

May the Lord grant me His Peace
and the grace to bring Peace to all.

Mother Pauline, February 2, 1850

+ Rome, July 3, 2005

Dear Sisters,

With this letter I want to share with you – insofar as it is possible to do so in a written way - some of my experiences of the SCC Assembly that took place in Wilmette from June 15 to 17 in which I was able to participate. The theme was: “Let Justice Roll like Water and Goodness like an Ever-flowing Stream.” (Amos 5:24) The main consideration was how we could become and be – according to the teaching and life of Jesus – peacemakers and bearers of reconciliation in a world of violence. Looking on Jesus and his way of non-violence, justice, peace and love did not remain only

words but challenged us more and more each day to ask ourselves: How far am I/are we ready to follow Jesus?

The highlight of the Assembly was the planting of two Peace Poles, one in the garden of “Sacred Heart Convent“, our home for the elderly Sisters, the other near the cemetery of the Sisters on the property of the Province Center (see photo). In four languages – English, German, Spanish and Vietnamese – one can read: „May Peace Prevail on Earth.“ These two Peace Poles had been erected in the presence of many Sisters, friends, neighbors and representatives of other Religious communities who had been invited to the celebration. Both poles are now like a silent prayer for peace, a connecting link of all Religions in their common intention of peace in the world. They continuously remind us of our mission to live radically and creatively the Gospel teaching of non-violence in our world of violence and terror.

The Assembly was conducted by Fr. John Dear, SJ. In addition to the three vows of chastity, poverty and obedience he has made the vow of non-violence. He tries to live this vow in his daily life. He is a tireless advocate for peace, social justice and human rights. Because of peaceful actions for peace which inevitably include civil disobedience, he has been in prison already more than 75 times. In spite of the always insecure outcome of the imprisonment and the inner darkness combined with it, he felt each time strengthened in his commitment for peace and justice. Non-violence is mainly an inner journey for him which is only possible in looking to Jesus and in following him. Painful personal experiences in the United States, in El Salvador, in Iraq, Ireland and other countries which are struck by violence have confirmed him in his commitment to peace and justice and has deepened his spirituality of non-violence.

We can learn Gospel non-violence only in looking towards Jesus and listening to his teachings. He lived non-violently and proclaimed non-violence, social justice, and true peace for all, especially for the “anawim“, as the Gospel calls those who are suppressed and marginalized. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus calls us to be peacemakers, to hunger and thirst for justice, he calls us to reconciliation and to love of our enemies. Jesus’ words are unmistakably clear. And yet – how often do we try to interpret his words in a way that they “fit” us?!

In Gospel non-violence we discover three movements: from contemplative non-violence to active non-violence to prophetic non-violence. In Mary’s life we see the basic steps on the road to peace, as Fr. Dear made clear.



Peace and non-violence begin with prayer. First of all we have to breathe in the peace that only God can give, before we can become bearers of peace. That requires that every day we spend sufficient time in the presence of God in order to breathe in the Holy Spirit of peace and to breathe out our inner wars, our own violence and brokenness, our anger and our bitterness, our powerlessness and our restlessness, handing all over to God. Only when we are free from all the violence that is in us can God fill us with the gift of his peace. Mary's history begins with this contemplative dwelling in God. Although living in an environment in which she daily experienced the violence of the Roman occupiers she put her hope in God and in his plan of salvation. She did not suspect that God's salvific plan would cross the plan of her own life. But she was open for God's coming into her life. Mary teaches us: Only when we commit ourselves and all our life's-project to God can he transform us and fill us with his peace, that is, with himself.

When we have found inner peace we are ready to do the second step: to practice active non-violence. After Mary had encountered God and after he became flesh in her womb she hastened to her cousin Elizabeth who soon would give birth to her child. Authentic contemplative dwelling in God leads to active non-violence, which is expressed in loving service to our neighbor. Martin Luther King, Jr. described active non-violence by using the word *Agape*, love in action, a love that seeks and creates unity. *Agape* is the willingness to sacrifice in the interest of mutuality. *Agape* does not stop at the first mile, but it goes the second mile. *Agape* is the love that "never counts." Looking at the cross is enough to show us how far God's *Agape*, his unconditional non-violence goes.

The active non-violence becomes a prophetic sign when our actions of service don't remain in a private circle but when they become publicly visible. The prophetic non-violence proclaims the Kingdom of God as the only just reign, as Mary did in the Magnificat. In Jesus Christ the Kingdom of God began already, a Kingdom that "is not of this world". Nevertheless, many sovereigns of this world, beginning with Herod, felt themselves threatened in their power by the proclamation of God's Kingdom. Out of fear of losing their power they used violence against those who trusted in God's Kingdom and proclaimed it. For Jesus it meant an apparently powerless end on the cross; for many after him a brutal martyrdom – even until today. Mary proclaimed God who "has lifted up the lowly and has thrown down the rulers from their thrones." In the Magnificat Mary praises the God of peace, of goodness and mercy. It is a hymn of praise that until today encourages many people and fills them with hope.

