

Shalom!

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Pursuing Peace in a World of Conflict

THE CALL TO peacemaking is a key focus of my Christian faith. I fully embrace the pursuing peace core value of the Brethren in Christ: “We value all human life, and promote forgiveness, understanding, reconciliation, and nonviolent resolution of conflict.” Just because I believe and am committed to practicing it, however, doesn’t mean I never have questions.

The war in Ukraine has raised these questions again—the same questions people asked during World War II and more recent conflicts in places like Syria, Congo, Rwanda, Bosnia, and elsewhere. When people are being mercilessly killed or fleeing their homes, perhaps never to return, what can or should we do to stop the violence? It’s tempting to want to support military intervention to stop the violence; it’s tempting to hope for Hitler, Slobadon Milosovic, or Putin to be destroyed.

And yet, and yet. . . . Violence usually begets more violence, and Jesus told us that we are to love our enemies. Do enemies include those who are responsible for horrific violence and the death of hundreds, thousands, even millions of innocent people for no good reason? What does that look like? How do we pursue peace right now as Russia rains down violence and terror on the Ukrainian people and as NATO supports Ukraine’s defense with weapons paid for by our tax dollars?

It often feels inadequate to pray and send money or make comforters and relief kits, but we should still do it. We can also renew our commitment as a Brethren in Christ

community of believers to determine contemporary applications of the first denominational peace statement in the 1770s: “the use of the sword is completely forbidden for revenge or defense” (from our earliest confession of faith). From that renewed commitment, we can redouble our efforts to teach peacemaking skills—how to do the work of rooting out the violence within us and learn practical tools for responding to evil nonviolent.

The world tells us that there is no effective response to violence except more violence, that instead of “turning the other cheek,” we have to fight back or else evil will win. It’s that old question intended to trap people who are committed to nonviolence: “What would you do if a member of your family was being attacked?” I honestly don’t know what I would do, but I hope that because I have tried to think through alternatives to violence, I would be able to imagine something better than a knee-jerk violent response.

This edition of *Shalom!* invites you to do the inner work of peacemaking, to imagine alternatives to violence and war, to confront the issues the war in Ukraine has raised (like why we seem to care more about Ukrainians who are suffering from war than Syrians, Congolese, Somalians), and to respond as Jesus commanded us: “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.”

Harriet S. Bicksler, editor

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Enemies: A Natural Outcome of the Christian Calling

Facing Our Inner Violence

By Joshua Nolt

CHRISTIANITY CAN OFTEN be an abstraction. Something of God that is true and right and good is spoken of and promoted, often with a deficiency of personal reality and experience. Teachers, preachers, and theologians are common perpetrators, speaking of truths that are truth absent of an experience that would lead to authenticity, genuine authority, and humility. Church folk then follow the lead of their leaders, knowing what is good and yet not knowing what is good.

Within the context of the Anabaptist tradition, peace is one of those truths.

It is a dangerous thing to pursue peace without first being pursued by peace. There is a spirituality to peace preceding the work

of peace. Each of us must do the difficult work of confronting our inner violence before we speak or act to confront the violence of the world. If this inner violence is not first confronted, peacemakers will engage in peaceful work in ways not reflecting the Prince of Peace, with hearts ungoverned by the Spirit of peace.

Inner violence is something each person suffers at the hands of an aggressive and violent world. Inner violence can be described in many ways—as anger, frustration, angst, anxiety, worry, fear, rage, depression (latent anger). Perhaps a better way to describe it is by using the visual language of Genesis: it's the “chaos of the deep,” a stirring of the waters. The description of language is hardly necessary because most of us know it in our gut.

And herein lies our challenge: many times we respond from that gut. We advocate for what is good and right from a place of chaos. We call this chaos “righteous anger” in order to justify responding in anger, and in the process end up wounding others and ourselves.

Before we do the work of peace, we must first do the work of confronting our inner violence, and this is done by entering into silence. The best speech and action come from silence. Henri Nouwen puts it this way:

Words can only create communion and thus new life when they embody the silence from which they emerge. . . . Thus silence is the mystery of the future world. It keeps us pilgrims and prevents us from becoming entangled in the cares of this age. It guards the fire of the Holy Spirit who dwells within us. It allows us to speak a word that participates in the creative and recreative power of God's own Word (Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, p. 41).

God's own Word is Jesus. A number of years ago, in the midst of an intense time of conflict, I was drawn back to the gospel stories of Jesus before the Jewish and Roman powers at his crucifixion. When I went back to read these stories again (Matt. 27:11-14,

Mark 14:55-62),

I noticed something I hadn't noticed before. When the leaders spoke a word of truth about Jesus, he responded affirmatively, but Jesus remained silent during the flurry of accusations. No defense. No rebuttal. Just silence.

Where did this ability to be silent come from? How could Jesus engage with the powers in this way that “amazed” them?

Flip back a few pages in either gospel and you'll find Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, dealing with his own inner violence. That's right, just like you and I, Jesus was dealing with his own inner violence. We do an injustice to the beauty of Jesus's life when we exempt Jesus from his humanity. Listen to the way Matthew describes his “stirring of the waters” in the NRSV, which provides the most descriptive language:

Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.” He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be **grieved and agitated**. Then he said to them, “I am **deeply grieved, even to death**; remain here, and stay awake with me.” And going a little farther, **he threw himself on the ground** and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want.” (Matt. 26:36-39, bold for emphasis).

Do you notice the embodiment of the psalms in Jesus's experience here? Jesus brings his grief and agitation to God, throwing himself down in prayer, resolving it with trust in his Abba.

The action of Jesus is instructive to those who want to pursue peace. Before standing before the powers and bearing witness, we must first present our own inner violence to God. One of the most beautiful things we see of the nature of God in Christ is the ability of God to absorb the violence of the world.

