

The Pace e Bene Vow of Nonviolence

“There is no hope for the aching world except through the narrow and straight path of nonviolence,” Mahatma Gandhi wrote. Long ago, at the turn of the century, he and his friends professed a vow of nonviolence in their South African ashram to formalize their commitment to nonviolence. They were inspired by the Catholic vows of the nearby Trappist monastery. For the rest of his life, Gandhi practiced, taught and organized nonviolence. He said that his vow helped him become a practitioner of nonviolence.

In the thirteenth century, St. Francis, too, embodied the Gospel life of peacemaking. His commitment to peace and nonviolence led him to walk through the warzones of the Catholic crusades and meet the Sultan. He wanted to practice the nonviolence of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount and to love even the enemies of his land.

Today, Pace e Bene invites you to consider professing a solemn vow of nonviolence, as Mahatma Gandhi did, to formalize your explicit rejection of violence and the culture of war, and your commitment to and practice of active, creative nonviolence for the rest of your life.

We offer here below two versions of the vow—a Christian version and an interfaith version.

Vows have a long history within the Christian tradition, dating back to St. Paul, which include baptismal, marriage and religious vows. The Hebrew Scriptures tell of holy men and women who professed vows, and the psalms include prayers to fulfill our vows.

Vows are not to be taken lightly. They are serious religious acts to be taken before the God of peace and the community of faith and conscience, and if adhered to, can lead to a new way of life as they explore a fundamental religious value.

Pace e Bene offers this vow of nonviolence as a private, devotional vow, which can be shared with one’s local community and offered as a public witness. It is intended to serve as a guidepost for the rest of one’s life---not only that you refrain from violence of thought, word and deed, but that actively practice nonviolence in your daily life and engage nonviolence in the struggle to abolish war, poverty, nuclear weapons and environmental destruction. The vow of nonviolence is intended to help you on your journey of peace, that you might become more peaceful, that you might become a public peacemaker, that you will fulfill your vocation to be a peacemaker and help transform our culture of violence and war into a culture of nonviolence and peace.

If you are interested in this vow of nonviolence, we suggest that you take it as seriously as a marriage vow, that you spend several months, perhaps even a whole year, preparing to profess the vow.

You could study the many books on nonviolence, take a Pace e Bene nonviolence workshop, investigate the teachings of well known practitioners such as Gandhi, Dr. King, and Dorothy Day, make a private retreat to examine your own violence and the challenges of nonviolence for you, experiment with a local, public action of nonviolence for peace and justice, and then when you are ready, profess it before friends or your local faith community. Then we recommend that

you keep a copy of it nearby to reread and pray over occasionally, and that you renew your vow of nonviolence once a year. (You could frame your signed and witnessed vow and keep it close by as a reminder.) We hope it will open up new avenues of peace and nonviolence for you, and help you deepen your spiritual journey of peace.

We invite you to share your experience and reflections about this Pace e Bene. Write us (info@paceebene.org) and tell us what you are doing, how you professed the vow, and what you are learning about nonviolence as you formalize your commitment.

“The essence of nonviolence is love,” the Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hang writes. “Out of love and the willingness to act selflessly, strategies, tactics, and techniques for a nonviolent struggle arise naturally. Nonviolence is not a dogma; it is a process. Other struggles may be fueled by greed, fear or ignorance, but a nonviolent one cannot use such blind sources of energy, for they will destroy those involved and also the struggle itself. Nonviolent action, born of the awareness of suffering and nurtured by love, is the most effective way to confront adversity.”

“Nonviolence is the constant awareness of the dignity and humanity of oneself and others,” long time U.S. peace activist Wally Nelson wrote. “It seeks truth and justice; it renounces violence both in method and in attitude. It is a courageous acceptance of active love and goodwill as the instrument with which to overcome evil and transform both oneself and others. It is the willingness to undergo suffering rather than inflict it. It excludes retaliation and flight.”

The Pace e Bene vow of nonviolence is offered as a way to help you live the spirituality and practice of active nonviolence in today’s violent world, that you might fulfill your vocation to be a peacemaker. Thank you for prayerfully considering this invitation and commitment.

The Pace e Bene Vow of Nonviolence (Christian Version)

In the spirit of St. Francis and St. Clare, I vow to practice Gospel nonviolence for the rest of my life, to follow the nonviolent Jesus on the path of peace, and to join his campaign for the abolition of war, poverty, nuclear weapons, environmental destruction and violence and to welcome God's reign of peace on earth.

I vow to be nonviolent to myself and to cultivate interior peace and nonviolence, and to be nonviolent to every human being I meet for the rest of my life. I will strive to love everyone, show compassion, seek justice, forgive those who hurt me, and create peace with everyone and all creation. I will refrain from violence of thought, word, spirit and action, to the best of my ability, and refuse to retaliate with further violence but respond with love and truth in the struggle for justice and peace.

I vow to participate in the global grassroots movement of nonviolence, to do what I can to help the struggle to abolish war, poverty, nuclear weapons, environmental destruction and every form of violence. I will resist the structures and institutions of violence and war through creative nonviolence, and spread the ways of nonviolent conflict resolution and peacemaking.

I will seek the God of peace and God's reign of peace every day for the rest of my life and strive to live in peace with everyone and all creation. I will try to study and practice Jesus' teachings on peace and nonviolence every day, and try to spread them and teach them.

With St. Francis and St. Clare, I will try to be an instrument of God's peace, and commit myself to live the rest of my life as a Gospel peacemaker.

I profess this solemn vow in the name of the nonviolent Jesus and trust in the God of peace to give me the grace to fulfill it. Amen.

SIGNED _____ DATE _____

WITNESSED _____ DATE _____

The Pace e Bene Vow of Nonviolence (Interfaith Version)

In the spirit of peace, I vow to practice active nonviolence for the rest of my life, to be a peacemaker and to work for the abolition of war, poverty, nuclear weapons, environmental destruction and violence and the coming of a new world of peace.

I vow to be nonviolent to myself and to cultivate interior peace and nonviolence, and to be nonviolent to every human being I meet for the rest of my life. I will strive to love everyone, show compassion, seek justice, forgive those who hurt me, and create peace with everyone and all creation. I will refrain from violence of thought, word, spirit and action, to the best of my ability, and refuse to retaliate with further violence but respond with love and truth in the struggle for justice and peace.

I vow to participate in the global grassroots movement of nonviolence, to do what I can to help the struggle to abolish war, poverty, nuclear weapons, environmental destruction and every form of violence. I will resist the structures and institutions of violence and war through creative nonviolence, and spread the ways of nonviolent conflict resolution and peacemaking.

I will seek to live in peace, to spread peace, and to teach peace and nonviolence every day for the rest of my life. I will try to be a true instrument of peace and commit myself to live as a peacemaker for the rest of my life.

I profess this solemn vow in the name of Peace.

SIGNED _____ DATE _____

WITNESSED _____ DATE _____