

The SERVANT SONG

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Bearing the Unbearable: Never-ending Grief

by Suzanne Belote Shanley

The June commemoration of Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church, reminded us of Mary “standing by the cross of Jesus” with other women relatives (John 19:25-34). Mary beholds the desecrated body of her son, spikes nailed into hands and feet, thorns lacerating his head. She hears her son groaning in agony his last words, words of forgiveness.

As if the Uvalde and Buffalo weren’t enough, we began morning prayer at Agape on June 6, the day after Pentecost Sunday, remembering the victims of the continuing mass slaughter over the weekend—gun violence in Tennessee, Virginia, Arizona, and South Carolina, leaving 6 more dead and dozens injured. 22 weeks into the year, America has seen 246 mass shootings. The numbers keep climbing. As of June 13th, the ever-staggering body count was 5 dead and 27 injured.

Scripture as a Context for Grief

Unlike the bodies of the slain children at Uvalde, Jesus’ tortured, and mutilated body was visible to his mother and to the women under the cross. The Mothers of Uvalde did not see the decapitated and shredded bodies of their children; instead, officials used saliva swabs from parents to identify their horrifically disfigured children. Doctors on the scene reported their own trauma at the unspeakable sight of these small, shattered bodies.

The Realities of Mass Slaughter: How to depict carnage?

The *New York Times* and the *New Yorker* both carried recent articles querying whether people in the US were ready to view, (if any of the parents of the slain children indicated they were), the bodies of the massacred children in open caskets. Initially, such a proposal seems macabre, grotesque. Yet, history records that it was the viewing of the body of the lynched fifteen-year-old Emmett Till in 1955 at the insistence of his mother, Mamie, that galvanized the Civil Rights Movement.

The authors of these articles, as well as the writing and photography of many photo-journalists in the past, such as Susan Sontag, (*Regarding the Pain of Others*), center on the value of visual images of atrocity. They each ask a similar critical question: Could gruesome visuals of war (and gun madness in the US) have any effect on a population in a state of voluntary psychic numbing? Could outrage over the immediacy of such visuals mobilize a movement? Editorializing commentary came and went amidst the funerals, the eulogies, presidential mourning, and the new death tolls. Tom Cruise made millions on his latest “action” film, as children across the US “play” virtually, with blood-splattered screens recording “kills”.

Personal Encounters with Grief: Covid, Gun Violence and Ukraine

No national forum existed for public grieving during mega covid deaths. My brother-in-law Paul’s Covid passing in January 2022 and the Covid death at age 47 of Allah Mathematics Allah, who was like a son to us from age 5, wrapped us in a pall of grief. Allah overcame incredible odds as an African American male who went from jail to ownership of a business, inspiring hundreds in his Dudley Square residence in Boston, with his community outreach through his barbershop, *Everything is Real*. Both Paul and Allah are two of the million or more nationally ungrieved. The issue of mass murder, grief, pandemic death, Ukraine, merge to present a major challenge for our violence-saturated internal process.



D. Roberts Kirk

Agape is 40 !!

Come, dance to the music of community
Join Agape’s Anniversary Celebration

Sat. Oct. 1st, 2022

10 am – 4 pm

Join in the reminiscence of those
who have been here 40 years and those newly arrived.
Sing along with music that will fill the day.
Bring a lunch and vegan potluck offering and a friend (s).
Share in our day of prayer and gratitude

My distanced grief and outrage continued during the news reports and videos of civilian executions in the Ukrainian town of Bucha. Repulsive and riveting, images of hastily dug trenches for mass graves, inflict new emotional tolls, leading to the question: at what point is such imagery too much? The thudding of black body bags, randomly tossed into makeshift graves, convinced me that I couldn’t turn away. Yet, I moved into a suspended state, all the while deepening the darkness. As I sought a way to de-traumatize, I felt guilty that my own needs seemed so self-absorbed, self-protecting.

How to process this spiraling sadness, seemingly terminal abyss of violence? I take myself to Jesus and the cross, to Mary and her circle of keening women. I realize the biblical implications of watching The Mothers of Uvalde outside Robb Elementary School, some handcuffed and restrained attempting to rush into the building which became their children’s graveyard. Mary too may have tried to pull Jesus down from the cross, wailing and screaming.

