



PRAYERS

Sisters of Mercy's Critical Concerns Through the Lens of Nonviolence

The Sisters of Mercy were founded out of a deep concern for persons who are poor. Today, that commitment is focused in five “critical concerns” that we address through prayer; attention to personal, communal and institutional choices; education; advocacy with legislators and other government leaders; and corporate engagement.

These Critical Concerns are focused on nonviolence, immigration, women, care of earth, and racism.

We believe these areas of critical concern are all interconnected and what affects one also affects the others as part of the web of life's connections. At one time we may have a more concentrated focus on one but a closer look allows us to see how each hinges on the other and forms a whole.

The prayers and reflection pieces to follow view Mercy's Critical Concerns using the lens of nonviolence.

We invite everyone to use these resources and to share with others.

Introduction

We live in a culture that is becoming more and more violent. Every day we read or hear about violence taking place. On the news we see graphic scenes of violence while news anchors deliver the messages as if they are reading a restaurant menu. Quickly they move on to the next item. All too often we may find ourselves moving on to the next thing as well. We, too, it seems, have become accustomed to such reports.

What does this culture of violence say to us and demand of us as women and friends of Mercy? What kind of witness do we bear to a culture different from this one? How are we contributing to the shaping of a different reality? How do we create a culture of peace, together?

Contemplation and nonviolence are inextricably connected:

Contemplation offers us an intuition of the oneness we have with one another in God: the intuition of a oneness that underlies our superficial differences. This intuition of necessity begets nonviolence, which is simply living that oneness in everyday life. Moreover, it is not just that contemplation leads us to nonviolence; the practice of nonviolence at the same time deepens the contemplative perspective. It removes the destructive forces that tend to divide us, and thus it makes the unity we have with all our sisters and brothers shine all the brighter. We begin to live a spirituality that is both contemplative and nonviolent.

'Seeds of Peace' William H. Shannon, Crossroads Publishing, 1996

We are living in an exciting time, and the dawning of a new consciousness. We have reached a point in the evolutionary process where we have come to see our relationships in an entirely new way. We are slowly realizing that we are not separate but are part of a much bigger universe. Our choices make a difference. This new understanding of who we are and who we are called to be engenders a heightened state of consciousness of human solidarity. This may well be God's gift and call to us to live differently.

The scripts we have received from our culture are often about power and dominance. We have all been fed on this for generations. Now the tide is turning toward a new world order of interdependence and solidarity. We are being invited to design and write new scripts for our culture. These new and exciting scripts are about cooperation, nonviolence, transformation. How will we understand, participate, engage, and transform our culture to one of peace?

Creating a culture of peace and nonviolence must begin with each individual person. Contemplation of God's merciful, unconditional love is a good place to begin. We can ask ourselves... How have I responded to that transformative love? How will I pour this same gift outward on others and the world?



Personal Nonviolence



Opening Prayer

Leader: O God of Compassion and Peace bless us with an awareness of your presence with us as we gather together in this space.

All: O Compassionate, peaceful God, we are grateful for your presence and ask to be open and receptive to your call to be nonviolent.

Reading: Isaiah 11:6-9 *The Wolf and the Lamb*

The wolf will dwell with the lamb,
and the leopard will lie down with the young goat;
the calf and the lion cub will graze together,
and a little child will lead them.
The cow will feed with the bear;
their young will lie down together.
The lion will eat hay like the ox,
The baby will play next to the den of the cobra,
and the toddler will dance over the viper's nest.
There will be no harm, no destruction
anywhere in my holy mountain,
for as water fills the sea,
so the land will be filled with the knowledge of Yahweh.

Reflection:

This reading presents almost an unbelievable, unreal picture of a possibility. Could it ever happen that the wolf and lamb would share the same space without aggression?
Would a toddler dance over a viper's nest?

What do you think is the meaning of this reading from Isaiah?

Does this passage hold any message for me? If so, what might it be?

Sharing:

Each one is invited to share whatever she/he wishes about the concept or idea of nonviolence. You may want to share your own growing consciousness of nonviolence in your life and personal interactions.

