



ADVENT REFLECTIONS 2018

PATHS TO PEACE

Make me a channel of your peace.... St. Francis of Assisi

Peacemaking calls for courage, much more so than warfare. Only the tenacious say yes to encounter and no to conflict; yes to negotiations and no to hostilities; yes to respect for agreements and no to acts of provocation.

Pope Francis

Advent Reflections 2018: *Paths to Peace*

Directions for convener:

Note that Christmas is the day after the Fourth Sunday of Advent. I suggest you plan meetings accordingly. The suggested music is optional. If hymn words are used, borrow books if possible, to avoid printing copies. Only U.S. participants need pp. 9-10.

Create a centerpiece with a candle made of beeswax, soy, or another natural substance. (Paraffin is a petroleum product and causes pollution in its production.) Have a lighter. Convener lights this candle when silent reflection begins and extinguishes it at meeting's end.

Week One:

Suggested music for closing:

"Christ, Circle Round Us," Dan Schutte, Breaking Bread 2012 #55

"To Be In Your Presence," (2:17), Kathy Sherman, CSJ, The Heart Knows

Week Two:

Buy, rent, borrow, or prepare from this site — www.seescapes.com — Len Sroka's *Living Inside Out*.

Suggested music:

"Let the Valleys Be Raised," Dan Schutte, Breaking Bread 2012 #65

"Every Valley," Bob Dufford, SJ, Breaking Bread 2012 #74

Week Three:

Suggested music: "To Be In Your Presence" (2:17), Kathy Sherman, CSJ, The Heart Knows. Provide the words (and music, if needed) of "Make Me a Channel of Your Peace."

Week Four:

Suggested music: "Consciousness Waking" (4:14), Jan Novatka, Awakening Consciousness or other hymns on that album.

Allow time to socialize after each meeting.

Scripture is from E. H. Peterson's The Message.

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American Province of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus



Week One: *The Meaning of Peace*

I. Introduction

As needed, individuals introduce themselves. Each shares with the group feelings about Advent or treasured Advent customs. Settle any decisions concerning group meetings (e.g., timing? refreshments?). Convener prays aloud that all will deepen the Spirit's gift of peace this Advent.

Convener reads the Scripture excerpts:

He shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. (Jer. 33: 15)

Be on your guard. Don't let the sharp edge of your expectation get dulled by parties and drinking and shopping [and various distractions of pre-Christmas]. Otherwise that day [when God's reign is here] is going to take you by complete surprise. (Lk. 21: 34)

Reflect silently on this Scripture in light of our focus on peace. Take turns reading.



II. Input

We often refer to the Christ Child as the Prince of Peace. We exchange a sign of peace during Mass. When someone dies, we pray: May s/he rest in peace. We pray for peace in our world, our families, our selves. Nobel awards a Peace Prize. We assume that God's reign will be one of Peace on Earth. What are your feelings about the topic of peace? How do you respond to the two quotes on the cover page?

In the Hebrew Bible, “shalom” is translated “peace.” (The image here includes “shalom” in Arabic and Hebrew.) Shalom is about wholeness. Each part of us (e.g., cells, organs, systems) is a whole entity, working for the good of the whole. Each person is part of larger wholes. Ultimately we are integral parts of our interconnected, expanding creation. No one and no thing can be excised from that whole. “When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the Universe.” (John Muir) Justice demands that each be given its proper respect.

Note that shalom is not the absence of tension or even of conflict. Think how our Universe somehow began with an expansion of particles and light and the repeated transformation of these particles as they gave themselves to become the next generation of elements within evolution. Eventually supernovas exploded so that the remains could eventually become our solar system — and everything in it, including ourselves.

Death and conflict pervade creation, yet from the beginning, creation has kept in balance and harmony. Earth repaired disequilibriums whenever that was necessary. (E.g., when too much oxygen threatened the health of the atmosphere, Earth “invented” respiration to assure the presence of the right amount of carbon dioxide (CO₂) to foster life. This required time, even

eons.) We know from experience that we, too, can heal, though sufficient time must be allowed.