Rituals of Grief

The day of the Uvalde massacre we, at Agape, were only one day into a rural immersion with students from Stonehill College. In the shock of the moment, we came up with a ritual of communal grief to initiate with these students. We decided to light 21 candles for the children and teachers and one large candle for the Buffalo victims.

All of us somber, attentive, each student walked up to a photo on the Agape altar of each of the children and the two teachers, reciting, one by one, the names of the slain. We lit 21 candles from the central Jesus Easter candle. Then we were silent. Our stillness was born in part of confusion and dread. None of us had experience in processing grief for murdered children.

Perspectives on Grief in Times of Massacres

In her treatise on grief and war, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* the social theorist, Judith Butler, speaks to the issue of “public grieving,” which has become a regular occurrence at gun massacre sites

some labeled as scenes of “domestic terrorism.” Butler contends that “there is no life and no death without a relation to some frame. Even when life and death take place between, outside, or across the frames by which for the most part they are organized, they still take place. ...” (p. 8) Butler’s analysis attempts to use an image of “frames” which includes how a viewer integrates or frames a photographic depiction of a horrific event. She asks the reader to consider a “frame” for viewing such abominations as the killing of civilians in the Iraq war? Is gruesome photography justified? Does it enrage? Can it numb? Will it move us to action and remedy?

Butler suggests that “open grieving is bound up with outrage, and outrage is the face of injustice or indeed of unbearable loss which has enormous political potential.” (p. 39) She observes that Plato was worried that too much open and public mourning could end up “disrupting the order and hierarchy of the soul...and of political authority as well.”

Do we share an aversion to public grieving which comes at a cost? Public grieving takes time. We cannot sink back into our daily routines. If we bypass a response with “political potential” and do not engage in massive outrage as in the global outcry in the killing of George Floyd, what becomes of our frame of grief? Are we grief-fatigued, silent, numb?

How does a “disrupted soul” respond to carnage when the souls of legislators are not similarly disrupted?

From the killing fields of Ukraine to the Tops grocery Store in Buffalo, the blood is not easily washed from the hands of those whom Thomas Merton referred to as “great criminals with enormous power...in a death struggle with each other.” These criminals include “well-meaning lawyers and policemen, clergymen” who are a “front controlling. ...communication and enrolling everybody in their armies.”

The Violence by Which We are Formed

Butler suggests a question of context: Can we frame, the killing of children in the US to include a truth-telling about slaughtered children in Iraq and Afghanistan?

When the US pulled out of Kabul, for example, a targeted killing of Zemaro Ahmadi, a supposed ISIS operative resulted in the death of 10 including 7 children. Zemaro was a US based worker addressing malnutrition in Afghanistan. Pentagon apologies followed. The US offered no apologies for the bombing of Afghanistan after 9/11 or the invasion of Iraq, similar in scope to the Russian obliteration of Ukraine.

Butler posits “...a breakage...between the violence by which we are formed and the violence by which we conduct ourselves.” If we can clearly see this breakage, then perhaps we will be poised to accept the “responsibility not to repeat the violence of one’s formation.” (p. 167) In other words, violence is endemic to the American “frame” as we selectively grieve or don’t grieve.

Butler envisions roadblocks to “affective responses” to murder and death as “highly regulated by regimes of power. ...” The Pentagon “regulated” the press coverage of the targeted murders after the American military’s exit from Kabul. Butler contends that the “power of the image” is controlled, “knowing full well that it could and would turn public opinion against the war in Iraq.

The War in Ukraine – Nonviolence or Nonexistence?

by **Brayton Shanley**

It has been over three months since the Russians invasion of Ukraine. Frustrated, feeling trapped as if in a living nightmare, many of us are simply horrified by the media reports of the daily death toll. Do we American bystanders need to look within ourselves and our nation’s support of this war to get real answers?

And what is the status of this war, this graphically filmed human carnage? Ten demolished cities and several more towns are on their way to ash and ruin. Since Ukrainian troops in Kyiv thwarted a hasty Russian takeover, Russian troops have now successfully relocated to the Eastern Donbas Region, and continue levelling cities, towns, and killing their civilian populations. Russian forces may begin to achieve their victory in a war of annihilation. Devastating much of this country of 44 million people in the size of Texas.

