



## Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace

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July 21, 2016

His Holiness Pope Francis  
Bishop of Rome  
Apostolic Palace  
Vatican City 00120

Your Holiness,

On behalf of the leadership of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace (CSJP) I want to express our gratitude and hope concerning the April conference at the Vatican entitled "Nonviolence and Just Peace." The announcement of the conference was welcome news and long overdue.

We want to affirm and add our voices to "An Appeal to the Catholic Church to Re-Commit to the Centrality of Gospel Nonviolence" issued at the end of the conference. We would welcome an encyclical to bring greater awareness of nonviolence to the Catholic and world communities. We experience the need to move away from the "just war" theory which we have seen misused and misapplied even by "Catholic" theologians in the U.S. and U.K. justifying wars of aggression. We agree with the conference document when it says, "Suggesting that a 'just war' is possible also undermines the moral imperative to develop tools and capacities for nonviolent transformation of conflict."

"Christ is our peace." (Constitution 2) Our Congregation was founded as the Sisters of Peace with the benediction of Pope Leo XII in 1884. It was hoped that the very name "Sisters of Peace" would inspire a love of peace and a desire for it. (Constitution 3) From our Foundress we learned that there can be no peace without justice. "This congregation had its origin in the founder's response to the social needs of the time." (Constitution 4)

We recommitted ourselves as a congregation to Gospel nonviolence in our Chapter Acts of 2008: Seeds of Peace, Growing in Nonviolence.

As people of peace we called ourselves to action to:

- Practice nonviolence in all relationships, with self, one another, Earth and Cosmos  
Stand in solidarity with those who are poor and respond to injustice with creativity, passion and nonviolence
- Practice nonviolence in communication, reconciliation and forgiveness
- Live nonviolence in our lives as citizens and consumers
- Practice nonviolence in collaboration with others to heal the violence in our world
- As individuals discern if we are called to take a vow of nonviolence

We believe that the recommendations made at the end of the conference would be helpful to us and to our families, church and society in living our own commitments to nonviolence and in building a world of peace founded on justice. We join our voices to the Conference attendees in calling on the church to:

- ✓ continue developing Catholic social teaching on nonviolence. In particular, we call on Pope Francis to share with the world an encyclical on nonviolence and Just Peace;
- ✓ integrate Gospel nonviolence explicitly into the life, including the sacramental life, and work of the Church through dioceses, parishes, agencies, schools, universities, seminaries, religious orders, voluntary associations, and others;
- ✓ promote nonviolent practices and strategies (e.g., nonviolent resistance, restorative justice, trauma healing, unarmed civilian protection, conflict transformation, and peacebuilding strategies);
- ✓ initiate a global conversation on nonviolence within the Church, with people of other faiths, and with the larger world to respond to the monumental crises of our time with the vision and strategies of nonviolence and Just Peace;
- ✓ no longer use or teach "just war theory"; continue advocating for the abolition of war and nuclear weapons;
- ✓ lift up the prophetic voice of the church to challenge unjust world powers and to support and defend those nonviolent activists whose work for peace and justice put their lives at risk.

Now is the time to turn to the life and witness of Jesus, to tell the world, as He did, to "Put down the sword." Mt. 26:52

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sister Sheila Lemieux". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

Sr. Shelia Lemieux, CSJP, Congregation Leader