Our inner violence must go somewhere, and God wants us to bring it Godward. If we



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do not do this, our inner violence will be transmitted—most likely heaped upon our enemy who we are called to pray for, love, and bless.

A spirituality of peace first faces one's own inner violence. I leave you with a simple prayer practice to walk through as you notice and give your inner violence to God, preparing you to be a person of peace who works for peace. This practice has no timeframe,

but its fruit is peace and a readiness to share the "gospel of peace."

1. Spend a few moments in silence, and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal the inner violence. Where are the "waters stirring"?
2. Spend a few moments expressing these things to God, verbally through prayer or reading a psalm. Don't hold back.
3. Spend a few moments of silence picturing Jesus with you and hearing Jesus speak

these words to you: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you."

4. Close with the words of St. Francis: "Lord, make me an instrument of your peace." Amen.

Joshua Nolt is senior pastor at the Lancaster (PA) Brethren in Christ Church.

Dispelling the Myths

By Keith Miller

PEACE ISN'T NEARLY as popular as slogans may lead us to believe. Living as people of nonviolence and justice often leads us into a homeless space in our world, unable to fit neatly into any political ideology or national identity. We are looked at as peculiar and idealistic, sometimes seen as having nothing meaningful to contribute to the conversation during times of war.

Many who grew up in the historic pacifist tradition may not see a peace witness as radical. However, as a pastor of a congregation with little Anabaptist ancestry, it's absolutely crucial that we continue laying foundations for such a worldview. I would also contend that even within deeply rooted peace traditions, this foundation must continue to be strengthened.

So what do we do as disciples? We start, of course, with Jesus. We frequently cite the clear teachings of Jesus when we consider nonviolence, but the nonviolent witness of Jesus is equally compelling. On the cross, Jesus absorbs the power of the world's violence, refusing to cycle it back into society. He puts an end to the need for retribution, forgiving and enduring rather than perpetuating. His position is not powerless. Indeed, it initiated one of the most significant movements the world has seen. The futility of the world's violent ways is highlighted by the radical love of Jesus. Jesus exposes "the myth of redemptive violence," to quote Walter Wink's famous phrase.

The same upside-down reality can be true of his disciples. When the world's violence swells, the creative and non-resistive witness of the Church can highlight the futility of vi-

olence and the sanctity of every human life. There is no winner in a war. Even those who are outwardly victorious take great losses to mind, spirit, and soul. This is what compelled Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to declare in 1963 that "The chain reaction of evil—hate begetting hate, wars producing more wars—must be broken, or we shall be plunged into the dark abyss of annihilation."

With Jesus as our guide, we make a case for a nonviolent way of life. But when the violence isn't against us specifically, what might the Church's role look like? Do we simply stand aside?

Our answer will inform the way we enter conversations happening right now surrounding the Ukraine, and the ones that will happen in the coming months as violence continues.

Jesus helps us resist the lie that violence is inevitable in our world. But in our churches, it's time to dispel other myths that we've adopted too—most of which we don't want to admit at all. But let's humbly acknowledge that we often reflect the values of the world around us more than Jesus in these areas.

Myth #1: Those whose lives and appearance match ours are more worthy of compassion.

The aggression from Russia is horrific and should be global news as we offer support, solidarity, and humanitarian aid to the Ukraine. But violent conflict has been happening in Syria, in Yemen, in Iraq, and in Afghanistan for years. Boko Haram is currently bombing and destabilizing cities in Nigeria. What is it that makes us see and

take notice so much now? Yes, there is a higher risk for global conflict here, but why so many Westerners so deeply and publicly moved by what's happening? We need to acknowledge an uncomfortable truth, made clear by the news reports themselves:

- NBC Reporter on location: "To put it bluntly, these are not refugees from Syria, these are refugees from Ukraine. . . . They're Christian, they're white, they're very similar."
- CBS Reporter on location: "This is a relatively civilized, relatively European city where you wouldn't expect that, or hope that it is going to happen."
- French Nation broadcast: "We're talking about Europeans leaving in cars that look like ours to save their lives."
- BBC reporter: "What's compelling is looking at them. . . . These are prosperous middle class people . . . these are not obviously refugees getting away from areas in the Middle East. . . . They look like any European family that you would live next door to."

Our racial and economic biases are highlighted in times of war. Even in the horror of war, some victims are seen as more worthy of mercy. Father, forgive us for our racism and economic inequality and tribalism. Father, forgive us for when we decide that those who are like us are more worthy of compassion.

Ukraine is worthy of our mercy, compassion, and solidarity. So are those who do not look like us, who do not live like us, and who are not economically similar to us. When we notice ourselves compassionate for people who are like us, while suggesting that this is

the first warlike conflict our world has faced in decades, we must learn to own our racial bias. We need Jesus to teach us about his peacemaking approach, which included compassion and care to all the different—the Samaritans, the women, the Gentiles, and the Romans. Anyone who suffered was worthy to receive care. This is our model.

I believe this looks like acting with compassion toward Ukrainian homeless refugees and toward Russian citizens who are struggling to afford food due to their leader's power-obsession. We grow in awareness of the violence around our world that isn't heavily reported on, and we lend our resources and intercession to the ones who are suffering in those places as well.

Myth #2: Prayer is inaction.

As people of Jesus, we believe in an upside-down kingdom, where power looks like powerlessness and leadership looks like servanthood. In a politicized world where "thoughts and prayers" are a clearly insufficient cop-out from the policies of justice, the Church must be careful to not accidentally devalue prayer in our own approach. Our Ukrainian brothers and sisters in Christ have consistently been asking for one primary thing from churches: Pray for us. Pray for

protection. Pray for peace. While a politician's thoughts and prayers may be nothing more than a slogan, the prayers of the saints are powerful in this upside-down kingdom. It is consistent with Jesus' teaching that we do not respond to evil with evil, but with something altogether different. People of compassionate action must never believe that interceding for peace isn't a powerful way to pursue nonviolence. We must go beyond the binary either/or approach.