Possible Actions:

Spend some time exploring the lives of those who have embraced nonviolence as a lifestyle, for example: Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr. Sojourner Truth, Dorothy Day, Dorothy Stang, Women Martyrs of El Salvador, Oscar Romero.

Think about the language you use every day. Are there words or phrases that have violent overtones. (“I could kill her...” going ballistic, using bullet points in a presentation instead of focus points, etc?) Consider other ways of expressing these thoughts using nonviolent language.

Make a commitment to learn more about the theology and practice of nonviolence.

Determine to be nonviolent with yourself by not putting yourself down, by taking time for your own personal space and time for relaxation.

Consider the many issues of our world that are all embedded in violence: human trafficking, gun violence, extractive industries, domestic abuse, and war. Make a commitment to learn about one of these issues and engage in action (letter writing, phone call to legislators, petitions, editorials, demonstrations, lobby visit) to raise awareness and work to bring about change.

Closing Prayer:

O God, of Mercy and Compassion, open our heart to your grace. We ask You to:

Bless us with courage to embrace nonviolence in our everyday lives

Bless us with vision to seek alternatives when violence appears as the only solution

Encourage us to look deeply at our own complicity that allows violence to continue in our own hearts and in our world

Bless us with insight to see the roots of violence inherent in Mercy's Critical Concerns

Bless us with the tenacity to stay committed to the struggle to shape a more peaceful, nonviolent world for all your people

O good and gracious God, source of all life,
all creation is charged with your Divine Energy.
Grant us the strength and courage, we pray,
for a radical transformation of own lives and a
deeper realization of your Kin-dom among us. Amen



Nonviolence and Immigration



Opening Prayer

Leader: O God of Compassion and Peace bless us with an awareness of your presence with us as we gather together in this space.

All: O Compassionate, peaceful God, we are grateful for your presence and ask to be open and receptive to your call to be nonviolent.

Reading:

A vagrant, a destitute wanderer with dusty feet, finds his way down a new road. A homeless God, lost in the night, without papers, without identification, without even a number, a frail expendable exile lies down in desolation under the sweet stars of the world and entrusts Himself to sleep.

Thomas Merton, "Hagia Sophia" IV Sunset, The Hour of Compline, Salve, Collected Poems, p. 369

Have you ever been surrounded by darkness, unable to see and perhaps feeling a bit fearful? Did your heart race, your hands perspire and your thoughts become confused? Many of our immigrant brothers and sisters live this scenario every day. Homeless, without papers, without identification-- they are forced to live in the shadows due to a broken and punitive immigration system.

Those who have come to our shores are people much like our own families. They are mothers and fathers looking for a better way of life and an opportunity to educate their children, put food on the table and contribute their gifts and talents. For many, access to the United States was encouraged because we had employment opportunities we were unable to fill with American workers. These new immigrants work in the food service industries and meat packing plants while others secure jobs as nannies or gardeners. Now, we are saying "No, you have lived here, contributed to our society, performed services but you cannot become citizens." This is an injustice that needs to be addressed.

We can all relate to moments of darkness, the time before the first rays of light penetrated our sorrow or despair. Do you remember what it was like when the darkness lifted? How did it feel to experience the light and to see the brightness and to no longer have to abide in the shadows?

Reflection: Our faith calls us to “welcome the stranger.” In what ways does this call resound for me in my own personal attitudes and response to the issues of immigration/migration?

Think about a time when you have been alienated or not included. What did that feel like? How might those desperately fleeing from their homelands feel when they are treated as aliens and not treated as human beings with dignity and respect?

What in me resists welcoming the immigrant?

In what way is violence connected to the immigrants need to flee their own countries?

In what way do I need to open my heart to nonviolence when considering this issue?

Sharing: Each one is invited to share his/her reflections. Be conscious of the aspects of violence that may be causing people to immigrate.

Possible Actions:

Make a commitment to read a variety of sources to obtain a balanced view of the issues surrounding immigration.

Learn about some of the issues that are forcing people to flee their lands:

- Corporations setting up business and paying an unjust, unlivable wage
- Oppression of the people through military means
- Corruption at all levels of public life
- Drug Cartels
- Gang violence
- Seizure of campesinos' land

Examine how United States policies have influenced many aspects of Immigration

Encourage Congress to pass comprehensive immigration reform that is compassionate and just. Call for a path to citizenship and family reunification.