Over 8 million civilians have fled the country, 95% are women and children while their husbands stay back to fight: 7 million, the elderly, infirm, women and their children cannot afford to flee, 10 million are displaced. The present Russian stance on the invasion is: “We will increase our aggression rather than fail to meet our goals.” Therefore, let’s expect a protracted war and further atrocities even while the Ukrainian army talks of persevering to victory. If Ukraine prevails and barters a livable truce, the military will be honored as war heroes of historic proportions. Zelensky will achieve a contemporary Churchill status and David once again defeats Goliath against all conceivable odds.

As we bystanders watch these reports, it is impossible not to weep daily for Ukraine’s unbearable death and trauma. And the Russian conscripts? 15,000 dead and counting. While both sides continue the battle, what is the true cost to Ukraine? Even without a clear victory Russia continues this aggression as deep hair-trigger hatreds inevitably intensify between the two countries.

An elderly woman from Mariupol, recently interviewed at the scene of the brutal killing of her family members, cries out in anguish, “I know I should love enemies, but I cannot. I hate the Russians. I wish I could kill them, all of them.” In our compassion, we who are not in harm’s way can deeply understand her bitterness. But the consequences of her suffering will arc over future generations and sow inevitable seeds of retaliatory wars.

This is what the brutality of war does to its survivors. It is the same story throughout history; the cruelty of war always begets a more brutal war. If the Ukrainian army appears to prevail, fighting to the last man or woman, war will be made to look good, necessary, heroic. The smaller outmanned army beats the unjust, cruel, sub-human invader, the stuff of which warrior myths are made.

Will the months of fighting with such massive human cost be worth it in any way? Thousands are dead and injured, women, children, elderly. A generation of children, traumatized by the madness of the adult war around them leaves their sanity and wellbeing



without any protection. We need to remember that modern war is the most lethal child abuse.

Ukraine’s historic buildings and beautiful landscape, a culture is being levelled, reduced to rubble, while war spews massive carbon and toxifies soil and air. Millions of people displaced crowding into small inadequate spaces creates more carbon and drastically pollutes the soil. What are the Ukraine refugees, the elderly, the infirm and the displaced going to return to? Where will they live? Will it take twenty years to rebuild? All living beings, plant, and animal, lose “when humans let slip the dogs of war.” (Shakespeare)

Demonizing Our Enemies

Stanford University Russian scholar Stephen Kotkin, shared in a recent interview, “Russia has a several century history of authoritarian regimes, of Czars and military dictators, reaching its nadir with Josef Stalin. At the same time, Russia has also been a highly cultured people, world renown for great art, literature, music, including the storied history of Orthodox Christianity. But always second fiddle to the West, Russia is always in its shadow, always feeling demeaned, inferior. Putin inherited this subordinate place in history, intensified by the demise of the Soviet Union in the 1990s, a painfully traumatic event which compelled him to return Russia to Soviet Union status as a world player.”

Since he became president in 2000, Putin has been consistently demonized in the Western press, especially maligned by the US, isolating him, building up our superior military to keep him in our control. When Russia began threatening Ukraine with invasion, NATO countries amassed armaments in their own defense, and the U.S. has supported them with billions in weaponry.

Putin immediately responded with his own threats at Ukraine, condemning the alliance with NATO. The pattern is typical among the men who lead their

countries into war. Hardwired to counter the power threats of adversary nations, these leaders reciprocate with escalating language of threats of military force that too often cascades into armed warfare. So, it seems clear that there are many men and woman in

has a more deadly, unstoppable missile weapon systems. As we write, the US is about to counter their advantage by sending Ukraine long range missiles to slow the Russian military advance in the Donbas with the threat of a Russian naval Destroyers landing from the Black Sea. The West bears its fangs once again making it more likely that the Russian army will kill Ukrainians civilians more barbarically, continuing to target large apartment complexes of the elderly, women, and children, and those in hospitals and shelters. Have Western countries simply threatened a sickened and paranoid man with deadly force and driven him into a homicidal panic? Kill or be killed? Kill them all?

Sending weapons to Ukraine to defeat the Russians will not resolve the deep hatreds between Russians and Ukraine, or the Russians with the West, especially the U.S. But this response has successfully empowered Ukrainian leadership and their forces to stay in the fight. Battling with formidable force on both sides will increase the number of Ukrainian soldiers killed, now at 200 per day and tens of thousands of civilians to date, in a protracted military nightmare that will only stop with a clear “winner.”