Myth #3: Pacifism means standing by passively.

We have inherited an unfortunate linguistic connection between pacifism and "passivism." Peacemaking is active—we have opportunities in our connected world to send financial aid, to write to politicians, and to adopt sister churches in war torn areas. We can educate about effective nonviolent movements in history, and advocate publicly for nonviolent approaches to conflict.

Myth #4: Global politics are disconnected from our lives.

This one is tricky, because there is a slice of truth to it. However, when we disconnect the big conflicts of our world from the little ones, we forget that people are at the core of both. And when individual lives change,

societies begin to change too. So as holistic Christians who understand that God's world is connected and integrated, we know that when we oppose all forms of violence in our own relationships, we shape cultures and generations that can one day shape the world. When we choose to use gentle words and seek understanding, resisting the dehumanization of people we disagree with, we are doing the work of making the world a little more like God's kingdom. That's peacemaking too, and we live with the conviction that it's not disconnected from the global wars that we long to see end.

As a church, we are continuing to learn to make space for anger and lament, while still trusting Jesus to lead us toward hopefulness and compassionate action. We live in the hope that one day, all suffering will cease, and Jesus will bring about his kingdom in fullness, where nations will lay down their weapons of destruction and each life will be treated as sacred. Until that point, we do what we can and live in the tension. Lord, have mercy.

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Love Your Enemies!

By Jonah Langederfer

HAVE YOU SEEN the stories in recent years of shooters entering churches or synagogues and gunning down innocent victims? What should Christians do to prepare for violent intruders in the home or a Sunday worship service? Should we prepare to wield lethal force by getting a concealed carry gun? This is certainly not an easy question, but I bring it up because these conversations often show that instead of listening, much of the Church follows the world and our gut response and resists Jesus's clear teaching to love our enemy.

For example, when I was co-writing a paper in seminary with a military chaplain friend who wasn't and still isn't a pacifist, both he and I were surprised how clear Jesus was in his general command for Christians to love enemies, be people of peace, and ba-

sically reject violence. Yet, many evangelical churches like the ones we were both raised in resemble the world's way of hating enemy, are "gun-toting" and take up arms in war.

We can't begin to see clearly Jesus's way of peace, enemy love, and his will for the church in the midst of violent situations or war unless we first listen to Jesus: "to you who are listening I say: love your enemies" (Luke 6:27a). If we carefully listen to God's words to us through his Son's teaching in Luke 6:27-36, we'll be able to see what it means to love our enemies and the motivation Jesus gives to love our enemies.

What does it really mean to love your enemies? It doesn't mean returning evil for evil to those that harm us, but what does it look like? Love your enemy in action, word, and prayer. What does that mean?

First, "do good to those who hate you" (6:27b). Do you recognize the image on the opposite page? I first heard of Dirk Willems (the man on the left) in a core course on Brethren in Christ history taught by John Yeatts. After being tried and imprisoned for his Anabaptist views during the sixteenth century, Willems escaped from prison. Willems was chased and ran safely across a frozen lake, but his heavier captor fell through the ice and was helpless. Instead of fleeing, Willems chose to do good to his enemy by coming back to rescue him.

Second, "bless those who curse you" (6:28a). Not only does enemy love mean not insulting the bully who insults you, but it is wishing him good luck.

Third, "pray for those who mistreat you" (6:28b). The New Testament describes

prayer as the primary weapon God has given us to pursue peace in the world as we wage spiritual warfare, patterned after Jesus's prayer for his enemies while hanging on the cross (Luke 23:34). That Jesus prays for his enemies even while he is being executed shows us the most powerful thing we can do when confronted by an enemy. What is the most powerful force for peace in the Ukraine-Russian war? Prayer! Prayer pushes back the dark principalities and powers behind the human actors in war (Eph. 6:10-18).

Jesus is no idealist. He understands that enemies can be cruel and violent. What are you to do to those who physically harm you? Jesus says, "If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also" (Luke 6:29a). On one occasion, while Martin Luther King Jr. was delivering a speech, a member of the American Nazi Party walked up on stage and slugged him in the face. King was knocked back but regained his composure, stood up, and dropped his arms. The man proceeded to pound King in the face until the crowd intervened and hauled the Nazi off to another room. Shortly after, King visited the Nazi in the room and reassured him that there would be no harm done to him. King said that he was not going to press charges for the attack and that he had forgiven the man. King then returned to the stage, holding a bag of ice to his face, to finish his speech. No one in the room had doubts about who won the fight.

Jesus also knows that we will often encounter enemies who will take from us. How are we to respond to enemies in a ruthless world? Jesus gives this other-worldly command to love even those who steal from you: "If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them." Give to your enemies even if they are dressed up as beggars trying to take advantage of you, and if someone unjustly takes what belongs to you, don't demand it back (Luke 6:30).

Perhaps Jesus is losing us here: "Turn the other cheek? Really?" Didn't the conservative Edmund Burke once say: "All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good

men do nothing." In other words, is pacifism actually passivism? Jesus is not teaching us to be passive. Ronald J. Sider, a Brethren in Christ minister, says that the biggest argument against pacifism is people who believe in peace but don't take responsibility for actively seeking peace and justice in the world.

What's the motivation to love our enemy? Wouldn't you want someone to graciously love you if you were being a jerk? Put it another way: If you were Willems's captor



drowning in the ice, what would you want Willems to do? We must let Jesus's teaching of enemy love allow us to engage in imaginative and sometimes unrealistic thought experiments that will shape the way we learn to love our enemies. If an intruder comes to your building with a gun, what if instead of imagining an enemy who is less than human we imagine the attacker as a family member suffering from mental illness? Wouldn't we try to do everything possible to pacify the situation rather than shoot first and ask questions later? Jesus's teaching of enemy love changes things.