Others have shed light on the meaning of peace. Margaret Anna Cusack (foundress of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace in the 19th century), emphasized the biblical conception of peace not as the absence of hostility but as the establishment of right relationships based on justice. Pope Paul VI repeated this concept in his famous 1972 quote: "If you want peace, work for justice." The world awoke to yet another aspect of peace when Wangari Maathai won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004 because of her efforts to save the environment and plant trees, thus contributing to social and ecological justice. How would you explain that to someone who didn't understand?

What right relationships based on justice seem most needed in our personal lives, our groups, our nation, church, and Earth? How can justice bring peace to these issues? What difference happens when we use positive words rather than negative ones, e.g., "work for justice" instead of "war on poverty"?

As we ponder God's gift of Jesus and of peace this Advent, let's remember that "justice and righteousness" are needed to keep ourselves and the entire web of life whole/at peace. Any single thing we do for peace will affect many people, many other issues. As with the mobile (on right), touching any one part affects the whole. Butterfly wings flapping somewhere influence weather patterns elsewhere; stones cast into water result in ripples that extend and intersect. We cannot do *one* thing in our interconnected universe!



III. What is God saying to us?

Convener lights the candle. Reflect silently: The Scriptures tell us to "Be on your guard [be mindful]." Listen to the Spirit within. How do you feel called this week to become a peace- and justice-maker, whole-makers ecological-care-maker. Share if you wish after the silence.

IV. For Advent this week

Practice whatever you felt called to do. Prepare to share next week any follow-up insights you might have about peace, justice, and wholeness.

V. Closing

Dim lights as much as practical. Remember that the light of Christ is within each. Pass the large candle from one to another, allowing time for the group to look at the individual holding the candle and send blessings of shalom to him or her. After the candle is returned to the center, sing "Christ, Circle Round Us" or listen to "To Be In Your Presence" or another hymn of your choosing.

Extinguish the candle.

VI. Socialize

Week Two: *It's an Inside Job*

I. Introduction

Share experiences/insights relevant to Week One from the past week.

Convener prays for the Spirit of peace in the group and reads the Scripture:

You will be named by God forever the peace of justice, the glory of God's worship. (Baruch 5: 3)

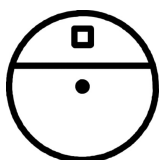
Prepare God's arrival! Make the road smooth and straight! Every ditch will be filled in, every bump smoothed out, the detours straightened out, all the ruts paved over (Lk. 3: 4-5)



Reflect silently on these readings. Then take turns reading.

II. Input

One “road” to prepare this Advent is to our innermost self. Dag Hammarskjöld said: “The longest journey is the journey inward.” Joseph Campbell showed Plato's soul-circle with a dot in the middle representing our center from which all energy comes (and where divinity abides). Above the dot he placed a horizontal line separating the conscious and unconscious.



Above the line he placed a square representing what we often think of as our true self, but that is only our ego. What helps you to feel centered and at peace? (e.g., nature, quiet prayer, music, Scripture, poetry)? Could you make more time for it during Advent? (Pause, but don't share.)

When considering the violence, lack of justice, isolation and separateness in our world and in many hearts, one recalls an old Chinese proverb: “Unless we change our direction, we'll end up where we are heading.” The flip side of that seems to be: Unless we know where we want to go, we won't know how to get there. Assuming we want to reach the goal of shalom as we discussed it last week [justice, wholeness, centeredness], what awareness needs deepening or expanding?

Dr. Ervin Laszlo, Creative Director, Global Peace Meditation and Prayer Day, writes: “We need to evolve our consciousness. This is possible, for human consciousness is not a permanent fixture: cultural anthropology testifies that it developed gradually in the course of millennia. In the thirty or fifty thousand year history of Homo sapiens the human body did not change significantly, but human consciousness did.” How has yours changed since childhood?