Military strategists are predicting the war could drag on for additional months even years. The juggernauts in the Russian and Ukrainian war are now caught

war, the most life-threatening evil that humans have brought into being. Violating the truth and worse, war mocks the bloody truth of Jesus warning to Peter; “Those that live by the sword die by the sword.” (Matt: 26:52). War and violence destroy both the killer and the victim, with no “winners,” only PTSD traumatized survivors trapped in their crippled bodies.

Truth Is Always the First Casualty in War

War can never be of God. It betrays the One, Loving and Nonviolent God. War is the truest antichrist and killing is our most self-destructive sin, and if left unabated could end all human life. Jesus’ command to “love enemies, do not take revenge on those who wrong you” (Matt:5:43-48) has evolved from an idealized Truth to absolute necessity. “Today the choice is not between violence and nonviolence but nonviolence and nonexistence”. Yes, Martin Luther King’s words ring perilously true at this very moment in history.

We humans are all imperiled. In our own quicksand of violence, the complicity with war widens well beyond those who order and fight it. Even “we nonviolent Christians” have not convinced our own Church to embrace Jesus’ command of nonviolent love. And how many Christians are killing other Christians in this evil massacre in Ukraine. Too often we “peace people” have failed to live and teach the ways of non-violence with our families, children, and their schools. As a race of humans, we simply have failed to make a more peaceful and safe world for our children and the children of our enemies.

As we witness to the unbearable pain of this massive killing, maiming, and traumatizing of children, can we see their loss as Biblical; they are true lambs to the slaughter. Beings radiating with innocence, they suffer and die in the grip of adult violence. The children’s suffering and death are unmerited, undeserved, innocent and, as such, have a power to redeem suffering and death, and reclaim life. The power of their meekness can buy back the hearts of fear-driven adults who perpetuate warlike ways. Jesus taught in The Sermon on the Mount: “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth (Matt 5:5). The God-molded harmless ones do not need to conquer the earth as warriors do. The earth is given to all of us as gift. Is it spiritually possible, that the horrific crucifixion and slaughter of these innocents can reclaim the humanity of those who continue to rely on war and like Jesus’ innocent death, redeem the whole of humanity?

The tragic deaths of these children must awaken us to the evil nightmare of all war, and help us to see, like the killing of George Floyd, that these deaths must not be in vain.

Has there been enough need-less suffering for love to radiate out over these killing fields emanating as a source of awakening and healing? May the unconquered power of mercy now be released over the land and the people and awaken us from this dark night of our hatreds to make certain this war will be our last.

Becoming Jesus

Jesus,
If your very being could be reduced to a word, it would be Mercy.
Help us to walk in that aura.

We are sinking in a sea of revenge for lack of Mercy.
Can we forgive those blinded by violence?
Clear our vision to see the precious humanity in the Ukrainians and Russians alike.
May this Mercy bring them peace that will rescue them from the desperation of this war.

Jesus,
Your love is a Nonviolent Love.
You loved your executioners unto your death.
Your love starves the fear-driven protection of violence as you teach:
“Bless them that curse you.”
Ignite our nonviolent hearts with yours.

Jesus, your Love is a compassionate Love.
Our sacred earth suffers from the heartless bombs of war.
She groans in the ravages of our greed and the war that protects our wealth.
Bring us down off the power-wielding pedestal of privilege to the humble simplicity of powerless love.

Yes, Jesus, we want to sit at your right hand and your left.
As you were willing to die for this Nonviolent Truth,
Embolden us to die for this Truth, for you.

Brayton Shanley

positions of political power who are directly complicit in bringing on this unthinkable savage war: Biden, Putin at the top and the 30 NATO countries, some of which are sending arms to Ukraine to aid in the fight against Russia.

When the Russians invaded Ukraine, NATO countries and the U.S. began to send billions of dollars of weapons to help Ukraine fight a superior Russian army that

in a death trap that “kills both the body and the soul in Gehenna” (Matt 10:28). This will only serve to fuel fear and hatred for the “other” on all sides, increasing Putin’s likelihood of using nuclear weapons in a final war of annihilation.