Sponsor an event, retreat, gathering to inform people and to pray for a change in the system of immigration.

Closing Prayer:

O God, of Mercy and Compassion, open our heart to your grace. We ask You to:

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Encourage us to look deeply at our own complicity that allows violence to continue in our own hearts and in our world

Bless us with insight to see the roots of violence inherent in Mercy's Critical Concerns

Bless us with the tenacity to stay committed to the struggle to shape a more peaceful, nonviolent world for all your people

O good and gracious God, source of all life,
all creation is charged with your Divine Energy.
Grant us the strength and courage, we pray,
for a radical transformation of own lives and a
deeper realization of your Kin-dom among us. Amen



Nonviolence and Women



Opening Prayer

Leader: O God of Compassion and Peace bless us with an awareness of your presence with us as we gather together in this space.

All: O Compassionate, peaceful God, we are grateful for your presence and ask to be open and receptive to your call to be nonviolent.

Reading: "Above all be the heroine of your life, not the victim."

--Nora Ephron

To say that throughout the world young girls and women have been treated poorly is an understatement! Discrimination, disrespect, abuse and violence are too often what they must face with little or no recourse.

Women face genital mutilation, domestic violence, arranged marriages and young girls are sold into slavery. Women in war torn countries fear for their families lives; other women struggle to keep their families together, put food on the table, keep a roof over their heads while working long hours for a minimum wage unable to meet even basic human needs. Some are denied education while others spend long days laboring in sweatshops.

Yet, amid it all many do more than survive. Clothed with remarkable courage, unwavering determination, strong wills, and incredible resiliency, women have survived and even thrived despite these unjust and dehumanizing situations. They have refused to become victims and in so doing they teach us all what it means to be strong and struggle for change, never giving in to this injustice.

Mercy's Critical Concern of women challenges us to stand side by side in solidarity with our sisters and to speak up and act to change systems and structures which oppress women. We pray that our own commitment will reflect the same courage, strength and determination we have witnessed by through these women, our sisters.

Reflection:

What in our systems and structures has contributed to this disrespect, disregard and abuse of women?

Are there ways in which I may be unknowingly contributing to the perpetration of this violence, perhaps by not speaking up when I see other women being disrespected?

What are the messages that I model or reinforce for the young girls and women I come in contact with in my daily life?

What one thing can I do personally to raise awareness about this issue?

Sharing: Each one is invited to share his/her reflections and responses to the impact of violence against women in its many forms. Many instances of violence are more subtle than those mentioned in the reading. Are you aware of other forms of violence against women? How might you respond to change the situation?

Possible Actions:

Read and become more informed about some issue of violence against women and then make a commitment to act or advocate for change.

Join or support an organization that advocates for effective and comprehensive responses to violence against women and girls.

Educate yourself about the United Nations Documents that address the human rights of women and girls.

Mentor a girl or young woman.

Be a role model and support and encourage girls and women.

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Nonviolence and Racism



Opening Prayer

Leader: O God of Compassion and Peace bless us with an awareness of your presence with us as we gather together in this space.

All: O Compassionate, peaceful God, we are grateful for your presence and ask to be open and receptive to your call to be nonviolent.

Reading: Literature has often spoken of dreams. Martin Luther King, Jr. eloquently shared his dream in his famous speech at the Lincoln Memorial in 1963; Langston Hughes in his poem, “A Dream Deferred” asks what happens to a dream deferred? Does it dry up or does it explode? A segregated educational system left many desiring a quality education but their dreams were deferred. Even when schools gradually became desegregated, inequalities were still glaring. The young, who held dreams of an education in a system free of racial slurs and taunts where they did not have to fear for her life, still had an unrealized dream as they were met with hatred.

Most of us will never have to face the humiliating situations and staggering injustices borne by our sisters and brothers of color. And let us not think that this is a thing of the past. Racism today often expresses itself in more subtle ways that are just as insidious.

Sisters of Mercy share many dreams about our future together. One such dream is our desire to address “the unrecognized and unreconciled racism” present in our own systems and structures. If we are serious about this challenge then we must work to make this dream a reality. We are called to examine our own prejudices and discriminatory actions but our task is much deeper. We must look seriously at our own institutional racism and acknowledge our own complicity both individually and communally in oppressive systems and structures.