These three movements which we have contemplated in the life of Mary, bring Mother Pauline to my mind. From witnesses of Sisters who had lived with her or who had met her we know that she could pray for hours, kneeling, "without moving, immersed in God". But when a poor person came and asked for help she immediately interrupted her prayer in order to take care of him or her. She saw in each poor man or woman Jesus Christ himself who came to visit her. Here we see how contemplation and service are one. During the time of the *Kulturkampf* Mother Pauline tried everything to save at least some of her schools. Time and time again she negotiated with powerful governors. She encountered all with an invincible gentleness and friendliness, even those whose attitude and behavior were anticlerical. One witness says: "I had the joy to see that very often the initial cool reception changed to remarkable esteem as soon the Reverend Mother had exchanged only a few words with the respective governors. This esteem grew during the conversation and had an effect also on the personnel in the office. At the end we were accompanied to the exit with the greatest gentleness." Mother Pauline's prophetic non-violence radiated in such a convincing way that the future emperor Friedrich once exclaimed: "This lady is worthy to wear a crown."

As Sisters of Christian Charity we are in a special way committed to non-violence, not only as a consequence of following Christ, but also because of our charism. In the writings of Mother Pauline we find again and again the expression "peace". In Volume 23 alone, her Retreat notes from 1842 to 1850, I counted the word "peace" 90 times. Mother Pauline knew that peace is not something that comes

from human effort. Peace is a grace, a gift of the Holy Spirit, which obliges us to action once we have received it. Therefore time and time again she asked God: "May the Lord grant me His Peace and the grace to bring Peace to all." Non-violence, beginning in our heart and radiating to others, is an expression of faith in God and of hope in him whose Kingdom began already here on earth – in spite of all contrary indications. The challenge not to lose hope in the midst of violence and death is maybe the greatest challenge for us today. As bearers of peace we are bearers of hope and vice versa. People today need nothing more urgently than bearers of hope who believe firmly in a future of peace.

Dear Sisters, let us ask the Lord to fill our hearts with peace and to give us the grace to be bearers of peace and to be peacemakers right there where we live.

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Some information:

- On November 7 a change will take place in the Provincialate of the German Province. Sr. Agathe Schuppert is re-appointed as Provincial Superior for another three years. Her councilors are: Sr. Anna Schwanz, Sr. Siglinde Müller and Sr. Rita Kellner. Sr. Chrysostoma Pützer will continue as Provincial Secretary. Sr. Maria Veronika Pasel will assume the responsibility of Provincial Treasurer. We are grateful to the Sisters who accepted wholeheartedly to serve in the Provincial Leadership. But I also want to thank in a special way those Sisters who will be leaving their office: Sr. Antonie Simon, Sr. Maria Gabriele Mutter, Sr. Renate Rautenbach and Sr. Aloysita Ruhmann. During a time of deep-rooted changes they have selflessly done their utmost for the best of the Province. We wish them God's blessing, joy and strength for the future and for the ministries that are already awaiting them.
- In the Uruguayan-Argentinean Province the change of the Provincial leadership will take place on February 11, 2006. Sr. María del Rosario Castro will continue as Provincial Superior for another three years. Her councilors are: Sr. Maria Nicholson, Sr. María Adriana Mateos, and Sr. María Angelina Rivarola. Sr. María del Carmen Meloni will continue for some time in the office of Provincial Secretary and Sr. Mariana Mateo will continue as Provincial Treasurer. We thank the Sisters who accepted the re-appointment or appointment with readiness. My gratitude goes also to the Sisters who will leave the service of Provincial leadership: Sr. Celina Raquel Ladrón de Guevara and Sr. Teresa Duarte. Sister Teresa has contributed much to the life of the Province through her joyful, selfless presence and her abundant gifts during 12 years as Provincial Superior and a further six years as Provincial Councilor. We wish the Sisters God's blessing for their future.
- The Bishop of the Diocese of Paterson to which our Motherhouse in Mendham belongs, has entrusted Sr. Mary Edward Spohrer with the highest level of leadership allowed to a woman in a diocese: Chancellor and Delegate for Religious for the Diocese of Paterson. Although Sr. Mary Edward's will continue as Provincial Superior until her term ends on August 21, 2006, the appointment will be effective on July 11, 2005. We wish Sr. Mary Edward God's blessing for this service "in the Church and for the Church."
- I think we can already look forward to the new Catechism. The short abridged version was presented by Pope Benedict XVI on June 28. The Pope while still a Cardinal had written the foreword on March 20 of this year. In the MOTU PROPRIO, the approval and publication of the Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, Pope Benedict said: *"The Compendium, which I now present to the Universal Church, is a faithful and sure synthesis of the Catechism of the Catholic Church. It contains, in concise form, all the essential and fundamental elements of the Church's faith, thus constituting, as my Predecessor had wished, a kind of vademecum which allows believers and non-believers alike to behold the entire panorama of the Catholic faith. ...[I] entrust this Compendium above all to the entire Church and, in particular, to every Christian, in*

order that it may awaken in the Church of the third millennium renewed zeal for evangelization and education in the faith, which ought to characterize every community in the Church and every Christian believer, regardless of age or nationality. But this Compendium, with its brevity, clarity and comprehensiveness, is directed to every human being, who, in a world of distractions and multifarious messages, desires to know the Way of Life, the Truth, entrusted by God to His Son's Church."

- From now on I will also copy my letters as a PDF-File on the web page of the Generalate. You will find it under "Generalate – Superior General."

I wish to the Sisters of the Northern Hemisphere a restful, enriching vacation time and/or many blessings for the various summer activities. May this time fill you with new physical and spiritual strength! To the Sisters in Chile, Uruguay and Argentina as well as in the Philippines I wish continuous blessings for the manifold apostolic ministries. I myself will be in Germany from July 19 to August 2.

With many greetings from the Sisters of our Generalate community and from the Renewal Sisters from the United States who are with us right now,

I am your grateful

Sr. Adalberto