After Willems loved his enemy, the guard was apparently unmoved by this gesture. He promptly seized Willems and placed him in an even more secure prison cell until, soon thereafter, he was burned at the stake. We might say, "See, loving your enemy doesn't work out!" But we are called to be faithful to Jesus's words even if it doesn't always personally benefit in the short run, though it will work in the long run! The resurrection of the crucified Messiah showed that the way of the cross leads to glory!

Is the Willems story a foolish tragedy, a loss? How about Revelation 12:11: "And martyrs have conquered [Satan] by the blood

of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death." Jesus is clearly calling us to love our enemy. The question we must ask ourselves, "Are we listening?"

Jonah Langederfer is the of the Pleasant Hill (OH) Brethren in Christ Church.

Editor's Notes

Subscription renewals: Many of you have already responded to the 2022 subscription renewal letter. Thank you for your renewals and extra contributions! If you haven't responded yet, please do so soon. The price for a one-year subscription is still \$20, with additional contributions welcome to help subsidize the cost of mailing overseas and sending one to each Brethren in Christ student enrolled at Messiah University. Checks should be payable to Brethren in Christ US and mailed to the editor (address on page 2).

Remaining topics for 2022: The topic for the summer edition has not been finalized, but topics under consideration are engaging in difficult conversations (perhaps addressing the "culture wars" that are causing so much polarization and division, even in the church) and making the church a welcoming place for those with disabilities. The fall edition will explore how Brethren in Christ US is working on the Project 250 goal of "Growing to reflect the [gender and racial] demographic realities of our communities." Please contact the editor if you have other ideas for topics or if you would like to contribute an article (contact info on page 2).

How to Remove a Dictator Without Firing a Shot

By Eric A. Seibert

THE NONVIOLENT OVERTHROW of Slobodan Milosevic

Dubbed the “Butcher of the Balkans,” Slobodan Milosevic was one of the most brutal dictators of the late twentieth century.¹ For thirteen years (1987-2000) he ruled the Yugoslav federation with an iron fist. Milosevic led Yugoslavia into catastrophic economic disaster with many living in desperate poverty on salaries averaging less than \$70 a month. Most chillingly, Milosevic authorized genocide in Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Kosovo. All told, approximately 210,000 people died and another three million became refugees.

Any attempt to overthrow Slobodan Milosevic violently would have been very risky and would likely have resulted in a great deal of bloodshed. Wisely, the people of Serbia tried a different approach.

Members of a student-led group called Otpor used a variety of nonviolent tactics that eventually eroded support for Milosevic.² These tactics included things like street theater and public support for arrested activists. They were also instrumental in uniting all opposition parties around a single political candidate, Vojislav Kostunica, to keep the vote from being divided among too many different individuals.

Otpor’s efforts paid off, with Kostunica winning the election. When Milosevic refused to accept the results, the people of Serbia participated in a general strike that slowly shut down the capital and brought everyday life to a halt. This culminated in a massive demonstration at the Serbian capital in Belgrade on October 5, 2000. Milosevic could no longer retain his hold on power. Kostunica, Yugoslavia’s democratically elected leader, took office on October 7, 2000. The people of Serbia had succeeded in removing one of the world’s most ruthless dictators—and they had done so without resorting to violence and with virtually no casualties.³

Violence is not the only way

Part of what makes Slobodan Milosevic’s removal from office such a remarkable story

is the way it challenges many conventional beliefs about violence and power. People generally assume violence is the most effective way (or even the only way) to respond to certain situations. Nonviolence is typically regarded as unrealistic, a nice idea but one that does not actually work in the real world. But nothing could be further from the truth. As Peter Ackerman and Jack DuVall observe:

The greatest misconception about conflict is that violence is always the ultimate form of power, that no other method of advancing a just cause or defeating injustice can surpass it. But Russians, Indians, Poles, Danes, Salvadorans, African Americans, Chileans, South Africans, and many others have proven . . . that other, nonviolent measures can be a force more powerful.⁴

This is precisely what the people of Serbia confirmed when they removed a dictator without firing a shot.

The success of nonviolent action in the twentieth century (and beyond)

Of course the nonviolent overthrow of Slobodan Milosevic is just one of many stories that could be told. Creative nonviolent struggle has been used frequently and quite successfully in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In a comprehensive study of 323 violent and nonviolent resistance campaigns between 1900 and 2006, Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan contend that nonviolent efforts often prove far more effective than violent ones. Specifically, they demonstrate that during this time period, “nonviolent resistance campaigns were *nearly twice as likely to achieve full or partial success* as their violent counterparts.”⁵

The importance of their study is not to suggest that nonviolence always works—it does not—but to demonstrate that nonviolence often works. There is nothing naïve or simple-minded about using creative nonviolent struggle to confront even the harshest and most repressive regimes. On the contrary, the historical record suggests that using nonviolent tactics strategically to achieve so-

cial, political, or economic change is really quite sensible. It may actually provide the greatest chance for success and the best hope that real and lasting change will occur.

Creative nonviolent action is consistent with the life and teachings of Jesus and should be freely utilized by Christians as they fight oppression and strive to “overcome evil with good” (Rom 12:21, NRSV).

For a relatively recent treatment of this topic from a Brethren in Christ author, see Ronald J. Sider’s *Nonviolent Action: What Christian Ethics Demands but Most Christians Have Never Really Tried* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2015). For something of a “how to” manual for engaging in nonviolent struggle, consider Otpor leader Srdja Popovic’s *Blueprint for Revolution: How to Use Rice Pudding, Lego Men, and Other Nonviolent Techniques to Galvanize Communities, Overthrow Dictators, or Simply Change the World* (New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2015). Clearly, violence is not the only way.

Eric Seibert is a professor of Old Testament at Messiah University and attends the Grantham (PA) Brethren in Christ Church where he serves on the Peace and Social Justice Commission. He is the author of several books, including *Disarming the Church: Why Christians Must Forsake Violence to Follow Jesus and Change the World* (Cascade Books, 2018), from which this article is adapted by permission from Wipf and Stock Publishers.

