

NJPN Comment

What does it mean to live nonviolently?

Theresa Alessandro



This is a situation I was in a few years ago: an older, white man got on the bus and casually verbally abused the Indian driver who had asked him to show his bus pass.

The white man sat next to me and continued his comments as though expecting me to collude with him. I felt suddenly very hot and very conscious of the other passengers listening in. I studiously said nothing for such a long, awkward interval that the man got up, made a show of dusting himself off and sat elsewhere. The woman he then sat beside quickly engaged him in a conversation about himself, successfully diverting him to this topic.

Until recently, I thought the woman who talked to him had done better than me who kept silence. Now I think we both failed the Indian bus driver. I did not skilfully use the tools of nonviolence to challenge injustice that day on the bus. The situation sprang up suddenly and I wanted to distance myself from the racist comments. My silence was not a clever ploy. I just couldn't think what to say. But injustice does not wait for us to be ready.

At Pax Christi, until 2nd October, we are celebrating nonviolence and calling attention to the creative power and value of it. We are now offering (online) study sessions to deepen our understanding and help us to feel more ready to live nonviolently and to challenge injustice with the values of the gospel.

In the first of these sessions we have shared our lived experience, studied texts, learned from each other and made plans. One participant described trying to live nonviolently as 'lifelong learning'.

Our study texts are taken from Pope Francis' World Day of Peace Message of 2017. Regarding my experience on the bus, these words resonated: 'An ethics of fraternity and peaceful coexistence between individuals and among peoples cannot be based on the logic of fear, violence and closed-mindedness, but on responsibility, respect and sincere dialogue'. We look forward to hearing more in the new encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*.

Find out more about our work on nonviolence, led by the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative, at <https://nonviolencejustpeace.net/>

Check out Pax Christi resources: <https://paxchristi.org.uk/resources/nonviolence-in-action/>

Contact us to find out more about the study sessions, info@paxchristi.org.uk. Theresa Alessandro is the director of Pax Christi, England and Wales.

The UN: 75 years devoted to peace and human rights

Effie Caldarola looks at the ongoing work of the United Nations as it prepares to celebrate its 75th anniversary

The United Nations was born in 1945 out of the rubble and human devastation of World War II. Like its predecessor, the League of Nations, the United Nations hoped to prevent future conflicts.

But unlike the League of Nations, which rose from the ashes of World War I and collapsed as another world war started, the United Nations has grown and continued to work for 75 years to diminish international struggle and encourage human rights for all.

Today's challenges are complex. Rather than disputes over territories and borders and treaty alliances, modern disputes are often within states like Syria, or regional fights springing from human rights issues and environmental conflicts over water and other resources. These conflicts have produced unprecedented waves of displaced peoples and refugees.

The Catholic Church has deep concern for peace, human rights and environmental sustainability, which is one reason that four recent popes have addressed the UN General Assembly. It's also why the Holy See became a permanent observer at the United Nations in 1964, and is always invited to participate in the meetings of all sessions of the General Assembly. The Vatican also has a voice and vote in UN conferences.

Pope Francis has been particularly vocal about the plight of refugees, the environment and the effects of war on the marginalised. In July 2020, for example, he publicly praised the UN Security Council for



its request for a global and immediate ceasefire of regional conflicts to focus on the delivery of humanitarian aid to assist in the Covid-19 pandemic.

His encyclical, *Laudato Si', on Care for Our Common Home*, finds common ground in many United Nations' initiatives, including the Youth Climate Action Summit, which brought youth climate champions together from more than 140 countries and territories to share their solutions and press for immediate attention to addressing climate change.

The pope shares the UN's concern that the Paris Climate Accord will be productive – and voiced his fears when the United States pulled out of that accord under President Trump.

When Pope Francis addressed the

UN general assembly in 2015, he focused on the environment, our "culture of waste" and the effect of climate change on the poor.

But, with Malala Yousafzai in the audience, he also stressed that women have a "right to education." Yousafzai is the Pakistani woman, who, when only 15, was injured in a failed assassination attempt by the Taliban because of her writing and outspoken promotion of education for girls and women.

Women's rights are a major UN cause, and Yousafzai was later named a UN Messenger of Peace, the youngest person ever given this title.

Currently, the UN is attempting a Spotlight Initiative to educate people worldwide about the second-class status of women. For example,



Pope Francis is one of four pontiffs to address the UN

the UN points out that 49 countries have no laws that protect women against domestic violence, which has increased during the isolation of the pandemic.

In 18 countries, men can legally prevent their wives from working, and in 39 countries sons and daughters do not have equal inheritance rights. By educating populations on these and many other inequalities, the UN must make this the century of women's equality, said its Secretary-General Antonio Guterres.

The United Nations reports that each day, 100 civilians, including women and children, are killed in armed conflicts around the world. In response, the UN has over 100,000 staff and affiliated personnel in peacekeeping operations worldwide.

There are currently 14 such missions, in places like the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, Kosovo, Darfur and near the border between India and Pakistan. Peacekeepers aim to suppress conflict, keep enemies separated and help threatened civilians.

Their first major challenge was in 1948, when UN peacekeepers became observers to the Arab-Israeli War and helped maintain a ceasefire during that conflict. They've been involved in keeping the world's peace ever since.

Anniversary statement calls on world to unite and defeat its common foes

Scott Houseman

The world's often-divided nations united on Monday to adopt a declaration commemorating the 75th anniversary of the United Nations, saying the urgency for countries to come together "has rarely been greater" amid challenges including the coronavirus, climate change and violent extremism.

The declaration, approved by 193 member nations at the mainly virtual commemoration, praised the UN as the only global organisation with the power to bring countries together and give "hope to so many people for a better world and ... deliver the future we want".

Born out of the horrors of World

War II, the UN was established to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war – words enshrined in the UN Charter.

The anniversary declaration recalled the UN's successes and failures over more than seven decades and vows to build a post-pandemic world that is more equal, works together and protects the planet.

Even at times of great tension, the declaration says, the UN promoted decolonisation, freedom, development, human rights and equality, "and worked to eradicate disease".

It also "helped mitigate dozens of conflicts, saved hundreds of thousands of lives through humanitarian action and provided millions of children with

the education that every child deserves".

As for disappointments, the declaration says it regrets that the world "is plagued by growing inequality, poverty, hunger, armed conflicts, terrorism, insecurity, climate change and pandemics".

It says the poorest and least developed countries are falling behind, decolonisation is not complete and people are forced to make dangerous journeys in search of refuge.

"Our challenges are interconnected and can only be addressed through reinvigorated multilateralism," it says.

The declaration stresses that the commemoration is taking place as the pandemic reverberates, not only

causing death and serious illness but "global economic recession, increased poverty, anxiety and fear".

"The Covid-19 pandemic has reminded us in the most powerful way that we are closely interconnected and only as strong as our weakest link," it says.

Only by working together can the pandemic end and "only together can we build resilience against future pandemics and other global challenges", the declaration says.

"Multilateralism is not an option but a necessity as we build back better for a more equal, more resilient and more sustainable world," it says.

"The United Nations must be at the centre of our efforts."