The dream cannot be deferred any longer. The injustice cannot continue. Holding each other in compassion and prayer we move forward on our journey together.

Reflection: Have you ever had to defer a dream? What did it feel like to experience? Was there fear connected to this experience in any way?

Have you ever been the object of hatred, prejudice or discrimination? What were the circumstances and how did you respond?

Sharing: Each one is invited to share his/her reflections on racism.

Be conscious of not just looking at personal prejudice and discrimination. Delve deeper into the institutional racism which affects us all.

Look at ways in which you may be benefiting from this structure at the expense of people of color.

Possible Actions:

Read and study to better understand the difference between prejudice or discrimination and racism.

If you are a Sister of Mercy or Mercy Associate, attend a racism workshop offered by the Institute Anti-Racism Transformation Team.

Be aware of stereotypes and work against being influenced by them.

Be conscious of ways in which people of color are presented in the media. If the depiction is unfavorable, consider contacting the TV station, the advertiser or the company responsible to register your disfavor.

Do not engage in racist jokes or stories. If you are present when this occurs, try addressing it in a way that does not escalate conflict but that speaks to your personal experience which may differ from that of those sharing the story. Be careful not to make a judgment or say anything dismissive of the person telling the story.

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Nonviolence and Earth



Opening Prayer

Leader: O God of Compassion and Peace bless us with an awareness of your presence with us as we gather together in this space.

All: O Compassionate, peaceful God, we are grateful for your presence and ask to be open and receptive to your call to be nonviolent.

Reading: What Must We Do?

Our situation as humans on planet Earth presents us with both crisis and opportunity. Awareness of our planetary crisis can spur us to do the kind of rethinking that can open new vistas in our minds and hearts. And those new vistas will, hopefully, inspire in us a renewed sense of commitment to place our individual and group energies at the service of the forward movement of life on planet Earth. How might we summarize what we know? Here are some of the factors...

We know that our planet is ailing because of our human lack of care and that the human species is collectively engaging in behaviors that risk not only our own self-destruction but the destruction of millions (even billions) of years of Earth's life-giving creativity.

We know that we are in a transitional time, in terms of both psychological and cultural development. We have a new global awareness of the interdependence of the whole community of life on planet Earth which will require changes in both our thinking and behaviors.

We know that as we begin to integrate a new cosmological and evolutionary perspective into our spirituality, we must rethink who we are and who God is. We must find new language, new ways of conceptualizing and imaging, new "fingers to point to the moon."

Knowing the vast, fathomless reaches of outer space, we also know the real impossibility of *containing* God in human thought or language and of accurately naming God. But we also know the importance of the revelation of our Christian tradition which centers upon the truth of God's incarnation and points us toward human participation in God's creative dynamic of dying and rising with and in the whole creation. We can experience, speak of, celebrate and participate in God's presence in human flesh and in the future life of our planet.

This revelation can inspire us and guide us with the wisdom we need to address the urgency of our planetary crisis.

We know that, while understanding and relating differently to the world and our own human existence is urgently *required of us*, making these changes has far-reaching implications, is difficult and may contain risks.

'Making the Shift' by Elaine M. Prevallet, SL (used with permission)

Reflection:

What are the opportunities presented to me by this new consciousness?

How have I responded to this new planetary awareness?

What are the risks inherent in responding to this new revelation of the cosmos?

What personal changes am I willing to make in order to preserve Earth?

Sharing:

Each one is invited to share his/her reflections about responding to the new understanding of the cosmos.

Consider what may be being asked of you at this time in history in order to preserve Earth for future generations.

What responsibilities are you feeling?

Possible Actions:

Read additional materials about the emerging cosmos.

Assess personal use of Earth's resources and consider ways of being a good steward of creation.

Choose to engage in an action (letter writing, lobby visit, demonstration, workshop, presentation) related to some aspect of caring for Earth. Some examples include: fracking, climate change, genetically modified organisms (GMO), privatization of water, organic foods, etc. The list is unlimited so choose something that you are passionate about and make a difference!

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