Notes

¹The following information about Milosevic and the effect he had on Yugoslavia comes from Joshua Paulson, “Removing the Dictator in Serbia—1996-2000,” in *Waging Nonviolent Struggle: 20th Century Practice and 21st Century Potential*, Gene Sharp in collaboration with Joshua Paulson, 315–316 (Boston: Extending Horizons, 2005).

²This inspiring story is brilliantly told in *Bringing Down a Dictator*, DVD, directed by Steve York (Washington, D.C.: York Zimmerman Inc., 2001). The information in this paragraph and the next is based on that documentary. For a narrative description of these events, see Paulson, “Removing the

Dictator in Serbia.”

³According to the documentary *Bringing Down a Dictator*, only two people died in the takeover of parliament on October 5, 2000, one in a traffic accident and one from a heart attack.

⁴Peter Ackerman and Jack DuVall, *A Force More Powerful: A Century of Nonviolent Conflict* (New York: St. Martin's, 2000), 9, emphasis mine.

⁵Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephen, *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict* (New York: Columbia University Press,

2011).

⁶Chenoweth and Stephen, *Why Civil Resistance Works*, 7, emphasis mine.

Running Peacefully Into Violence

By Zach Spidel

SOMETHING HAPPENED YESTERDAY (as I write this)—something I wish to process in this space because I think it may be relevant to this issue's concerns.

I heard the sounds of someone shrieking through my open living room windows. It was a sunny afternoon, but those sounds put ice in my veins. I ran onto our porch and looked toward the sound. I live two doors from our church and there, in the church yard, lay a woman face down with a large man above her, picking her up and throwing her down. He shook her and screamed at her while she continued shrieking.

I ran toward them with nothing but socks on my feet, praying all the while. I did not know what I was going to do. As I approached, I realized that I knew both people. I had prayed with them in the alley behind our church only a few Fridays before. A young couple seemingly in love, they had held one another gently and cried with me as I prayed for them in their troubles. Now everything was different. I yelled at D. (the young man) as I approached. “Get off her!” He looked up and I saw recognition on his face. He was in a rage: “Pastor, she f----- stole my phone! Give it back, b----!” he cried as he bent back down, grabbed her once more and threw her from her belly to her back. She moaned with what I could now see was a bloodied mouth.

That is when I reached them, I had slowed down to a fast walk for the last few feet. I wanted not to tackle the man but to insert myself between D. and M. (the young woman). I pushed, gently at first and then with greater force, to wedge myself between him and her. He kept trying to get around me. I kept trying to keep myself between him and her. I kept telling him to back away. He

wouldn't listen and while he had been reticent to knock me out of the way, I sensed he was gathering himself to get to her through me if need be. I didn't know what to do and couldn't think straight or formulate a plan. All I could do was react.

Just then a car pulled up. A young woman hopped out of the driver's seat, a baby in the back seat. She said her friend had called her and yelled for M. to get in the car. M. rushed that way with D. chasing after. As M. climbed into the car, D. wrapped his hands around her and began trying to pull her out. I wrapped my arms around D. and tried to pull him off her. The woman in the car peeled out with the three of us tangled up. D. and I fell backward while M. made it safely away.

D. screamed a string of profanities and demanded to know why I had “let her get away with my phone!” Adrenaline pumping and God's Spirit providing courage, I found myself much bolder than I would have thought possible and faced him squarely. I spent the next ten minutes (which felt like ten hours) laying out some hard truths rather directly for D. He never calmed down fully, but he did not attack me and he did start to breathe a little more deeply. When he tried blaming M. again, I told him I was done talking and asked him to contact me when he was willing to talk about his real problems.

This morning M. called me. She thanked me for intervening and wanted to tell me she was okay. Then she told me something amazing. The woman who had stopped was not her friend; she was a total stranger. That woman's line about being called to pick up M. had been a strategic lie (she had never used M.'s name, I recalled). This woman had stopped, at risk to herself and with her child



in the backseat, to rescue a total stranger. Had she not arrived when she did, I don't know what I could have done to stop D. from seriously harming M. As it happened, I prevented violence for those few crucial moments until God sent another helper to whisk M. away.

I relate all this to you with no sense of pride. The whole thing was chaotic and clumsy and I haven't had time enough to reflect on what I ought to have done. Moreover, the whole thing weirdly feels more like something I witnessed rather than did. I do think, however, that God was at work in that awful moment and that I can draw a few encouraging lessons from it.

First, I think Christians will be most successful in interrupting violence among those people for whom we have already been a peaceful presence. I believe that had I not met and prayed with D. a few weeks before, he would not have been so reticent about going through me to get to M.

Second, in a moment of crisis—in the midst of active violence—I could only react. But the instincts that shaped my reaction had, thank God, been formed over years of peace-oriented ministry. I intervened, even with a certain measure of physicality. But in those chaotic moments my posture, carriage, words, and actions communicated that I was an obstacle, not a combatant. D. never attempted to fight me directly in part, I think, because I never signaled that I was going to attack him. My ability to pull off this balance is due, I am sure, to the long previous shaping of my instincts within the church and not to

any plan I formulated in the moment. I think our interventions in violent situations will depend on the quality and duration of the spiritual training and taming of our fallen instincts much more than any plans we can formulate in the midst of such moments.

Third, I ran toward the violence and put myself into it alongside M. After that, I trusted in God and watched gratefully as God offered deliverance. I'm glad I did and

somewhat shocked. I think that's what we must be willing to do in violence and I pray I will be able and willing to do it again if I am called to it. Jesus entered the maelstrom of human violence and willingly suffered it. We must walk into it as defenseless as he was, willing to suffer if need be.

