

Hiroshima Day Gathering at Peirce Park, Bangor – August 6, 2024

My name is Mary Ellen Quinn. I serve as Co-Coordinator for Pax Christi Maine, the Catholic Peace and Justice Movement, a faith community with members statewide, nationally and internationally.

Pax Christi, which means 'Peace of Christ' is rooted in the Spirituality of Nonviolence and Catholic Social Teaching. Members strive to follow Jesus' teachings on nonviolence - as a spiritual practice, as a way of life, as a universal ethic and as a method for social change.

I am grateful to stand with you today. Like so many of you, I have grave concerns about the culture of violence in which we live. I think about my grandchildren's future. Born in 2001 and 2005, they are young adults who have never known a world without war, without climate catastrophes, without mass shootings, without threats of nuclear annihilation.

Today on this 79th anniversary, we remember all those who died in Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the site of the U.S. bombings, those who died due to radioactive fallout, and countless others who died from related cancers, and other conditions. We recognize the continuing harm inflicted on people across the globe from nuclear testing, storage of nuclear waste, and uranium mining - the consequences over several decades are enormous.

I recently read about a young woman residing in New Mexico, diagnosed with a deadly form of cancer, the 5th generation of her family to be afflicted.

The twin threats of nuclear annihilation and climate catastrophe are very real. We cannot continue on this path of death and destruction. We have to believe that a world without nuclear weapons and climate disasters is possible. Our very existence depends on it.

In 2022, at a Pax Christi National Conference in Washington, D.C., I met Archbishop John Wester of New Mexico. His diocese includes the nuclear facilities at Los Alamos and many parishioners are employed there. In a historic pastoral letter, the Archbishop shared how following a visit to Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 2017, his thinking was transformed. In dialogue with Japanese citizens, young and old, he gained a deeper understanding of the devastation of these weapons of mass

destruction and vowed to address the critical need for disarmament. Wester's efforts include public education, joining with scientists and physicians. When combined, the perspectives of science and faith can reach a great number of people.

Pope Francis, too has been outspoken on a global stage, condemning the evils of our time: endless war, genocide, climate catastrophe, economic disparity, the refugee crisis, nuclear weapons and more. At one time, the Pope accepted a policy of deterrence but now states emphatically that even the possession of nuclear weapons is immoral.

The U.S. government has not cooperated with the Treaty on Prohibition and currently embraces a policy of 'modernization' which means nuclear arsenals continue to grow at high financial cost and great risk to humanity across the globe and to our planet. The Pope recently stated, "national security frameworks that rely on weapons, militaries and the projection of state power cannot possibly protect us from the challenges of today's world."

The cost of building and maintaining a nuclear arsenal is astronomical. As a social worker in this community for over three decades, I would be remiss not to bring attention to the obscene cost and its direct impact on reduced funding for meeting basic human needs: food, shelter, medical care, education, housing and much more. As we look at the distorted spending priorities, we understand fully that budgets are moral documents.

So what can we do to restore our country and our world to a place of safety and security; of justice and inclusion; of love and compassion toward all?

Clearly, joining grassroots movements organized to address the critical concerns already mentioned is extremely important. Complementary to those actions, I have come to understand that adopting an ethic of nonviolence is a critical element in transforming our thinking, our way of living, our culture. We have so many teachers whose lived example can instruct and inspire us. Names you are all very familiar with including Jesus, Rev. Dr. King, Mohandas Gandhi and many others, past and present, practitioners of active nonviolence.

The Beatitudes taught and modeled by Jesus have been called a manual for living a life of nonviolence. Gandhi practiced 'ahimsa', the principle of causing 'no harm' to

living beings. King articulated, taught and practiced six principles of nonviolence. These principles for nonviolent living need not be limited to individual practice. They can be and have been applied to societal and organizational change, political campaigns, international relations, institutions, business, media and much more.

Building a culture of nonviolence can result in radical change. Thanks to the extensive research on civil resistance published in 2008 by Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephen, we now know that nonviolent change campaigns being waged across the globe have been more successful than violent ones and have contributed to the building of democratic societies.

Activist and author, Rivera Sun publishes Nonviolence News, an online weekly newsletter reporting on nonviolence in action. Rivera shares the hopeful, courageous, and inspiring ways people are changing the narrative, their culture, society and politics across the globe.

As our friend Ilze Petersons reminded us in a recent op ed in the Bangor Daily News, we cannot wait for our elected leaders to act on their own. Rather, we can act together to bring about a world without nuclear weapons, a world that rejects violence in all its forms, a world that demonstrates safety and security, inclusion and justice, love and compassion for all!

Thank you.