

Learning from nonviolence in action (1)

Read through these stories. What nonviolent actions can you pick out? What nonviolent attitudes underpinned those types of action? Make a note of these.

Liberian women are tired of war

For more than 20 years Liberia suffered from brutal civil wars - until a group of women decided they'd had enough. Leymah Gbowee coordinated the Women in Peacebuilding Network in Liberia and brought Christian women together in 2003 to pray and work for peace, soon joined by Muslim women. 2,500 women picketed President Charles Taylor's motorcade every day with signs reading 'The women of Liberia want peace now'. Taylor agreed to peace talks with opposition warlords and a delegation of women then kept vigil



outside the negotiations in Ghana. After seven weeks and no cease-fire they escalated their nonviolent protest, forming a human barricade across the doors, so the male negotiators could not leave until agreement was reached. When security guards tried to arrest the women they threatened to undress - a cultural taboo for the guards to witness. Three weeks later a peace deal was signed. The women went on to work alongside UN Peacekeeping Forces, persuading fighters to hand over their weapons

and go back to school. Their voter registration campaign in 2005 increased the proportion of women voters from 15% to 50%. Liberians elected President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf who, together with Leymah Gbowee, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2011.

Various sources

Political courage in Northern Ireland

No one should underestimate the real achievements this [Good Friday*] Agreement means... It took enormous courage for many of these politicians (traditional opponents) to sit down together, agree to discard some long-held dogmatic principles and accept compromise and change. It took enormous courage for them to recognise each other's 'identity' and agree to each person's right to different political aspirations. It took enormous courage to admit that violence is not the way forward and to pledge themselves to nonviolence and democracy.

*(*Intensive talks between American, British and Irish leaders, as well as party leaders in Northern Ireland, resulted in the Good Friday Agreement of 1998.)*

Mairead Corrigan Maguire, The Vision of Peace: faith and hope in Northern Ireland, Orbis, 1999, p 121

Peace in the midst of violence

For 20 years I have been working in the Magdalena Medio region of Colombia ... a very violent period in my country and we are trying to create just peace, a human sustainable process with the victims, the poor ones who are excluded. Then, in the middle of a strong conflict between paramilitary, guerrillas and the military we try to talk with everyone, trying to persuade everyone to change. This is a very fragile and difficult process; the situation is always unpredictable. Twenty-seven of our leaders have been killed including a lawyer who was killed by the paramilitary. We found her, with her arms and legs cut off. This is our daily situation



However, it is my conviction that dialogue transforms people. We are a Catholic country. We go to the guerrillas, the paramilitary, immediately after a massacre or attack. We try to respect them. We tell them that we don't understand what they are doing. We tell them we believe they are doing it because they believe it is the best for the Colombian people. Then we start the dialogue, inviting them to be consistent with humanity. Inviting them to talk in order to get transformation. In my opinion, this is always possible.

This is our approach, build upon human dignity - a dignity we do not get from the military, the government, the paramilitary. Jesus is passionate for human dignity. People get their strength from this. Now there is dialogue taking place between FARC and the Government, and the victims of violence are participating in this dialogue. Their testimony is powerful and their decision to contribute towards peace after suffering so much. Then the quality of transformation because of the suffering of the victims.

Francisco de Roux sj, Colombia,

Further reflection...

- *What do you think of Gandhi's comment that 'Nonviolence is not a cover for cowardice, but it is the supreme virtue of the brave'?*
- *What are the advantages of nonviolence over violence?*



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Catholic Nonviolence Initiative

www.nonviolencejustpeace.net