

Pace e Bene Australia:

nonviolent peace building for the long haul

Beginnings

Pace e Bene Franciscan Nonviolence Service began in the USA in 1989. Originating in a small, intentional Christian community that had recognised the need to provide formation in “the spirituality and practice of active nonviolence”, the group grew its wisdom through active exploration of the principles of nonviolent engagement with the surrounding culture in the USA and Latin America.

The UN Decade for a Culture of Peace and Nonviolence for the Children of the World, coupled with the WCC Decade to Overcome Violence, provided the seedbed for the introduction of Pace e Bene (PeB) to Australia. Programs were first introduced around the country in 1999 and led to the creation of Pace e Bene Australia in 2005. Since then, with generous support from sponsors such as The Mercy Foundation and the Glenburnie Program, a small, dedicated volunteer group has focused on consolidating and expanding this presence in Australia.

People and Purpose

The people who form this community are committed to “being the change they wish to see” by grounding their daily living in the equality and oneness of all people, by rejoicing in the differences that define each individual, and by celebrating the sacredness of all things.

The major purpose of Pace e Bene is to further the growth and expansion of a spirituality and practice of active nonviolence in Australia. The core group is made up of eight members from around the country who meet electronically for a couple of hours once a month (via Skype) and in person for a couple of days at their Annual General Meeting.

The principal activities involve providing educational programs in a spirituality of active nonviolence as an alternative, effective and spiritual response to emotional and physical violence — for individuals, groups and organisations.

The Work

A nationally-linked network of “facilitator-trainers” has been created, a Peace Fund to support the work has been set up and links have been made with other organisations working to promote peace through active nonviolence in Australia and other parts of the world.

The main PeB resources, *From Violence to Wholeness, Engage* (a 12-session course on nonviolent living) and *Travelling with the Turtle* (a program for women), have their origins in the USA, but are made more relevant by including local and national Australian stories

Two national “inspiritor” tours, featuring John Dear SJ in 2007 and Angie O’Gorman in 2009, have been organised to sustain spirit; a national gathering was held in 2008, with another one planned in 2010; programs, ranging from short introductory



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workshops to five-day residential retreats, have been provided around the country; and facilitator co-learning and training courses have increased the number of people providing courses in their own workplaces and communities.

In 2009, with the support of a grant from the Glenburnie Program, two exciting initiatives emerged: a part-time Peace Associate was appointed to work for two years at building grassroots capacity in nonviolence, and a pilot program on Nonviolent Leadership, that seeks to engage both clergy and lay church leaders in the theology and practice of nonviolent leadership.

The Learnings

For nonviolent peace building to be effective and sustainable, it is essential to learn how our personal spirituality, including our own capacities for violence and nonviolence, influences our “way of being” as we engage with activities for social transformation and justice. For Christians on this journey, the inner world of prayer, spirit and self-understanding is an indispensable companion for the outer world of activism.

Brendan McKeague
Member
Pace E Bene Australia
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PRAYER FOR PEACE BUILDERS

Reach out to those you fear.
Touch the heart of complexity.
Imagine beyond what is seen.
Risk vulnerability one step at a time.

(John Paul Lederach, The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace)

The nuclear challenge

Learning not to love the bomb

On the morning of August 6, 1945, at 8.15 am the nuclear age began with the atomic devastation of the Japanese city of Hiroshima; followed on August 9 by the bombing of Nagasaki (the “Christian city” of Japan).

It is difficult to find the language to describe these acts of destruction.

Sixty-five years on, nuclear disarmament remains one of the most pressing tasks for our time. Although we have learned to live with these weapons, they take a great toll on our lives as persons and as nations.

The cost of making and maintaining these weapons is enormous. The after effect of exploding these “devices” has left its mark in many ways and invisible nuclear radiation will have its effect for thousands of years to come.

We have seen mass destruction in other recent wars — especially the First World War. With nuclear weapons, a further step is taken: the use of these weapons threatens to extinguish all life on the planet. It is true that, since the “Cold War” between the United States and the Soviet Union ended, the nuclear doctrine of MAD (mutually assured destruction) is not so explicit. Yet nations who have nuclear weapons seem ready to use them, speaking of a “tactical use”.

We must question what is it that makes political leaders and their citizens ready to contemplate such destruction. How can such murderous instruments be acceptable? Do we notice how life-giving language is perverted in the service of this destruction? Recall, for example, that the world’s first nuclear detonation in the Nevada desert was code named *Trinity*, the name of God. The bomb dropped on Hiroshima was named *Little Boy*. *Fat Man* was the name given to the bomb dropped on Nagasaki. *Corpus Christi* (Body of Christ) has been used for two USS submarines.

A 2006 report of the International Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission noted that the nuclear weapons in one submarine have an explosive force several times greater than all of the conventional bombs dropped during WWII.

So, why is it that we struggle with a sort of nuclear amnesia — or, more provocatively, nuclear Alzheimer’s? Since 1945 there have been periods of high tension and public community debate, protest and agitation for change. When a limited advance seems to have been achieved, the populace settles back and the weapons remain.

In the period of the Cold War, nations such as Australia were active, often prompted by their citizens, to educate people about the nuclear threat and to form treaties.

At present, there is a significant movement called “iCAN”, which is acting to educate and raise awareness about nuclear weapons.

The Australian Government has also been participating in the renewed discussions concerning non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. The World Council of Churches continues to encourage member churches in the vocation of peacemaking and holds complete nuclear disarmament to be an urgent moral and legal imperative.

The bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki demonstrated the power of death. Speaking from biblical faith, we may say that the nuclear age has introduced an era of death in which humans have replaced their calling to preserve the earth with an urge to destroy it.