Zach Spidel is pastor of East Dayton Fellowship, Dayton, OH.

Fleeing War

By Kim Hoffman Spirek

“WAKE UP, KIM! We need to quickly pack to leave with our neighbors.” Those words definitely were not the first things I wanted to hear from my husband David on March 3, 2022. Groaning and half asleep, I quickly dressed, then ran around like a headless chicken throwing food, a couple home school books, some odds and ends into three bags. These were added to the ever-ready go-to bags. In a few minutes, we headed out with our neighbors toward the border, any border. We, along with our youngest daughter, were leaving behind 22 years of ministry in Ukraine (biblical education, pastoring, English outreach, disciple making, children's education). What lay ahead?

The first day, our two cars travelled to southwestern Ukraine. Normally an eight-hour drive, the first day's trip consisted of driving thirteen hours on pot-hole back roads. Needless to say, we arrived at our motel way after curfew. (Curfews have been in place since the war began in February.) After unsuccessfully searching for the motel for an hour, we met a police officer, who of course reminded us that it was past curfew. Exhausted, we explained to him that we had hurriedly left Kyiv that day. He kindly had us follow him to the motel.

Our troubles were not over yet. We rang the bell, and motel security came to the gate. We explained to him that our friends had made reservations for us. He, in response, asked for the name of the person who made the reservation. We gave the wife's name. He answered, “No, I need the family name.” Unfortunately, we knew only her first name. Hoping that our friends would still be up, my

husband called our neighbor, explaining the situation concerning the guard. When David repeated our friend's last name, the guard checked his paper, saw that it matched, and let us in.

We were finally able to sleep for a few hours. Later in the morning, we ate traditional Ukrainian dishes and left for the border, two and a half hours away. However, the car needed fuel, a task not easily accomplished. It took an hour of driving around before finding a working gas station. This unexpected delay should not have been surprising as there were shortages of many things. With the tank full, we started for the Romanian border but now alone. Thankfully, the drive was more peaceful compared to the previous day of tens of roadblocks and checkpoints. Although there was evidence of the Ukrainians' efforts to hinder Russia's advances, they were not as impressive as what we witnessed the previous day. Leaving Kyiv, we had seen various methods of roadblocks: two-meter-high piles of sandbags, concrete dividers, iron beams welded together, old trolleys, and piles of rubble. Often, cars had to serpentine down the road. I had the dumb idea of taking a picture of all this but was threateningly pulled over by gun-wielding soldiers who ordered that I delete the picture before being allowed to proceed down the road.

During the two days of driving to the border, we were trying to figure out where to cross. Many friends came forward with names of contacts in various countries. I sent hundreds of messages, letting people know our current situation as well as trying to fig-

ure out where to go. In the end, we chose to cross into Romania. There, we would be able to visit friends who could help us figure out the next steps. When we joined the 2.4-mile line of cars approaching passport control, we let out a sigh of relief. We were almost there! But alas, that was not the case. It ended up being another thirteen and a half hours before we reached the Ukrainian checkpoint. Thankfully, though, it only took thirty more minutes before we went through the Romanian checkpoint.

Driving out of Ukraine was, by far, the most stressful part of our experience since the war began. A small glitch occurred in trying to meet up with our Romanian contact the first night because we did not have a Romanian sim card. The meeting point was McDonalds, but which one? David drove around a bit, finally finding one. He was then able to use the restaurant's free wi-fi to call our new friend. After that, things have been pretty much smooth sailing.

Since crossing into Romania, we have been able to help in humanitarian efforts. It has been amazing to see how people have jumped in to help the Ukrainians who have lost so much. As Ukrainian refugees enter Romania, they are housed and fed. Many already have plans to travel elsewhere in Europe, so they are guided to the right connections. The country is providing free transportation (trains and buses) for them to cross into other countries as well as sim cards for their phones. We translated for them and provided listening ears for their stories. We have helped to load humanitarian aid into vehicles headed to places across the border as

well as to Kyiv. Personally, my favorite was connecting the Romanian team with Ukrainians, watching the two groups working together to get things distributed all over Kyiv.

There is no easy answer about how to respond to a crisis such as the war in Ukraine. Before it even started, many expatriates had already left the country. At first, some just drove further west, but as the threats started to become reality, most left the country. As of this writing, I only know of three couples and a single lady who is still in Ukraine. Most of them are caring for the physical and spiritual needs of the displaced people, people who often sleep in cold bomb shelters or

the subway and are going hungry as shelves are bare. Many of my Ukrainian friends have fled west or into EU countries, often leaving their husbands behind. Most of David's friends remain around Kyiv with many leaving their husbands behind because the government will not allow conscriptable men to cross the border. Our friends are horrified by the needlessness of the war but are grateful for the help from the global Christian community.

However, one thing is clear: the need to help each other, to let God's love be evident. In times of a world crisis, each of us should look beyond ourselves to the needs of those who are hurting and suffering. Feeding,

clothing, sheltering, lending a listening ear, dressing wounds, or sharing the Gospel can all serve as a positive witness of Christ's love. Only in Christ can people experience true peace and security. I used to end my emails to friends and supporters with "Serving Christ Together." Now, I end it with, "Serving Christ and Humanity." So, I choose to serve God and humankind.

Kim Hoffman Spirek had been serving as a missionary with her husband and children in Ukraine until forced to flee the war. She grew up in the Palmyra (PA) Brethren in Christ Church (now Encounter). Since she wrote this, she and her family have returned to the United States.

They Stretch Their Fingers

By Lois A. Saylor

that scene in the movie
where the hero, the desperate damsel
needs something just outside their reach

they stretch their fingers
reposition a shoulder
try to lurch a millimeter closer

I stretch out to help, but
I am a million miles away
I have no movie-magic to bring me closer

I stretch out in prayer instead
flinging my pleas to a god
further away than the first bang of the universe
and as close as my own spirit

I need the god-magic to reach your need

I keep asking, keep seeking
I am knocking on the god-door
I am stretching my reach towards you
one more millimeter
one more time
again and again

until we study war no more, and
find the peace that never left

Lois Saylor is an editorial advisor for Shalom! and attends the Harrisburg (PA) Brethren in Christ Church. She wrote this while watching images of Ukrainians fleeing the war.

