2026 Conference
on
Unarmed and Disarming Peace:
the Church's Emerging Paradigm Shift
to Gospel Nonviolence

Conference Goal:

- *To highlight, encourage, and contribute to the emerging focus on Gospel nonviolence in Catholic life, teaching and practice, including the pontificate of Pope Leo XIV;*
- *To offer concrete examples of active nonviolence, as well as research and theological reflection on nonviolence, to clarify this emerging paradigm.*

Conference Guiding Questions:

- *What does Pope Leo mean by 'unarmed and disarming peace'?*
- *What does it mean for Gospel nonviolence to be at the center of Catholic life, teaching and practice and what might be the challenges to centering nonviolence?*
- *What practices of nonviolence are most effective and for which contexts?*
- *What would a new paradigm of Catholic nonviolence look like and how can a shift to a new paradigm be facilitated?*
- *How can "legitimate defense" be framed under this emerging paradigm?*

Wednesday, September 9
Pope Leo's Vision of Unarmed and Disarming Peace: Toward a Paradigm of Nonviolence

8:00 Registration Open

9:00 Opening Prayer/Welcome
Marie Dennis, Co-Director, Catholic Institute for Nonviolence

Introduction - Goals of the conference/background
Nicolas Paz, Director Catholic Nonviolence Initiative

9:30 Overview of Pope Leo's teaching on peace and nonviolence
Ken Butigan, PhD., DePaul University, emeritus, Co-Director, Catholic Institute for Nonviolence

9:45 Keynote: Cardinal Charles Bo, Myanmar (by video)

10:15 Break

10:30 Session 1. Nonviolence in Municipality of Caicedo, Colombia during the War

- Laura Villanueva, PhD, Founder & Director, Satoyama for Peace: Ecosystems for Peace and Reconciliation - introduction to the experience of the Caicedo Community
- David Cochran, PhD, Professor of Politics, Loras College - research on the futility of war
- Martha Ines Romero, Secretary General, Pax Christi International - role of the Catholic Church promoting nonviolence during the armed conflict in Colombia

After 40 minutes the facilitator will invite two more participants to join the conversation, contributing insights, questions, differences, or discernment that advance the shared inquiry about nonviolent strategies in contexts of war.

- John Ashworth, Church worker in Sudan and South Sudan since 1983 - experience of the role of nonviolence and the Church in Sudan/South Sudan during years of war & violence
- Belen Garrido, PhD, Executive Director, Regional Institute for the Study and Practice of Strategic Nonviolent Action in the Americas – examples of nonviolent strategies used in other countries/contexts of war

11:45 Nonviolent Practice Presentation: *Civilian Based Defense*
Martí Olivella I Solé, author, co-founder of International Institute of Active Nonviolence (NOVACT)

12:30 Lunch

1:30 Plenary: *The Global Significance of the Catholic Church's Embrace of Gospel Nonviolence*
Maria Stephan, PhD, Catholic Institute for Nonviolence Advisory Council, renowned researcher on strategic nonviolence

2:15 Session 2. *Migration and Active Nonviolence in the Context of Democratic Backsliding*

- Leo Guardado, PhD, theologian, Fordham University - migration itself as nonviolent action - role of the Church on sanctuary
- Emilia Gonzalez Avalos, Executive Director of Unidos MN - What nonviolent strategies were tried and successful or not in Minnesota during ICE attacks

- Consuelo Amat, PhD, Political Scientist, Johns Hopkins University - role of minorities in nonviolent resistance

After 45 minutes the facilitator will invite others to join the conversation.

3:30 Break

3:45 Nonviolent Practice Expert Presentation: *Unarmed Civilian Protection (UCP)*
Amira Musallam, Head of Mission, Unarmed Civilian Protection in Palestine
Mel Duncan, Founding Executive Director, Nonviolent Peaceforce

4:30 Session 3. *Implementing a Commitment to Gospel Nonviolence in Contexts of Everyday, Structural and Cultural Violence*, Maryknoll Lay Missioners:

- Julie Lawler, Maryknoll Deaf Development Programme, Phnom Penh. Cambodia
- Heidi Cerneka JD, Migration, Women and Human Trafficking Project – Las Americas Immigrant Advocacy Center**,** El Paso; and Instituto Terra, Trabalho e Cidadania (ITTC), São Paulo, Brazil
- Dan Moriarty, Senior Program Officer, P*eace and Nonviolence Program with the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns*

After 45 minutes the facilitator will invite other participants to join the conversation.

