

# Talking Cents

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**Talking Cents is an ecumenical group charged by the Anglican Diocesan Council to promote an alternative to current economic and political thought, and to encourage debate within the Church. Ministry Units are encouraged to distribute these articles. This issue is contributed by Kevin McBride of Pax Christi Aotearoa-New Zealand.**

## **In Pursuit of Joy in a Broken World**

In April 2016, the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace and Pax Christi International convened an international conference on: Nonviolence and Just Peace; Contributing to the Catholic Understanding of and Commitment to Nonviolence. Earlier this year, Orbis Books published “*Choosing Peace: The Catholic Church Returns to Gospel Non-Violence*”, edited by Pax Christi co-president Marie Dennis as a response to the conference and a direction as to how the goals of the conference could be pursued and achieved.

The second chapter of the book begins with a quotation from Pope Francis’ World Day of Peace Message 2017: “A broken world: While the last century knew the devastation of two deadly World Wars, the threat of nuclear war and a great number of other conflicts, today, sadly, we find ourselves engaged in a horrifying world war fought piecemeal ... We know that this ‘piecemeal’ violence, of different kinds and levels, causes great suffering: wars in different countries and continents; terrorism, organised crime, and unforeseen acts of violence; the abuses suffered by migrants and victims of human trafficking; and the devastation of the environment.” The chapter goes on to examine under various headings, the many expressions of violence, “direct, structural and cultural”. Examples of these are described in the contexts of the Philippines, South Sudan, Mexico, Croatia, Sri Lanka, US, Peru, Uganda and Afghanistan. The chapter closes with an analysis of the “drivers of violence”, economic and political, closing with the perception that: “Violence is pervasive, both within and, at times, between nations. Its root

causes are many, different, sometimes multi-dimensional, often interconnected. A wide array of manifestations – from war and preparations of war to street violence and terrorism – and their devastating personal and societal consequences present researchers and peace practitioners with ever-increasing challenges.”

Although New Zealand is usually spared the manifestations of violence named above, we suffer from our own forms, including domestic and gender violence. Figures show that we have the worst rate of family violence in the world and it is rising. In 2016, family violence records show that there were 118,910 reported incidents, 1 every 5 minutes and up 8,000 from the previous year. In the years 2009 – 2012, an average of 13 women, 10 men and 9 children were killed each year by family violence. (rf Family Violence Death Review Committee, 2014, Health Quality and Safety Commission). These statistics refer to our own neighbourhoods and our own citizens in our own streets, so should be much more part of our consciousness.

We also need to remind ourselves that our nation was founded in the violence of colonisation. This has left us with a continuing obligation to address residual injustices in a spirit of humility, compassion and reconciliation, realising that many current social and community inequities can be traced back to the effects of that process.

Faced as a member of Pax Christi with the challenge of “working for peace for all everywhere” in the contexts outlined above, I was interested to receive recently a copy of an

‘apostolic exhortation’ prepared by Pope Francis. I hoped to find there some guidance in addressing the needs of ‘the broken world’. Entitled *Rejoice and be Glad; Apostolic Exhortation on the Call to Holiness in Today’s World*, it appears, at first glance, to be a traditional call for withdrawal from the insurmountable problems of the day into a more secure and sanctifying environment. Instead, Francis suggests a more active and engaged approach to the achievement of peace in our day and in our community. In the first place, he encourages us to work not for our personal peace but for peace in our own and others’ communities, “for the common good and renouncing personal gain”. This peace will come not from heroic actions but “will grow through small gestures” and deciding that: “I will not speak badly of anyone”. [I will] “listen [to others] with patience and love, will stop and say a kind word to [street-dwellers]”, and in general, will find “a more perfect way of doing what we are already doing: ... I will seize the occasions that present themselves every day ... If I encounter a person sleeping outdoors on a cold night, I can view him as an annoyance, an idler, an obstacle in my path, a troubling sight, a problem for politicians to sort out or even a piece of refuse cluttering a public space. Or I can respond with faith and charity, and see in this person a human being with a dignity identical to my own ...”, a victim of unjust and violent social structures. ... simply performing good works” is not enough. The search for peace also means “seeking social change ... the restoration of just social and economic systems ...”.

Linked with this is a caution against those who ‘relativise’, whereby some Christians consider that “the only thing that counts is one particular ethical issue or cause that they themselves defend.” He goes on to illustrate: “Our defence of the unborn, for example needs to be clear, firm and passionate, for at stake is the dignity of a human life ... Equally sacred, however, are the lives of the poor, those already born, the destitute, the abandoned and the underprivileged, the vulnerable infirm and elderly exposed to covert euthanasia, the victims of human

trafficking, new forms of slavery, and every form of rejection. We cannot uphold an ideal ... that would ignore injustice in a world where some revel, spend with abandon and live only for the latest consumer goods, even as others look on from afar, living their entire lives in abject poverty.”

In order to counter the violence inherent in this unequal world, Pope Francis advises us “to cultivate a certain simplicity of life, resisting the feverish demands of a consumer society, which leave us impoverished and unsatisfied ...” Conversely, we must counter the temptation “to be caught up in superficial information, instant communication and virtual reality” which might cause us to “waste precious time and become indifferent to the suffering flesh of our brothers and sisters.”

Essentially, his suggestions equate to similar reflections by Mahatma Gandhi, perhaps summed up in “You must be the change you wish to see in the world.” We cannot do a great deal in direct terms about the brutality of wars and community violence in Syria, Afghanistan and the Philippines, and may be spared involvement in the shocking number of domestic issues in our neighbourhood. However, we have no excuse for not encouraging change to reduce the wide disparities in wealth and privilege which characterise our own society. Nor are we exonerated from supporting those who question the hegemonic dominance of some nations over others, in spite of their commitment to international bodies like the development agencies of the UN, which are founded on sharing the resources of a finite world.

As we “live simply so that others may simply live”, and as we maintain respectful relationships with (whanaungatanga) and care for (manaakitanga) the Earth and all who are in need, we will “rejoice and be glad”. Our small steps towards a more balanced and less violent world will carry hope for fullness of life for all.