Remember the US is second to Russia in nuclear weapons capacity. Remember too, that total nuclear war ends most of life on earth in an hour. This is modern

From Constantine to Ukraine

It can be difficult to fathom the mindset of the followers of Jesus in the early to mid-fourth century as they gradually abandoned their commitment to the Way of total love towards all, even enemies. Before being called Christians the disciples of Jesus were known as the people of the Way. What Way?

The Way that Jesus had taught in both his words and actions to be the Way that God reveals for the deliverance of human race from the iron-tight trap into which it had fallen using homicidal violence to maintain survival of self, tribe and nation.

Christians understood that the endless and religiously justified cycles of violence and counter violence had led humanity down a spiraling path of untold misery and pain. They understood that by returning good for evil, and love for hate that the chain of violence could be broken. They understood that it is better to die than to kill because they knew that there was spiritual life after the end of physical life. And when one kills, one risks bringing spiritual harm to themselves and others. How could a people with 300 years of such a consciousness, come to see tribal and national homicidal violence as compatible with the person and teaching of the One who taught the opposite?

There is little written evidence from this time that we can look to directly for an explanation. Rather we must piece together what information is available and make an educated conjecture considering our understanding of human nature.

In the first decade of the Fourth Century the Roman emperor Diocletian launched what would become the worst of the major persecutions of the early Church. His goal was to eliminate the Christian movement entirely as its adherents were growing in number despite all the previous lesser persecutions. Sacred books and buildings were burned, clergy and lay people were hunted down, arrested, tortured, and executed. It was a terrible time for Christians, who amazingly were able to hold out, trusting firmly in the teachings of the master and by belief in the reality of resurrection. This is not to say that it was easy. Nor can we know how we would respond in a similar situation. We know what Jesus taught, but would we do it?

Diocletian's successor Constantine saw that the many persecutions of Christians, including Diocletian's, had not and were not working. The number of Christians was increasing rather than decreasing. Many were converted upon seeing the Christians non-violent response to oppression and their strong faith in life after the grave. Constantine realized that another approach was needed. It is said, though doubted among some historical scholars, that Constantine had a vision of the cross in the sky, which as a superstitious



Paul Ritscher

follower of the pagan religion, he took as a sign that the Christian God would grant him victory in battle. He did indeed win an important battle and shortly thereafter legalized the previously outlawed Christian religion, thereby ending the persecutions. From this time forward Christians were able to practice their faith freely. Later in the century, Christianity became the official State religion.

All leaders of empires know that religious unity is essential for the empire's maintenance and expansion. That is why the Roman emperors felt threatened by the rise of the Christian religion. It was causing a disturbance in the unity of the empire. Constantine convened the First Ecumenical Council in 325 when he saw inner disputes concerning doctrine in the Church threatening unity. He needed a unified church to have a unified empire. His primary interest was not his own transformation in Christ, but the interests of empire. If he was truly interested in being a Christian, would he have waited until his death bed for Baptism? And surely, he would not have had his first wife and his son murdered.

We can imagine the relief of the Christians as the persecutions subsided. And we can imagine their reluctance to return to such horror. Who of us would feel any differently? The thought process must have been gratitude and perhaps a sense of victory over the dark powers. Perhaps the Gospel imperative of love between all people was becoming reality. There were good reasons for the change

in the attitude of Christians from early to late 4th century.

The horrendous persecutions had ended, Constantine was giving church buildings to the community and salaries to clergy. He instituted programs for the needy and destitute among other helpful initiatives. And these good aspects of Constantine's governing are what prevent us from seeing the underlying problem clearly: the basic incompatibility between the priorities of nation-states and the Gospel.

On the one hand, governments look out for what they view as their own well-being. Continuance of the status quo and its own survival is the issue. The Gospel on the other hand teaches its adherents to put the other person ahead of oneself, to extend love to all, even those who present deadly threat, in the knowledge that it is better to die to this short life than to risk the spiritual harm that comes with offensive or defensive killing. Obviously not an easy way to live, but a way that becomes possible if one believes that Jesus' teachings on the matter are authoritative, indeed that his words are God's words.

This was the bedrock motivation of Christians for their first three hundred years. It was what enabled them to endure all that they endured. And although they may have failed at times to love their enemies, the teaching of church leadership was consistent. The community was united. It was this consistent teaching, this underlying unity that was gradually eroded with the Constantinian

revolution.