We know that creation has followed a trajectory towards more complexity and consciousness. As parts of this creation, we, too, develop this way. Mature people develop a sense of connectedness and accept the complexities of life. Especially as we deepen our awe and gratitude for the

mystery of life and the divine within it, "we begin to experience ourselves as part of creation . . . not separate from it." (Renewing the Earth, USCCB) This can bring the gift of a more peaceful spirit. When have you felt yourself "part of creation . . . not separate from it"? How did/does that effect/affect your inner peace?

Tending the road on our inward journey takes patience and continuing effort. These excerpts from a Prayer for World Peace (Iyanla Vanzant) might assist us:

" . . . Today, I am laying down all weapons of anger and attack in my thoughts, words, and actions. Today, I am laying down the grievances and upsets that have led me to attack others and brutally assault myself. . . . Today, I ask that you remind me how important I am in ensuring the active presence of peace. . . . Today, I humbly surrender myself . . . to the creation, maintenance, and advancement of peace"

III. What is God saying to us?

Convener lights the candle. Reflect silently: God helps us find peace through Jesus' life. When was it probably challenging for Jesus to maintain his peace? How did he develop this ability? What role might Mary have played? What can we learn from his example? Remember that Scripture events have transhistorical significance for believers. They can be contemplated as archetypes, leading us to a deeper level of belief. Share if you wish after the silence.

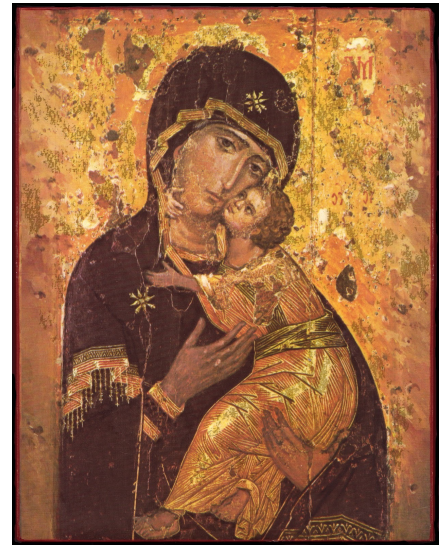
IV. For Advent this week

Make time to bring insights from this meeting to your efforts to smooth and straighten the road to your innermost self.

V. Closing

Watch "Living Outside Our Inside," the first segment (6 min.) of Len Sroka's Living Inside Out (www.seescapes.com). Share any one thought or insight that struck you as you watched. Extinguish the candle.

VI. Socialize



Week Three: *Obstacles Were Made to Be Transformed*

I. Introduction

Settle into your place of peace and wholeness. Share experiences/insights from the past week relevant to Week Two. Convener prays for the Spirit of peace to deepen in the group this week. Convener reads the Scripture:

From now on, God is Israel's king, in charge of the center. There's nothing to fear from evil ever again! . . . Your God is present among you . . . (Zeph. 3: 15, 17)

John intervened: "I'm baptizing you here in the river. The main character in this drama, to whom I am a mere stagehand, will ignite the kingdom of life, a fire, the Holy Spirit within you, changing you from the inside out. (Luke 3: 16)



Reflect silently on these readings. What helps you remember that the Spirit is with you, changing you from the inside out? Take turns reading.

II. Input

Note that Zephaniah does not say that there will be no evil, but that we have nothing to fear from evil because God is present. John the Baptizer was aware of many evils: Herod ruled maliciously and did evil deeds; Herodias (Herod's brother's wife) would ask for John's head on a platter; John urged the "brood of vipers," who came to be baptized, to repent their many failings.

We, too, are aware of evils — personal, family, local, church, national, and global — basic lack of respect; death of innocents; terrorism; military-industrial structures that benefit from conflict; climate disruption that damages our air, water, soil and thus all life; hunger, thirst, and disease that are major killers, especially of children; extinction of species that is greater now than at any time since the extinction of the dinosaurs; human slavery/ trafficking/abuse that is greater than at any time in recorded history; racism, sexism, intolerance of "others"; wars and the inhumanity resulting from them (budget imbalances, refugees, pollution, etc.). . . . In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis wrote: "War always does grave harm to the environment and to the cultural riches of peoples, risks which are magnified when one considers nuclear arms and biological weapons." (par. 57) Do these and other evils threaten your peace of heart?

