



Sister of Mercy, Mary Schmuck, serves with the Archdiocese of Louisville Catholic Charities Parish Social Ministry Department.

Nonviolence Builds Peace

Veterans Day included the 5th annual Nelson County Interfaith Service.

This year's theme was "Peace and Justice As Seen Through the World's Great Religions."

Persons from ten faith communities gathered with a couple hundred of us to mull on the fundamental connection between peace and justice. I found it very inspiring and I learned more about the teachings and aspirations of other faith traditions.

Participants were also encouraged to consider and actually make the Vow of Non-violence. I had done so some years back, but Sunday's gathering drew my attention to it all again.

The vow is at once simple and profound (as is a lot about life, it seems to me). The vow reads:

"Recognizing the violence in my own heart, yet trusting in goodness and mercy, I vow or solemnly affirm that I will strive to live a life of non-violence by:

- Striving for peace within myself and seeking to be a peacemaker in my daily life.
- Showing love, compassion and forgiveness to everyone I meet.
- Accepting suffering in the struggle for peace and justice rather than inflicting it.
- Refusing to retaliate in the face of provocation and violence.
- Persevering in non-violence of tongue and heart.
- Living conscientiously and simply so that I do not deprive others of the means to life.
- Striving to treat the natural world not as a resource but rather as a beloved member of my family, and
- Actively resisting evil; and working nonviolently to abolish war and the causes of war from my own heart and from the face of the earth."

As the well-loved song puts it, "Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me." This vow is a means precisely toward this beginning.

It does seem to me that this call to nonviolence also applies to groups and nations. Peace in those realms hinges on all being in right relationship, all having a decent chance of getting their basic human rights protected and human needs met.

Peace and nonviolence in the realm of groups and nations is much trickier but profoundly needed nonetheless. Some ponderings:

- I don't know if our saying our country isn't as violent as other countries really makes a case for our being violent to do good or to try to curb evil actions of others.
- Wouldn't a call to be much less violent and less demanding of the resources (if not the sovereignty) of other countries make for a happier, less violent global community?
- Has our bombing and other military action in Iraq hurt or killed any civilian non-combatants?
- Has our country engaged in torture – as official policy or at least redefining the term? Torture victims coming to this country for refuge and some healing are now afraid – of us! Is this living nonviolently? We have actually taught military personnel from other countries how to torture at a special school in Fort Benning – which some concerned citizens want defunded and closed.
- Is our civilization the only real one or the only "best" one on this planet at this time?
- History seems to indicate that no country's control of anything lasts forever.
- Can we be true to our own professed national values – or are other groups in effect controlling us, tricking us into also acting sometimes like radical "Great Satans," keeping us from choosing to live by our values?

Relating less violently would indeed be different from life in this present time. It is quite hard to do but how can we not do it and still live?

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The Catholic Conference of Kentucky (CCK) is an agency of the Catholic Bishops of Kentucky, established in 1968. It speaks for the Church in matters of public policy, serves as liaison to government and the legislature, and coordinates communications and activities between the church and secular agencies. There are 406,000 Catholics in the Commonwealth. The Bishops of the four dioceses of KY constitute CCK's Board of Directors.