Responding to War in Ukraine

PRAY: For peace, for Ukrainians and Russians, for those providing emergency assistance, for leaders on all sides making decisions.

GIVE: Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) is also working on developing a long-term, response that will likely include psychosocial support and trauma healing, temporary emergency housing, emergency distributions of locally purchased emergency supplies such as blankets and food. You can also donate emergency supplies, such as relief kits or comforters, to your local MCC material resource center.

ADVOCATE: Contact your member of Congress or Parliament calling for peacebuilding efforts alongside development and humanitarian work. Ask for an emphasis on local peacebuilding as an alternative to foreign military interventions and operations.

WELCOME UKRAINIANS: Though MCC does not directly support refugee resettlement in the U.S., they can help you connect with refugee resettlement organizations and other resources.

For more information, go to mcc.org/stories/crisis-ukraine.

MCC Calls for Peace, Nonviolence in the Midst of War

By Rick Cober Bauman and Ann Graber Hershberger



WHAT DOES IT take to be people of peace in these times? It is challenging to watch people directly impacted by war in Ukraine and many other places like Colombia, Syria, Afghanistan and Ethiopia. Amid the devastation of war, how do we respond in a way that reflects Anabaptist values?

At MCC, our vision is to see communities in right relationship with God, one another



MCC staff member Anna made this pot of borscht while on kitchen duty at a refugee shelter assembled with support from MCC by a local Evangelical Baptist church in western Ukraine. The flowers were a handmade gift from her youngest daughter to mark International Women's Day on March 8.

other and creation. This is a call to peace and active nonviolence based on our faith. Christian peacemaking starts with the belief that God has made peace with us through the gift of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. Peacemaking is a response to Jesus's gift of grace and peace. We all continue to sin. All of us are complicit in systems of violence and oppression. We constantly fall short in proclaiming and living out Christ's peace. God's grace, however, empowers us to follow Christ as active peacemakers in a spirit of hu-

mility. (You can read more about our peace position in our publication, "Pursuing Peace: The Essence of Mennonite Central Committee.")

For MCC, peace is more than a wish, it's our work. We do this by partnering with grassroots and faith-based organizations and churches that actively work for peace and nonviolence, and with your support. We witness the power of people coming together with hope to respond to impossible situations and ensure the human dignity of all. We walk alongside communities in processes of conflict transformation and reconciliation. We experience the spaces of creativity and imagination that are opened when violence is not seen as an option.

From these relationships, we have learned that peacemakers have many tools they can use to create positive change. Gathering together in prayer and worship is a powerful response. Diplomacy, dialogue, disarmament, development, conflict resolution, peace education, active nonviolence and strategic peacebuilding are only a few other nonviolent approaches available to prevent war and to work for peace during war. A refusal to be enemies is a powerful way to reduce the harm of violence and build positive peace.

One way we engage in peacebuilding at MCC is through conversations with our governments. In response to the conflict in Ukraine, we ask the Canadian and United States governments to continue considering approaches that do not rely on military intervention or military support. We ask our governments to be global leaders in promoting the use of nonviolent tools such as diplomacy, disarmament, dialogue, the use of international law and support for grassroots peacemakers. We caution against the selling and providing of weapons or direct participation in military missions. We believe nonviolent leadership for peace-

ful resolution is a way that our countries can make a positive difference.

A focus on trauma healing and assistance to meet basic needs will continue to be urgently needed. We ask our governments to provide support for the most vulnerable, including Russians who are also deeply impacted by this conflict. We encourage careful deliberation around the possible unintended negative consequences of broad sanctions.

Christ invites us to step into the pain and suffering of others. The skills and tools we take into these encounters and learn along the way include: the ability to listen with care and patience, to mediate and resolve conflicts, to analyze political and historical real-



MCC partner, Kharkiv Independent ECB Churches, evacuated residents from Kharkiv, housing them at a local Christian school and the House of Hope, a senior's residence in their village community fifty kilometers (thirty-one miles) from Kharkiv.

ities, to seek out voices unheard, to support community-based actions, to be courageous allies, to imagine and create options and alternatives and to embody hope. We invite you to join us as we walk this path, together with all those impacted by wars and conflict.

Rick Cober Bauman is executive director of MCC Canada, and *Ann Graber Hershberger* is executive director of MCC US.

Hope Still Standing: Caring for the Most Vulnerable

By Jason Dueck

ON THE DAY that rockets began to rain down onto Kharkiv, Ukraine, Pavel* and a group from his church stepped outside, raised their hands and prayed. They turned in faith to God, seeking the protection of a seniors' home called House of Hope. The residence is in a village close to Kharkiv, where Pavel has been providing relief for people fleeing the conflict. And after more than a month of the continued destruction in Kharkiv and the surrounding area, House of Hope is still standing.

Still standing, too, is the hope that Pavel maintains. He is the leader of MCC partner in Ukraine KECB (Kharkiv Independent ECB Churches), which works to support the elderly, the sick and the poor. KECB is helping the most vulnerable escape the danger of the conflict by moving them to smaller villages around Kharkiv that have been less directly targeted.

Kharkiv is Ukraine's second-largest city and has been the site of some of the worst destruction by Russian military forces. Much of the city that once was home to 1.4 million people has been reduced to unlivable rubble. Some 80 per cent of the population has fled the city and the area around it. And while many have escaped to neighbouring countries seeking refuge, many Ukrainians are unable to flee the death and destruction, particularly those who are disabled, sick or very old.