Inner peace is possible not just in spite of, but sometimes because of, these conflicts. Sometimes people only turn to the Divine Presence within when things are most difficult. People feel called to form bonds through advocacy, education, prayer, demonstrations, new "social inventions," and creative nonviolent actions to stop injustice.

Not everyone is called to act in the same way, though one universal call is to pray. "The beginning of all peace work is prayer," says Shawn Storer, director of the Catholic Peace

Fellowship. Beyond that, moral dilemmas are often involved; people can disagree about effective actions and responses. We need not answer for others' methods. The question is not: Why does s/he do that? but: What am *I* doing for peacemaking?

Love can enable us to change the situation from the inside out by our attitude. Albert Einstein said: "No problem can be solved from [using] the consciousness that created it." For example, some problems like racism, sexism, greed, excessive nationalism, and individualism began when peoples were not aware of how interconnected creation is. Our brains functioned using separations and "us-them" consciousness — judging "us" to be superior.

Choose a problem caused by one of those mindsets, and apply Einstein's insight to suggest solutions. For example, what transformation in consciousness is already helping to change the mindset that caused it? What change in consciousness is needed to eliminate it?

December 21, the winter solstice, starts the gradual increase of daylight in the Northern Hemisphere. It's one of the reasons that Christians (in the third and fourth centuries) chose December 25th to celebrate Christ's birth. During Advent we light candles, reminding us to effect changes from within: igniting the kingdom of life, a fire . . . changing [us] from the inside out. Our consciousness affects universal consciousness and the continuing evolution of creation!

III. What is God saying to us?

Convener lights the candle. Reflect silently on this quote from the Catholic Bishops' The Challenge of Peace (1983): "Peacemaking is not an optional commitment. It is a requirement of our faith. We are called to be peacemakers, not by some movement of the moment, but by our Lord Jesus." No one said it would be easy! Share if you wish after the silence.

IV. For Advent this week

Choose any one issue in the news this week that upsets you. Grieve for suffering humanity and Mother Earth. Consider what mindset caused these affronts to creation. What mindset would help to change it? Remember: *Your God is present among you* to empower us to be part of the solution.

V. Closing

U. S. participants, read pp. 9 - 10 silently. When most have finished, share anything that struck you that related directly to what we've been considering about Advent and peace-making. When the group has finished sharing, sing or say together: "Make Me a Channel of Your Peace."

Other participants can read those pages, too, of course, or share what you know about Pope Francis' teachings and how he has contributed to peace-making. When the group has finished sharing, sing or say together: "Make Me a Channel of Your Peace."
Extinguish the candle.

VI. Socialize.

No more will nation fight nation....

Note: The point of pages 9-10 is religious, not political.

It is difficult to find accurate information on nuclear and conventional weapons and amounts spent building and caring for them. The following numbers are from Statistics Portal (which checks more than 22,500 sources): In 2017 the highest military spender in the world was the **United States, at \$610 billion. China spent \$228 billion, followed by Saudi Arabia (\$69,4 billion), Russia (\$66,3 billion), and India (\$63,9 billion).** Billions can be hard to conceptualize. How many millions are in this number: 610,000,000,000?

The atomic bombings at Hiroshima, Japan, August 6, 1945, and at Nagasaki just three days later, resulted in destruction that made accurate counting impossible, but in the first four months after the two bombings, about 225,000 men, women, and children perished (plus animals and all plants). These bombs left behind radioactive waste that causes genetic mutations and cancers to this day.



One hydrogen bomb is thousands of times deadlier than an atomic bomb (20,000 tons of TNT vs. 10,000,000 tons of TNT). Considering the damage guaranteed by a single hydrogen bomb, what country needs more than one for its national security? Former United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon sums up the situation: “The world is over-armed and peace is under-funded . . . there are over 20,000 nuclear weapons around the world. Many of them are still on hair-trigger alert, threatening our own survival.”

