

CALLED TO CREATE A CULTURE OF NON-VIOLENCE IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE LIFE

By Sister Brenda Walsh, Racine Dominican

Following the recent outbreak of violence in Tucson, Arizona, leaders and other citizens across the nation and beyond called for an end to violence in both public and private life. At the Memorial Service for those who lost their lives in the Tucson incident, President Obama called on all “to use the occasion to expand our moral imagination, to listen to each other more carefully, to sharpen our instincts for empathy and to remind ourselves of all the ways our hopes and dreams can bond us together and create a more peaceful world.” The people participating were experiencing pain, frustration, sorrow and anger after the senseless attack.

After that event, many people started thinking about solutions that could create a culture of non-violence and peace in our individual lives, in our communities and in the public sector. Some solutions were offered. While not new, they need to be consistently practiced with diligence and hope. They include the following:

- Look at the words we use. Do they bring hope and healing, or do they result in hurt, hostility and conflict?
- Do we provide good example for youth today, demonstrating ways to interact and communicate peacefully? We can write letters to the editors of local newspapers and remind readers to assume shared responsibility for teaching non-violence to our youth and demonstrating it by the witness of our daily lives.
- Politicians are called on to drop destructive labels and bring people of different views together to exchange ideas truthfully and with civility for the sake of peace, unity and the common good.
- In private and public life, look at the judgments we make about people without sufficient knowledge of their stand on issues. We need to listen and learn from them and exchange ideas with respect. It does not mean that we agree with them or give up our own views and affiliations. We speak our own truth with clarity and listen to the other side. Ask ourselves what role does racism or prejudice play in our judgments of other people.

- We must speak out clearly and publicly when we perceive injustice and evil. We have a moral obligation, says Henry Thoreau, to refuse to cooperate with systems that oppress and dehumanize. Together we can seek a non-violent response.
- We can provide and promote room for healthy discord and discover and practice effective ways of dealing with anger, revenge, discord and hostility.
All people, youth and adults can learn and use conflict resolution and dispute mediation skills to help resolve differences and to communicate in a non-violent way.

Pope Paul VI reminded us that “there is no peace without justice.” To bring about peace we need to listen to the struggles of suffering people and help them articulate what they see as a solution and not just impose a solution for them to accept. We need a deep faith in our effort to create a non-violent community and systems and structures that support the dignity of all people. We need to reclaim authentic compassion that will clarify our attitudes toward justice and peace and renew our commitment to non-violence in a culture that often promotes and even rewards violence. If we are centered in prayer and in God’s spirit, we can accomplish great things. When we approach things in a non-violent manner, we try to walk in the other person’s shoes and try to understand where they are coming from and approach them in a civilized way that will help them respond in a more reasonable way and look more clearly at the issues involved.

Another world is indeed possible. Let us begin to create world of peace and non-violence and do so with courage conviction and hope. “Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me.”