Perhaps the Christians reasoned that they could maintain the Gospel imperatives while actively participating in the exigencies of empire. Perhaps they would be able to go so far and draw a line. Yet when Constantine and his successors wanted the Christians to serve in the military, what could be done at that point? Were they willing to return to persecutions, to lose their church buildings, their clergy compensation? Would we have been willing if we were there at the time?

And so, from there on out we see the sad story of one compromise after another. Late 4th century bishops imposed sanctions on soldiers who killed in war, but that was later dropped and imposed only on clergy. Cicero's just war theory was baptized and became the dominant view over time. Christians leaders largely no longer taught the full Gospel and Christians freely participated in the wars of whatever country they happened to belong. It didn't even matter if those wars were fought between Christian tribes or nations. Christians had few qualms about killing even other members of the faith.

For many, the 20th century brought into focus the failure of Jesus' followers to live fully the precepts of the Gospel. The horrors of the world wars and the invention and use of weapons of mass death, forced the attentive to realize how far astray the baptized had gone. The all-Christian bombing crews of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as well as the willingness to perpetually hang a Damocles sword of nuclear death over the human race, was too much for their conscience to bear. Many embarked on a re-discovery of the essential truth of the Way of Jesus: non-violent love of all, including enemies. They came to see it as the only way out of the pernicious claws of darkness be-deviling the human race.

One can draw a straight line between the present war in Ukraine and the decisions of church leadership during the Constantinian period and beyond. People do what they are taught to do for the most part. To point the finger at Putin who is nominally Orthodox or Patriarch Kirill, is to not see the long-standing underlying problem: that Christians have largely abandoned the Way of the Gospel.

And as difficult as it may be, there is no solution in sight except a return to the obvious: a renewed commitment by all those who aspire to be disciples of Christ to the Way that he taught in his words and in his actions. May God help us all.

Mark Korban, an Orthodox priest at St. Jacob of Alaska Mission in Northfield Falls, VT, together with his wife Reba, have been closely connected to Agape since the late 1970's, and have been a source of inspiration since then.

U.S. Weapons, Ukraine, and War Tax Resistance

by Lincoln Rice

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has brought the horror of war back into the forefront of many in the U.S. who never think about it. It has been easy for many to condemn the actions of a hostile, powerful, and well-funded military when it is somebody else's. It is much easier for NPR and late-night hosts to talk about war crimes when the perpetrator does not live in the White House.

This war came at a perfect time for the U.S. government and war profiteering corporations. Just as military operations in Afghanistan were ramping down and there seemed to be fewer excuses to keep producing the weapons for war at current levels, a new war appeared in which U.S. soldiers are safe, but U.S. weapon manufacturers keep raking in the profits.

In April, the Pentagon hosted representatives from the top 8 U.S. weapon manufacturers to discuss whether they could meet demand for a war in Ukraine that may last years. Yes, the U.S. and its weapon manufacturers are planning for a war that will continue the hellish conditions in Ukraine for years. And the longer this war continues, the more likely that a line will be crossed leading to a direct war between Russia and the United States.

You probably already know that the largest-funded mil-



Marching down Broadway from the IRS to Wall Street.

itary in the world belongs to the U.S., whose military budget surpasses the budgets of the next nine highest-funded militaries combined. On a weekly basis—and often daily—the U.S. military is killing civilians using drones. This has not stopped during the war in Ukraine.

Although U.S. imperialism does not normally make headlines on the evening news, it is a reality that affects countless lives around the globe. With the help of the National War Tax Resistance Coordinating Committee's (NWTRCC's) wonderful resources, I have been able to refuse the payment of taxes that fund this imperialism for over 20 years. War tax resistance is also giving me tools to refuse paying for the kind of "aid" that sends billions of dollars of U.S. weapons to Ukraine and other war-torn regions.

I first discovered NWTRCC when I joined the Milwaukee Catholic Worker in 1998. Their bookshelf contained a copy of each practical booklet published by NWTRCC. A year later, attended my first NWTRCC conference, where I met some wonderful people from all over the United States who were refusing to pay for war. Although the conferences continue, most folks discover our literature online, with NWTRCC's website receiving visits from 40,000 unique visitors each year.

I am very proud to be part of NWTRCC's 40-year history, as well as part of the rich and diverse history of war tax resistance that spans diverse peoples and cultures throughout human history. If you are interested in learning more about war tax resistance, NWTRCC's resources are all freely available at www.nwtrcc.org.

