**Make me an instrument of your peace**

As you know I am a member of the Third Order of Saint Francis.

Each year on the nearest Saturday to Saint Francis Day which is October 4th Third Order members in East Anglia and others across the country meet to renew their promises.

This year because of COVID19 we are restricted so that we cannot meet in a large group and so we are having two smaller gatherings at Diss in Norfolk and Halstead in Suffolk on Saturday October 3rd based around sharing a communion service together. Normally we would also meet for a longer time and have discussions, but alas not this year. Instead Angela Alexander our Area Minister along with the Area Team have asked me to produce an article to send out in advance with questions to take away and consider in our Zoom groups. Here is that article:

As Franciscans we commit ourselves yet again this Francistide ‘to seek to spread the knowledge and love of Christ, and to promote the spirit of love and harmony as the family of God and to live joyfully a life of simplicity and humble service after the example of Saint Francis’ (Words from the annual renewal of our pledge as Third Order Franciscans)

One of our greatest commitments is to be men and women of peace. Francis, in his own day, was a peacemaker, living out the Beatitude which says, ‘Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God’.

Franciscans are glad to use the prayer which has become known as the ‘Prayer of Saint Francis’ even though Francis himself did not write it. We pray,

‘Lord make me an instrument of your peace, where there is hatred let me sow love’.

How well are we rising to the challenge of being instruments of peace in our own time, in 2020? How do we sow the seeds of love in a world which, in so many ways, is torn apart by continuing hatred and violence?

To help us answer this I first want to look at warfare as it is today. In order to become peacemakers, we must see clearly what the task involves. If we want to beat our swords into ploughshares, we must take a clear look at what a 21st century ‘sword’ looks like.

Way back in Jesus's time there was plenty of violence around. However, it could be said that the sword or the spear represented the cutting edge, literally, of the military. The Roman occupying army was indeed pretty formidable and frightening and its method of death by crucifixion very cruel.

Fast forward to the 21st century and our task to be peacemakers suddenly looks enormous. A number of inventions have made war far more deadly and far more expensive. The invention of gunpowder, the internal combustion engine, the invention of flying machines and rockets, the invention of radar, and perhaps, most frightening of all, the invention of weapons of mass nuclear destruction. The latest technologies using satellites and computers means that we have moved a long way in the history of warfare from a sword at the end of a man's arm to the era of mass destruction at the touch of a remote button. We have a whole military and industrial complex involved in the art of warfare bringing along with it huge vested interests which are all too ready to continue to exploit the opportunities arising from human conflict.

In one profound way nothing has changed. As Franciscans we like to keep it simple following the simplicity of Christ who said that loving our enemies is always the way. ‘Make me an instrument of your peace. where there is hatred let me sow love’. Two 20th century leaders have shown us the way of love and non-violence and we would do well to study their methods. Gandhi encourages us by saying, ‘When I despair, I remember that all through history the way of truth and love have always won. There have been tyrants and murderers, and for a time they seem invincible, but in the end they always fall. Think of it – always’. And Martin Luther King encourages us to choose the way of love by saying, ‘Darkness cannot drive out darkness, only light can do that, hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that’.

As part of our commitment to be instruments of peace perhaps we can study the non-violence of Gandhi and King and apply it to our own peace making.

So back to our present. How do we use love in an era of huge military might? We must have faith in the way of truth and love. Love is far stronger than nuclear blasts and military strength. Love unites us and builds us into a strong world community whereas military strength is largely destructive and solves few problems. Violence almost inevitably leads to more violence, whereas love always leads to more love. As peacemakers we must actively choose the way of love and non-violence and use it creatively and with imagination.

If we are to follow the way of truth, then we must face up to the fact that spending on the military is way out of control and is immoral. Military spending is the big elephant in the room of modern life. Of course, it is in the interests of the military and the business world for ordinary people not to think about this. Not dissimilar to the tobacco companies wanting to hide the cancerous consequences of their product. Therefore, it is up to peacemakers to shine a light on the truth. As part of our commitment as Franciscans let us become better informed and more active and vocal in our opposition to huge military spending.

Where do we find out about this? How do we become better informed? I have recently re-joined the Campaign Against the Arms Trade (CAAT) and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND). The figures for arms sales are staggering. The Campaign Against the Arms Trade uses the most up to date statistics provided from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute which says that in 2017 the top 100 companies made an estimated 398.2 billion dollars of sales. From 2009 to 2018 the largest buyer of weapons in the world was the Saudi Arabian regime with 115 billion pounds of deals. If you want to know what happens to some of these weapons, then you need to inform yourself about the war in Yemen. Many weapons bought from the UK have ended up bombing civilian homes, markets, wedding parties and funeral gatherings in the Yemen. Should the UK government still be supplying weapons to Saudi Arabia? I have recently e-mailed my MP to ask her this question. We must ask the right questions in the right places and question this immoral trade just as in the past people questioned the immorality of the slave trade.

Does war ever bring about peace? Can I recommend a series of five programmes entitled ‘Once Upon a Time in Iraq’, which can be found on the BBC iPlayer? These five programmes let the ordinary people of Iraq have their say and are a very convincing commentary on the mess of war left after the invasion of Iraq in 2003. If you need convincing that violence breeds more violence, then this is a very powerful presentation of the legacy of this particular war.

In the end the different warring parties have to sit down and talk. We have examples of this working in South Africa with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. In Northern Ireland the peace process took years to bring about peace and is an ongoing process. At present there are peace talks between the different factions in Afghanistan. We pray for a good outcome. Our calling could be to keep well informed about all attempts to bring peace and reconciliation in our world and to support the work of the United Nations.

We would do well to promote the Charter of the United Nations adopted at its inauguration in 1945. It starts,

‘We the Peoples of the United Nations determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind, and to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small, and to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained, and to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom, and for these ends to practise tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours and to unite our strength to maintain international peace and security, - - - ‘

As part of our commitment to be peacemakers we would do well to read the whole Charter and to support the ongoing work of peacemaking promoted by the United Nations.

It is not easy being a peacemaker in 2020 because so many still think that war is a necessary evil in our modern world. This is what makes the work of a peacemaker so important. It is up to all of us to explore and promote peace in an active and imaginative way.

Can I encourage you to believe in the power of love and leave you with a quote from Jimi Hendrix,

‘When the power of love

overcomes the love of power

the world will know peace’

And finally the International Prayer for Peace

‘Lead me from death to life,

From falsehood to truth,

lead me from despair to hope,

from fear to trust,

lead me from hate to love,

from war to peace,

let peace fill our heart

our world our universe.’

Questions for consideration as we seek to be peacemakers

‘Make me an instrument of your peace,

where there is hatred let me sow love’

How can we put this into action:-

A Personally and locally

B Nationally

C Internationally

Are you familiar with the way Gandhi and Martin Luther King used nonviolence in their campaigns?

Could this be useful to you as a peacemaker?

In our Franciscan Principle for Day 18 in the Third Order we are given the responsibility to study the application of Christian principles to questions concerning justice and peace.

What might you study in the coming days so that you are better informed in this area?

Is there ever any peace without justice?

Quakers challenge us to live in virtue of that life and power that takes away the occasion of wars? (Taken from advice number 31 of Advices and Queries).

Can you search out whatever in your own way of life that may contain the seeds of war?

‘When the power of love overcomes the love of power

The world will know peace’. Jimi Hendrix

Is this practical or just idealistic dreaming?

‘Jaw jaw or is better than war war’. Winston Churchill

How can we encourage the work of peace and reconciliation throughout the world?