

Learning from nonviolence in action (2)

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

St John XXIII and the Cuban Missile Crisis

In October 1962 the United States found proof that Soviet missiles had been positioned in Cuba. President Kennedy announced a blockade on Soviet ships approaching Cuba and for a week a nuclear war seemed a terrible possibility. Using every diplomatic avenue behind the scenes, Kennedy asked Pope John XXIII to help defuse the tension. At his weekly audience the Pope delivered this veiled comment: 'The Pope always speaks well of those statesmen, on whatever side, who strive to come together to avoid war and bring peace to humanity'. He sent a message to Moscow appealing for negotiations to continue for the sake of peace. These encouraging signals enabled President Khrushchev to overrule more combative colleagues, withdraw the missiles from Cuba, and portray himself as a dignified peacemaker. Khrushchev later said: 'What the Pope has done for peace will go down in history'.

Source: Peter Hebblethwaite, John XXIII: Pope of the Council, Geoffrey Chapman, 1984, pp 445-448

Nonviolent resistance in the South Hebron Hills

Residents of the South Hebron Hills experience continual harassment from nearby settlements but remain firm in their commitment to nonviolent resistance. Each day they graze their sheep in contested areas and resist settler attempts to drive them from their lands. International volunteers from Operation Dove have maintained a presence there since 2004.

At one tense moment the shepherds, accompanied by the volunteers, were arrested following a nonviolent action during which villagers repaired the road which links At-Tuwani village to Yatta. This is an example of nonviolent resistance and of the importance of the witness of volunteers. The volunteers were quickly released and the shepherds were held for several hours, released only after paying a fine.

Source: www.operazionecolomba.it/en/palestine/



I made a choice

War changed my life. For us ordinary people of Croatia, the violent disintegration of Yugoslavia came so suddenly we were confused. The war and the logic of war spread like a violent fire. From a culture of nationalism to the fear-ridden images of the enemy, to being surrounded by Serbian forces bombing us... I started to think like others, there was no other way. It is them or us... While we were thinking and praying in a small group we spoke about the meaning of love for our enemy in this very



situation. Some said maybe the love of enemy now is to kill them, to prevent them from committing more atrocities. This kind of logic alarmed me deeply. I started to think, what would it mean to love my enemy in this time of war? I could not find the answer. But then I made a choice, from my will. So, I chose to love my enemy as Jesus would. This choice was my first move from the logic of violence, and I felt I could breathe again.

My next step was to think how would I defend life? I would defend life but not by killing. But what if I needed to defend the life of my children? I don't know what I would do in such a situation. But this passover from the logic of violence opened my heart and my mind to ask: what could I do for peace and the end of the war? I met someone who was an ethicist and then a conscientious objector. Together we began to think about how we could bring peace in the middle of the war. And this was the beginning of the peace movement, the Centre for Nonviolence and Human Rights in Osijek, from the middle of the war.

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For 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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www.nonviolencejustpeace.net