Sowing Seeds

Life at Margins: The Sanctity of Work and Worship

by Tom Roepke

For over forty years, the Agape Community has demonstrated nonviolent resistance to injustice in the world and provided loving service to those in need. I first experienced life at Agape during several community workdays. A recent five-month residency at Francis House helped me understand more deeply the sanctity of shared work and the sacredness of daily communal worship.

The Sanctity of Shared Work

Residents at Agape met briefly on Monday mornings to share how things were going for them. Then the coming week was previewed using a large monthly calendar with the names of visitors and events written in pencil. I began to realize how much work is required to provide the hospitality visitors experience during their visits to the community.

A crackling wood stove represented a good deal of shared labor done earlier. I was happy to help as wood was split, stacked outside and later moved into the house, keeping the wood bins stocked during the cold winter months. Smiling with the realization that bodily health and strength enabled my capacity to serve the community in this way, I felt gratitude while carrying logs into the house.

The work of filling wood bins with others allowed for casual conversation as well as a shared silence filled with the sounds of logs being pulled from the pile and feet crunching across the snowy path to the house. At times, the work became a dance of gracefully coordinated movements. Working with other community members fostered an experience of mutual camaraderie and friendship.

Cooking and baking also provided the intrinsic satisfaction inherent in any form of loving service, especially when we rejoiced over bread that didn't have hole in the middle and a soup that turned out well. The value of a supportive community was easy to appreciate when I learned that a failed loaf of crumbly bread could be used to make homemade croutons.

While communities have long relied on cooperative work, today it is often replaced by more "efficient" methods of getting things done. Often this involves the exchange of currency for goods and services. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Krishna explains renunciation to Arjuna saying, "When work is done as sacred work, unselfishly,



Nancy Beth Jackson

with a peaceful mind, without lust or hate, with no desire for reward, then the work is pure." Preparing and sustaining a house of hospitality is a contemporary form of sacred work. Sanctified by the renunciation of working for a monetary reward, residents provide hospitality to all visitors, including the formerly unhoused, the lonely, and those in search of a new way of living.

Welcoming visitors to share a meal of soup, salad and homemade bread provided a welcome alternative to the commercially prepared options at a fast food restaurant or processed food in a grocery store. I wonder: How does the monetization of labor in capitalist society impact the possibility of experiencing daily work as a labor of love?

Even in mid-December the garden continued to provide fresh collard greens and kale. One day I was given the job of stripping any edible greens from the garden, as freezing winter weather would soon put an end to that possibility. I filled several large white bags with collard greens, arugula, parsley, and kale. This last harvest of the season was enough for the four residents and visiting friends to eat fresh greens for days. Harvesting greens to be eaten by others as well as myself was a novel experience for me. While living in NYC all the food I ate was harvested, transported, sold, and often prepared in exchange for currency.

Sanctity, the state of being holy or saintly, is not typically an attribute associated with work in the world. At Agape, I experienced daily work as a service to the community, a transformative approach to nurturing a human presence in the world. We may not all be saints, but we can all foster saintliness in ourselves and our communities. Even small acts can be imbued with love and hospitality. On cold winter nights, I often moved an extra chair when I sat near the woodstove and the resident cat, Ricky, would hop up to enjoy the warmth of the fire. Over time, daily expressions of kindness, generosity and loving care create a healing human presence in the world.

As Thomas Merton wrote, "For me, to be a saint means to be myself. Therefore, the problem of sanctity... is in fact the problem of finding out who I am and of discovering my true self." Engaging in work as a holy activity supports this process of self-realization.

The Sacredness of Daily Worship

Along with work, living at Agape deepened a sense of sacredness, strengthening my inner life and relationship with creation. In his latest book, *On the Brink of Everything*, eighty-year-old Parker Palmer describes the inner life as, "a largely silent, solitary process of reflection that helps us reclaim the 'ground of our being' and root

ourselves in something larger and truer than our own ego." As an Agape resident, I experienced this "something larger" many times, both in solitude and during daily morning prayer gatherings in the chapel.

It's easy to imagine opportunities for nurturing the inner life in solitude at Agape. Surrounded by the beauty of the natural world, I often had brief reflective moments while working outside or taking a hike by myself. These brief moments of awareness during the day strengthened my communion with the world and over time, my days became increasingly punctuated with a sense of wonder and joy.