KECB is based out of a village* near Kharkiv that is home to around 4,300 people. In addition to transporting people to safety, KECB is buying and making food and, more importantly, says Pavel, purchasing much-needed medicine.

"We have 47 people with epilepsy in this district and the authorities came to us with a request to help with medicine for these people. There are also 57 with diabetes, 54 with cancer, 27 including some children with asthma and 63 with thyroid conditions. We need very special medicine, not just what you buy when you have a cold."

Through the incredible outpouring of support from MCC donors across the world, KECB has received support to continue this life-saving work.

"For the people who are sick or disabled, it's very hard for them," says Pavel. "We've taken people out of places that the battle lines are very close to, like Slovyansk and Kramatorsk. Just yesterday, some brothers [from the church] set up a toilet so it could be adapted for those who can't move around on their own."

And for many of the people KECB is helping, physical needs are only one component of caring for them.

"There was an 84-year-old woman who was brought to us from the hospital. She did not see all the destruction and can't fully realize and believe that all this is actually hap-

pening. She needs to talk about it all the time. She has a house, which is now partially destroyed. She lives in the area of constant shelling, and it is not possible to return there now."

KECB's small fleet of vehicles travels to several villages in the area around Kharkiv every day, looking for anyone left behind who needs help. And through their base at House of Hope and the Christian school next door, they also prepare meals and food packages for as many people as they can, baking their own bread multiple times a day. Pavel says once the relief supplies have been distributed, the buckets that MCC relief kits are packaged in make great vessels for proofing large batches of dough.

"If we can't use all the bread in one day, we cut it and dry it so it can be eaten tomorrow or in the food packages," he says, holding up a five-gallon pail filled to the top with dried cubes of bread. "And we've distributed more than 11,000 food packages so far."

*Last names and specific locations are not used for security purposes.

Jason Dueck is a communications specialist from Winnipeg, MB. This article is courtesy of MCC News Service.

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and congregationally as part of a problem in historic peace churches.

As Florer-Bixler continues to explore the idea of enemies, she speaks to the "old order" and to the "reign of God." The old order is the world of dominance ruled over by powers and principalities in which political, economic, and social structures find their power. The reign of God is the kingdom of God. Her "reign" terminology highlights that God is active. He is reigning, working, ruling. The book looks at the power of Mammon or wealth in the old order as well as racism, sex-

ism, and whiteness. She calls us to look at how we may still be under the dominance of these old order powers and how to break free of them. Not letting any of us off the hook, she says each of us is both victim and victimizer. She looks to Jesus to redeem us from both stances and bring us more fully into the reign of God.

There is plenty in this book to challenge us. There will undoubtedly be areas of resonance and areas of disagreement. Yet, the basic premise—that living under the reign of God will put us at odds with those invested

in the current power structures—helps us orient ourselves in the world. As we are called to love our enemies and forgive them, we note that the assumption is that we will have enemies. Florer-Bixler calls us to not be afraid of having enemies, but shows us how to have an enemy and do it well as part of the work of peace.

Lois Saylor is an editorial advisor for Shalom! and attends the Harrisburg (PA) Brethren in Christ Church.

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BOOK REVIEW

Enemies: A Natural Outcome of the Christian Calling

By Lois A. Saylor

JESUS MADE ENEMIES. He may have loved them. He may have forgiven them seven times seventy, but he made enemies because he did not keep silent to avoid the anger and enmity of others. So, if Jesus made enemies, should we? Enemy-making is not the goal but advocating for truth angers those who trust in lies. Advocating for the marginalized can anger the privileged. Working for justice can anger those benefitting from the status-quo. Even challenging someone's worldview or material comfort can raise ire. And telling religious-leaders they are vipers and snakes tends to anger them into wanting to silence you, even to the point of using the legal system and execution to do so. Jesus made enemies.

Melisa Florer-Bixler tackles the issue of enemies in her book, *How to Have an Enemy: Righteous Anger & the Work of Peace*. (Let's underscore the last part of that title, "the Work of Peace.") She writes, "Jesus does not call us to claim we no longer have enemies. Instead, he shows us how to have enemies well." While maintaining that enemies will arise, she also notes:

Jesus reshapes expected and naturalized categories of enemies. Jesus overcomes

national and ethnic barriers and reveals that the true enemy is the person who stands against the reign of God.

With this understanding, she makes a clear stance as to who and what the enemy is and explores issues of family, politics, anger, forgiveness, mammon or wealth, whiteness, and an overall approach to the idea and reality of "enemy."

Describing "enemies," Florer-Bixler writes:

I use the language of enemies in this book to describe a relationship between people, one that recognizes how a person uses their power, actively or passively, to harm or dominate another. When there are enemies, one is in power over the other, or there is a conflict over who holds power.

She notes that power in and of itself is not bad. Empowerment helps people and we "need power to act." Her warning for the church, however, is that we often hold unity as the highest good while ignoring the imbalance of power and the harmful "dynamics of racial, gendered, and class power . . . with devastating consequences." A surface unity only serves to hide harmful power dynamics

and therefore cannot address them or change them to bring in true unity. When we call for unity in the church, do we mean we want to silence voices or raise up voices so conflicts can be openly addressed?

In addressing conflict and anger, Florer-Bixler suggests that "anger acts as a signal to draw attention to a harm or a wrong." In this light, anger is not a threat, but rather a place of potential to right a wrong or solve a problem. Anger offers "potential strength and clarification for the work before us." The author would like to see the church create a space for anger and a space for differences. At the same time, she calls for careful discernment to make sure that harmful power imbalances do not turn this space from one of resolution to one of manipulation. Instead, she calls for the church to use anger, especially anger at injustice, as a "creative force to build something new."

She also asserts that, "when anger takes form in communal sharing, it can carve the path toward reconciliation," whereas submerged anger runs "the risk of falling into passive aggression or moralizing self-righteousness." These are two profound risks we should look at very closely both individually