The cost of President Trump’s 30-year makeover of America’s nuclear arsenal is estimated by government sources to be \$1.2 trillion. This includes the nation’s nuclear weapons, bombers, missiles and submarines. The figures released by the Congressional Budget Office, October. 31, 2017, noted that this figure did not account for inflation, which independent experts estimate would drive the total figure to more than \$1.6 trillion. (How many millions in that?)

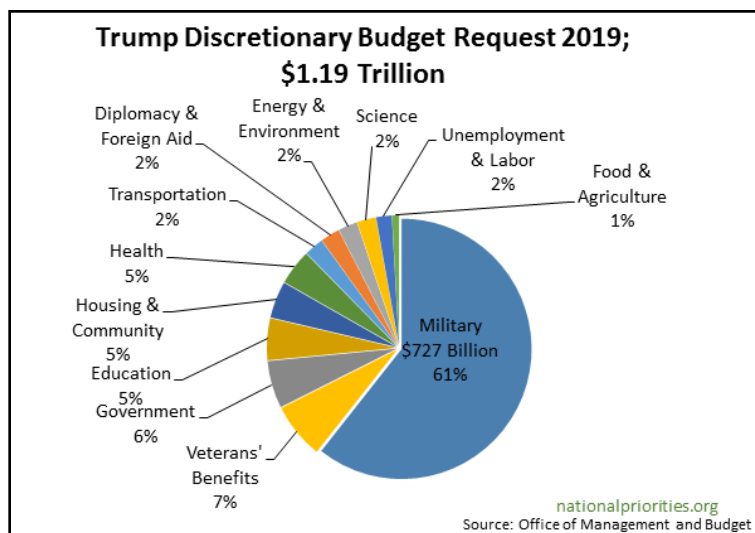


The readings for the Third Sunday in Advent include readings from Isaiah. Earlier in Isaiah is a famous passage (here in Peterson's translation) that calls for transforming weapons to life-enhancing alternatives:

“They'll turn their swords into shovels, their spears into hoes. No more will nation fight nation, they won't play war games any more.” (Isaiah 2: 4)

Years ago, Richard McSorley, S.J., said: "The taproot of violence in our society today is our intent to use nuclear weapons . . . all other evil is minor in comparison." McSorley once told a student newspaper: "To be a Christian means to have respect for life in all its forms and in today's nuclear age, that means Christians must become active witnesses for peace and must firmly oppose all forms of war." Martin Luther King, Jr., agreed: "A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death." These weapons, even if not used, could never be part of a life lived in imitation of Jesus, who spoke and lived a message of peace and love and forgiveness.

Here's a chart of Pres. Trump's request for Fiscal Year 2019, using facts from the Office of Management and Budget of the U.S. Government:



A focus on Jesus the Peacemaker will help us penetrate specious arguments like, e.g., we need jobs in the military-industrial complex. David Cortright, director of policy studies at Notre Dame's Kroc Institute for International Studies, wrote in 2012: "Over the decades more than two dozen countries have considered but then decided not to develop or maintain nuclear weapons capability. In almost every instance, *countries were persuaded to give up the bomb*

because of improved political and economic conditions or in response to security assurances and financial incentives.... " (emphasis added).

In a time of unprecedented local and global economic, environmental, and political upheaval resulting in poverty, climate/war refugees and destruction, and deterioration of life systems (water, air, soil) from weapons use and war, and in light of the Cortright quote above, how could we better deal with other countries? How else could we allocate our taxes? What jobs that contribute to the common good and the development of peace could be created to employ former military industry workers?

If time remains after reading these two pages, read again from the vantage point of people in need.

(FYI: Lead to Life is a group dedicated to turning weapons into shovels used for gardens and planting trees. See www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/lead-to-life-guns-shovels.)