5:30 Reflection on the First Day - Small groups (by language)

6:30 Ritual/Evening Prayer

7:15 Break and Dinner

8:30 Meeting of Catholic Institute for Nonviolence Associates

Thursday, September 10
Catholic Peace Ethics: Realizing a Nonviolent Paradigm in an Increasingly Violent World

8:30 Opening Prayer/Reflection
Message from Pope Leo XIV (Archbishop Giovanni Ricchiuti)

8:45 Plenary: *Recovering the Doctrine of Gospel Nonviolence: Jesus, the Sermon on the Mount, and Pope Leo's teaching that 'The power with which Christ rose is entirely nonviolent'*
Rev. John Dear, author, Founding Director, The Beatitudes Center

9:15 Session 4. Contextual Example: *Nonviolent Strategies to Protect the Land, Water, Culture*

- Daoud Nassar, farmer, Tent of Nations, educational and ecological family farm, Palestine
- Sr. Maamalifar Poreku, MSOLA, Executive Co-Secretary of the UISG-USG Commission for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation
- Eliane Lakam, Global Policy & Partnerships Specialist, Taproot Earth
- Divina Gekong, PhD , Professor of Theology and Peace, St. Paul's University, Kenya

After 45 minutes the facilitator will invite others to join the conversation,

10:30 Break

10:45 Plenary: *Heralding a Paradigm Shift toward Nonviolence*
Carlos Eduardo Martinez Hincapié, PhD, Colombia, *educator, co-founder of Benposta Nación de los Muchachos. Member of the Movimiento Ciudadano por la Noviolencia in Colombia*

11:30 Session 5. *"Legitimate Defense"* and the *Nonviolence Paradigm*

- Sr. Wamuyu Wachira, PhD, Co-President, Pax Christi International, St. Paul's University Kenya – what are we defending?
- Eli McCarthy, PhD, author, Lecturer, Department of Theology and Religious Studies, Georgetown University - pastoral task, dignity and nonviolent defense
- Wolfgang Palaver, PhD, Professor emeritus, Catholic Social Thought, University of Innsbruck - legitimate defense and nonviolence
- David Kwon, PhD, Associate Professor, Department of Theology and Religious Studies, Seattle University - rethinking legitimate defense: defending the conditions of just peace

After 60 minutes the facilitator will invite others to join the conversation

1:00 Lunch

2:00 Plenary: *What would it mean for Gospel nonviolence to move to the center of Catholic teaching and practice? What would it mean for Gospel nonviolence to be explicitly incorporated into Catholic social teaching?*
Cardinal Robert McElroy (by video)

2:30 Session 6. Moving Nonviolence to the Heart of the Catholic Church (I)

- Gerald Schlabach, PhD, Professor Em, Department of Theology, University of St. Thomas, MN - Church unity as strategic peacebuilding. If you want peace, work for Church unity.

- Jeanette Rodriguez, PhD, Professor, Department of Theology and Religious Studies, Seattle University. - interior disarmament/nonviolence as spiritual discipline- psycho-social dimension
- Anna Blackman, PhD, Lecturer, University of Glasgow - interior disarmament/nonviolence as spiritual discipline - pedagogies and prayer
- Pietro Ameglio, PhD, Social Activist and Professor of Peace and Nonviolence Culture, National University, Mexico - How can be the Catholic Church be prophetic in a world with such high levels of violence, wars and inhumanity?

3:30 Break

3:45 Session 7. Moving Nonviolence to the Heart of the Catholic Church (II)

- Michael Duffey, Ph.D., Associate Professor Em of Theology, Marquette University – cultivating nonviolence in parish life
- Jean Baptiste Talla, Catholic Relief Services
- Margaret Pfiel, PhD, Assistant Professor of Moral Theology, University of Notre Dame
- Scaria Kalloor. OFM Cap, Director, JPIC Commission of Capuchin Order (invited)
- Terrence Rynne, PhD, Founder, Center for Peace, Marquette University

4:45 Small Groups/Open Space Process on Different Dimensions of Gospel Nonviolence at the Center of Catholic Church Life and Teaching

6:00 "Nonviolent Church for a Nonviolent World"

6:30 Closing Mass

7:30 Dinner