A profound and pressing challenge remains before us in matters of nuclear weapons. In order not to be overcome by the weight and power of these instruments of death, we must continue to pray for peace, trusting that, in Jesus Christ, God is acting to preserve our lives and appoints us to care for the planet so it may be home for the generations to come.

Our confidence in acting for a world free of nuclear weapon stems from the news that Jesus Christ has acted to remove the deep structure of violence and fear which causes us to want “safety” under a nuclear umbrella. In Jesus we are free to refuse the false protection of these weapons of terror.

The Rev. Dr Wes Campbell
Ecumenical Chaplain to Melbourne University,
Uniting Church Minister of the Word

PRAYER

Living God, Father of all,
You spoke your Word of love
and light broke the darkness, banishing chaos.
In the teeming life of your creation
you placed us, made in your image,
to care for the planet,
to preserve it for future generations.
We see with horror
that we have turned your light into nuclear destruction,
our wills darkened by fear.
Holy Spirit, Lord and Giver of life,
by your gentle power
turn us toward the life-giving light of God
and train us to be life-givers,
for the sake of Jesus Christ, the Light of the world,
AMEN.

Towards safer churches

The need to talk about “safe” churches may seem strange or unnatural; after all, aren't all churches *safe*?

In a perfect world this would be the case. However, the Church has not always lived up to its calling.

Church history is coloured with both wonderful acts of love flowing through God's humble servants, but also with some of the most shameful acts of abuse imaginable.

Also, it is a sad fact that within Australia some people have sought to abuse innocent victims — be they children, young people or adults — and those “predators” have seen churches as an area where they can exploit the innocent.

“Often this is because, by its very nature, the Church has historically been a trusting body and sometimes an ‘easy target’.” (Gillian Calvert, Commissioner for Children and Young People NSW, 2006).

This *National Council of Churches in Australia's Safe Church Training Agreement (SCTA)* aims to reduce the instances of abuse and all other kinds of duty of care and/or safety failures by providing procedures for *Holistic Safe Church Ministry*.

Holistic Safe Church Ministry includes prevention and response policies, procedures and implementation support in: duty of care; caring for vulnerable people; appropriate use of positions of power; codes of conduct; response to allegations of ministry misconduct and/or abuse; incident reporting; monitoring of practices; safe recruitment and supervision of leaders; and the preparation and conducting of physically and emotionally safe church programs and events.

The SCTA is a *self-funded service* operating within the structures of the National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA) with both NCCA member churches and non-member churches as members of the agreement.

The SCTA began operation in 2008 with 15 denominations, dioceses and organisations sending their church leaders (voluntary and paid) to

nationally-recognised Safe Church workshops. In 2009 we had 21 members who sent over 5,000 leaders (mostly volunteers in children's and youth ministry) to SCTA-endorsed training.

By the end of 2009 it was clear that Safe Church training was not operating universally. Some denominations were asking for help in getting started with *Holistic Safe Church Ministry*, highlighting that the need in the Church goes beyond “child protection training” to the creation and provision of resources. Churches need to be resourced with policies and procedures, and to have access to quality education and training.

To this end, the SCTA now resources and facilitates sustainable, quality, accessible, Holistic Safe Church ministry training and implementation and is now able to offer a range of products and services to help Christian churches with this ongoing task.

Our goal is to be a nationally operating agreement by the end of 2011 ... *towards safer churches*.

The Rev. Peter Barnett

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The National Coordinator

Safe Church Training Agreement.

For more information on the SCTA visit www.safechurches.org.au

A SAFE CHURCHES PRAYER

Gracious and loving God,
We ask your blessing on all who work and minister in the churches, particularly those whose responsibility it is to ensure that professional standards are upheld. May our churches be places where all are welcomed, respected and treated with dignity, tolerance and understanding. May they be places where the Gospel of Jesus finds authentic and practical expression so that the dream of Jesus for us and our world becomes a reality. Help us all to make hospitality our special care so that the gifts of all are recognised, valued and nurtured. And may those in leadership exercise their responsibilities with sensitivity, integrity and true wisdom. We make this prayer in Jesus, name. AMEN.

RESOURCE LINKS

- Pax Christi International: www.paxchristi.net/international/eng/index.php
- Pax Christi Australia: www.paxchristi.org.au/index.html
- Pace e Bene International: paceebene.org/
- Pace a Bene Australia: paceebene.org.au
- Act for Peace: www.actforpeace.org.au
- Edmund Rice Centre: www.erc.org.au
- WCC Decade to Overcome Violence: www.oikoumene.org/programmes/public-witness-addressing-power-affirming-peace/overcoming-violence.html

PRAYERS FOR PEACE

- In 1963 Pope John addressed his great encyclical *Pacem in Terris* to a world living under the shadow and threat of war. He spoke fearlessly of a divinely established order in human affairs, which is the basis of peace. For the proceedings, go to: www.sacredspace.ie/peaceprayer/pp_day1.htm
- Prayers for peace from the National Council of Churches in the USA: www.nccusa.org/iraq/prayersforpeace.html
- Give Peace a Hand: www.ncca.org.au/files/Reports_and_Publications/DOV/Introduction.pdf

SOCIAL JUSTICE RESOURCES IN AUSTRALIAN CHURCHES

- Uniting Church resources for the International Day of Peace: www.unitingjustice.org.au/resources/internationaldayofpeace.html
- Quaker website: www.quakers.org.au — click through to “Peace action”
- Australian Catholic Social Justice Council: www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au
- Social Justice Network of the NCCA: www.ncca.org.au/departments/social_justice_network

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