Week Four: *Mary, Blessed and Peaceful Woman*

I. Introduction

Convener prays aloud that all will be attentive to the Spirit within all creation. Listen to "Consciousness Waking" and settle into your centered place of shalom. Remember your interconnectedness with all creation. Convener reads the Scripture excerpts:

His family tree is ancient and distinguished . . . and the people will have a good and safe home, for the whole world will hold him in respect — Peacemaker of the world! (Mic. 5: 3-4) Mary didn't waste a minute. She got up and traveled . . . Blessed woman, who believed what God said. (Luke 1: 39, 45)

Share your feelings about Mary's inner peace.
Then take turns reading.

II. Input

We usually think of Jesus' family tree as reaching back through humanity. That's true, but humanity, too, has an ancient and distinguished lineage. No one knew it 2000 years ago, but we now know that Earth dates back 13.8 billion years. Thanks to the destruction of stars (supernovas) in the Milky Way Galaxy, our star/sun was born from these explosions about 4.5 billion years ago. Earth formed, followed by atmosphere, oceans, and continents. Everything we now know started from stardust and is interconnected.



We usually think of "home" as the building where we live, or lived, with our family. That is true, but we are increasingly aware that Earth is our home because all life is our family. How might realizing these truths increase peace/justice this Christmas? How might it affect consciousness about nationalism, racism, sexism, etc.?

Mary had to believe that the major questions raised by her pregnancy would somehow be resolved. Things we think of as obstacles to personal peace — such as disapproval and possible rejection by family and friends, potentially broken relationships, questions of raising the baby, economic uncertainty — remained for Mary. Once she had an answer to ***But how?*** her ***I'm ready to serve*** was given with shalom, a word that would have been familiar to her.

No one else will ever experience that presence the way Mary did. And yet, we too believe that divine life — Love and Peace incarnate — is within us and all others, “deserving” by our standards or not. Whatever problems face us, we possess the same Mystery and Gift. Unlike the rest of creation, we humans can be consciously grateful for the divine presence, rejoice in it, and

call upon Incarnate Peace within when we experience inner troubles and/or are distressed by the pains of others and of our world.

Michael Morwood, having watched a ballet, reflected on the beauty he experienced. He gives us this insight about art: "[These artists] did not add anything to the universe . . . Rather, the universe found a way through them to give expression to itself." What do you think he meant? How does this apply to Mary, and to us, as we strive to create peace?

Many things that threaten peace are notably not artful. Climate change results in human and ecological devastation. Mountaintop mining and drilling for gas and oil destroy the beauty of forests, fields, and farms. They pollute water, soil, and air and can be painfully noisy. War creates destruction and leaves not just death but also scars of ugliness for every sense. For those who believe the divine is present everywhere, this ugliness is a desecration.

Like Mary, we believe the Peacemaker is now present within us, within all creation, and uniquely within the elements of bread and wine in the Eucharist. "The divine has located itself in a material milieu. This aspect of the sacrament [of Eucharist] might become even more evident by adverting to its indebtedness to soil and grain and wheat and vines and grapes and the labors of bread-and-wine makers. . . ." John Haughey [hoi], S.J. "[T]he Christian people, in giving thanks to God through the Eucharist, should be conscious that they do so in the name of all creation, aspiring to the sanctification of the world and working intensely to that end" Pope Benedict XVI, *The Sacrament of Love*. How could we deepen this awareness during Mass?

III. What is God saying to us?

Convener lights the candle. Reflect silently: When we give gifts at Christmas, we hope they will be accepted and cared for. God has given us the gift of scientific and faith awareness that we are one and that Incarnate Peace dwells within each of us. Perhaps God wants us to imitate the way Mary *held these things dearly, deep within herself*. (Luke 2:51)

IV. For Advent this week

Because Christmas falls on Monday, there is no Fourth Week of Advent this year. During Christmas season, let's remember that our every effort to develop Jesus' gift of peace within us is like moving one part of a mobile: it affects and transforms not just ourselves, but also others, even the consciousness of creation!

V. Closing

Evaluation: What word(s) sum(s) up this four-week experience for you. Why?

Share the Peace of Christ with one another, remembering its presence in one's self, recognizing it in one another, and consciously wishing it to increase in them and everywhere.
Extinguish the candle.

VI. Socialize.