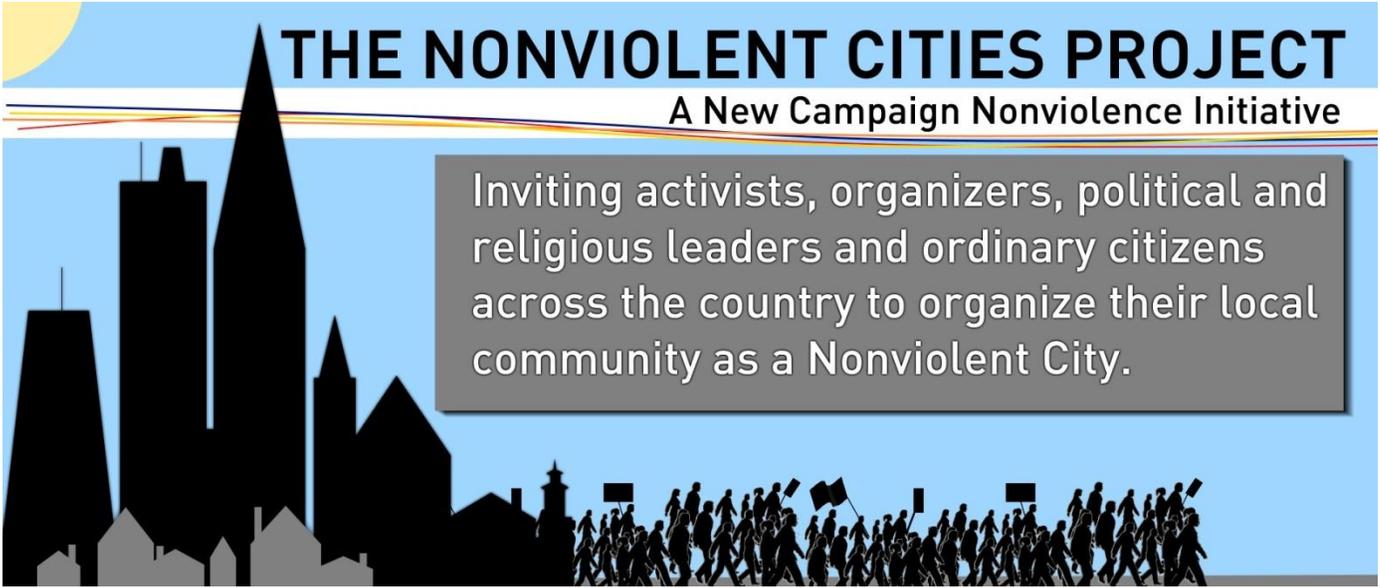


# THE NONVIOLENT CITIES PROJECT

A New Campaign Nonviolence Initiative



Inviting activists, organizers, political and religious leaders and ordinary citizens across the country to organize their local community as a Nonviolent City.

## LAUNCHING THE NONVIOLENT CITIES PROJECT

by John Dear

Last year, I was invited to give a talk on peace in Carbondale, Illinois. I was surprised to discover that in recent years, activists from across Carbondale had come together with a broad vision of what their community could one day become—a nonviolent city. They wanted a new holistic approach to their work, with a positive vision for the future, so that over time, their community would be transformed into a culture of nonviolence.

They created a coalition, a movement and a city-wide week of action and called it, “Nonviolent Carbondale.” They set up a new website, [www.nonviolentcarbondale.org](http://www.nonviolentcarbondale.org), established a steering committee, set up monthly meetings, and launched “Nonviolent Carbondale” as a positive way to promote peace and justice locally. In doing so, they gave everyone in Carbondale a new vision, a new idea, of what their community could become.

I think “Nonviolent Carbondale” offers a positive example of a new way forward for every community and city in the nation. Every city should become a nonviolent city. That should be the goal and vision of every local community, as Gandhi and Dr. King taught long ago. Activists and people from across the spectrum should come together locally to envision their community as a place of nonviolence and start organizing to make that goal come true. With all the violence, hatred, and warmaking these days, we need to help one another imagine what our local communities would look like if they were nonviolent, and systematically plan a long term course of action to make that vision come true.

