming a new dream for the world is our prayer.

My sisters and brothers in Christ, the pursuit of peace in a culture of violence involves the creation of a new culture. So let's get to work. And peace go with you.