From the start, the Carbondale activists held their local organizing meetings occasionally before city council meetings, which they then attended together as a group. At city council meetings, they started suggesting and lobbying ways their city could become more nonviolent. Their movement eventually became based out of the main Carbondale Library. Over the years, they have done positive work with their police department, local schools and school system, religious communities, the library system, and local non-profits. As grassroots activists, they have lifted up a positive vision of their community and brought it into the mainstream.

Over the years, they put their energies into their “11 Days” program—11 days in March filled with scores of actions and events for all ages across the city. Twice their 11 days focused on peace; twice on compassion; and last year on food. One of the outcomes from last year’s 11 Days, for example, was a new organic food market started in the poorest neighborhood in town.

“Nonviolent Carbondale” offers a model for activists, movements and cities across the country. With their example in mind, the group I work with, Campaign Nonviolence, is launching the “[Nonviolent Cities](#)” project using “Nonviolent Carbondale” as an organizing model for other cities.

Taking the lead from friends and activists in Carbondale, Campaign Nonviolence invites activists across the U.S. to organize a similar grassroots movement in their city, to put the word “nonviolent” in front of their city, and to help others envision, organize and work for a new more disarmed local community, town, or city. As far as we can tell, this organizing tool has

never been formally tried anywhere in the U.S., except in Carbondale. This movement is a new next step in the visionary, organizing nonviolence of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr.

Perhaps the key aspect of “[Nonviolent Cities](#)” is that each city will be summoned to address its violence in all its aspects, structures, and systems; to connect the dots between its violence; and to pursue a more holistic, creative, city-wide nonviolence, where everyone together is trying to practice nonviolence, promote nonviolence, teach nonviolence and even institutionalize nonviolence on the local level, to really build a new nonviolent community for itself and others. We want not just to undermine the local and regional culture of violence, and end all the killings, but to transform it into a culture of nonviolence.

That means that “[Nonviolent Cities](#)” organizers would promote the vision, teach nonviolence, and inspire people at every level in their community to work together for a new nonviolent community and a new nonviolent future. That would include everyone from the mayor and city council members to the police chief and police officers, to all religious and civic leaders, to all educators and healthcare workers, to housing authorities, to news reporters and local media; to youth and grassroots activists, to the poor and marginalized, children and the elderly. Together, they would address all the issues of violence and pursue all the angles and possibilities of nonviolence for their city’s transformation into a more nonviolent community. The first goal would be a rapid reduction in violence in the community and an end to killing.

Nonviolent cities would work to end racism, poverty, homelessness and violence at every level and in every form; dismantle housing segregation and pursue racial, social and economic nonviolent integration; end police violence and institutionalize police nonviolence; organize to end domestic violence and teach nonviolence between spouses, and nonviolence toward all children; work to end gang violence and teach nonviolence to gang members; teach nonviolence in every school; help get rid of guns, gun shows and local weapons manufacturers; pursue more nonviolent immigration programs and policies; get religious leaders and communities to promote nonviolence and the vision of a new nonviolent city; reform local jails and prisons so they are more nonviolent and educate guards and prisoners in nonviolence; move from retributive to restorative justice in the entire criminal justice system; put up signs calling for nonviolence everywhere in the community; address local environmental destruction, climate change, and environmental racism, pursue clean water, solar and wind power, and a 100% green community; and in general, do everything possible to help their local community become more disarmed, more reconciled, more just, more welcoming, more inclusive, and more nonviolent.

If Carbondale, Illinois can seek to become a nonviolent city, any city can seek to become a nonviolent city. This is an idea whose time has come. This is an organizing strategy that should be tried around the nation and the world. The only way it can happen is through bottom up, grassroots organizing, that reaches out to include everyone in the community, and eventually becomes widely accepted, even by the government, media and police.

Two international groups pursue a similar vision—International Cities for Peace ([www.internationalcitiesforpeace.org](http://www.internationalcitiesforpeace.org)) and Mayors for Peace ([www.mayorsforpeace.org](http://www.mayorsforpeace.org), which has 6965 cities committed in 161 countries)—but, as far as I can tell, no U.S. group has ever attempted to invite local communities to pursue a vision of holistic city-wide nonviolence or organize a grassroots movements of nonviolent cities.

On our website we have posted “[Ten Steps Toward a Nonviolent City](#),” a basic initial list of organizing tasks for local activists which includes: creating a local steering committee; finding a mainstream institution that can serve as a base; organizing a series of public meetings and forums; studying violence in the community; meeting with the mayor and the city council; and organizing a city-wide launch.

Gandhi once remarked that we are constantly being astonished by the advances in violence, but if we try, if we organize, if we can commit ourselves, he declared, we can make even more astonishing new discoveries and advances in nonviolence. With the example of “Nonviolent Carbondale” before us, we have a way to organize every local community and city in the nation, a way to envision how we can all one day live together in peace with justice, and the possibility of new hope. If we follow the example of Nonviolent Carbondale, we can help transform our culture of violence into something completely new—a culture of nonviolence. That should always be our goal.

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# 10 Steps Toward a Nonviolent City

## *Organizing Tips from Campaign Nonviolence*

- 1.) Create a local Steering Committee; write a mission and vision statement; and imagine and discuss what your community would look like if it were a “Nonviolent City.”
- 2.) Find a mainstream institution that could become the base for your “Nonviolent City” project, such as the local library, community center, a major religious institution, or the Rotary Club.
- 3.) Organize an initial public meeting/forum to discuss the idea. Make the meeting actually an organizing meeting, and come with future dates and meeting places ready to announce. Help people to start imagining what their community would look like as a nonviolent city. See that vision as a goal, and the years ahead as a journey toward that goal, which everyone can be a part of.
- 4.) Study the violence in your local community in all its forms, and begin to systematically address these forms of violence, and how the violence can end, and how people and the city institutionally can become more nonviolent.

This will mean exploring every aspect of one’s local community and ways to:

- end racism, poverty, homelessness and violence at every level and in every form;
- dismantle housing segregation and pursue racial, social and economic nonviolent integration;
- end police violence and institutionalize police nonviolence;
- work to end domestic violence and violence against children, and teach nonviolence between spouses and toward all children;
- teach nonviolence in every school;
- help get rid of guns, gun shows and local weapons manufacturers;
- work to end gang violence and teach nonviolence to gang members;
- pursue more nonviolent immigration programs and policies;
- get religious leaders and communities to promote nonviolence and the vision of a new nonviolent city;
- reform local jails and prisons so they are more nonviolent and educate guards and prisoners in nonviolence;
- put up signs calling for nonviolence everywhere in the community;
- address local environmental destruction, climate change, and environmental racism, and pursue clean water, solar and wind power, and a 100% green community;
- work with the local media to promote the vision of a nonviolent city;
- and anything else that can be done to help the local community become more disarmed, more reconciled, more just, more welcoming, more inclusive, and more nonviolent.

5.) Schedule a meeting with the mayor and city council, and the local steering committee and others members. Discuss with your local political leaders your vision of a “nonviolent city” and the concrete steps that together can be taken to make that vision come true.

6.) Start to attend city council meetings as a group and to propose and inject ways that your local community can become more nonviolent. Help your city council adopt the vision of your community as a “nonviolent city.”

- 7.) Set up a volunteer list, network and organizing base to spread out and reach out to everyone in your city. Assign tasks to everyone toward a systematic outreach. Encourage everyone to chip in and do their part to promote your community becoming a truly “nonviolent city.”
- 8.) Organize a city wide launch that is inclusive, celebratory, and visionary, but also has concrete tasks for new volunteers to work on. We recommend that you launch your Nonviolent City with a week of events and actions as part of the national Campaign Nonviolence week of actions beginning every year on September 21<sup>st</sup>, International Peace day.
- 9.) Set up a website and social media page to promote your nonviolent city. Set up a media committee to promote the vision of a “nonviolent city” in your newspaper, TV news, local talk shows, radio and social media.
- 10.) Reach out to every sector of the community to help promote and build a more nonviolent city. That means, reaching out to everyone from the mayor and city council members to the police chief and police officers, to all religious leaders and communities, and all civic leaders, to all educators and healthcare workers, to housing authorities, to prison officials, to youth and grassroots activists, to non-profit community groups, to the poor and marginalized, and children and the elderly.