Seeing frost on the kale, watching the last leaves cling resiliently to a mighty oak, kneeling down to touch princess pine illuminated by the morning sun on the path to the hermitage- life at Agape supported the innate human capacity to recognize the world's beauty and express gratitude to the creator. In this way, daily worship was not limited to a specific time or place. Although these moments occurred in solitude, they were gifts offered by the atmosphere formed and sustained by the community for decades.

Daily worship was also experienced communally before breakfast each morning. We gathered in the chapel and began the day together with shared silence, a chant, readings of scripture, reflections, prayers, and a song. Maybe the best way to describe the power of this practice is to say it was a daily communal experience of spiritual intimacy.

Shared silence between readings and prayers created the space for a communion that was more precious than words can express. After hearing the scripture, insights from *The Interpreter's Bible* were read and reflective comments freely shared. Then prayers were offered by individuals: prayers for loved ones who had died of covid, for those experiencing difficulties, and for personal needs; prayers in response to the endless reports of atrocities in the world... and prayers of gratitude. The gathering closed with a song that often reverberated inwardly well into the day.

Somehow, looking out of the chapel windows into the woods and sky provided a comforting sense of being embraced and cared for by the Creator. And this sense was experienced as well with a quick glance at the human community worshipping together. Life at the margins flows directly from the center of the human heart.

Out of My Comfort Zone

by Andrew Cowles

Spring break is typically a time for students to let loose, drink on the beach, without photo evidence, or maybe no memory at all. My friends who chose this route for spring break all seemed to have a blast, but man, did they look terrible when they returned--tired, hungover, and for a few, broke.

I can say with certainty that the seven of us from Holy Cross, returning from our spring break at Agape, did not share in their misery. Although not having as much fun in the traditional sense, the week of reflection, new experiences, and hard work at Agape, invigorated the group. Seemingly, everyone who partook in this immersion experience, had a healthier and happier end to the semester.

Before Arrival at Agape

Before arriving in the Quabbin Woods in Hardwick, what I knew about Agape included the community being vegan and artistic, both far strays from my typical day-to-day life. As an athlete, I don't often tap into my artistic side, not that other would benefit much if I did, (AKA not very talented); but coming into this Rural Immersion, I



Andrew Cowles, right, with fellow Holy Cross students

told myself "Embrace every new opportunity to make the most of this experience."

Night One

On our first night, we were thrown into

the immersion full force. Led by Borus, a volunteer and friends of Agape, the group participated in a musical circle. We sang and played instruments to songs, taking me out

of my comfort zone, pushing me to be expressive around a group I hardly knew.

Day Two

Our group traveled up to Amherst, MA, to participate in a multi-denominational peace protest about the war in Ukraine while picketing on the side of the road. Although I was slightly uncomfortable, the uncertainty of the situation turned to appreciation after our return to Agape. We reflected as a group on the day's experiences, and I better understood why these rallies are so important including that I realized that Ukrainians might gain hope by seeing rallies in their support occurring around the world.

A few days later, a group trip to the Quabbin reservoir provided time for us to bond on a hike together. Before the trip, my group was a mix of fellow students, but a night of light-hearted games and storytelling, allowed us to get closer to one another.

Night five for me was the most memorable as Agape offered us a "coffee-less" coffee hour. Holy Cross students and friends of the community gathered to share a song, a reading or anything particularly mean-

Dehumanization vs Kinship

By Kevin Fox

My ongoing, non-violent story, which has brought me to Agape, begins with hearing The Last Judgment read during Mass around my middle school years. Matthew 25:31-40 is where I find the works of mercy; but the deeper lesson I have always taken away is that when I perform any action good or bad, I am engaging with Jesus. It is Jesus whom I feed, clothe, shelter, visit. Jesus whom I refuse to feed, clothe, shelter, visit.

Consequently, the foundation to my pacifist roots comes from the understanding that it is Jesus whom I shoot at and kill in war. It is on Jesus, that I drop a bomb. The idea of killing God has never sat well with me, and therefore I decided to identify as a pacifist. My original pacifist roots are as simple as that. This reality is solidified when I remember that humans are made in the “image and likeness of God” (Gen 1:26).

At the time of this new understanding of The Last Judgment, I was not a nonviolent activist, but simply a passive pacifist. The identity ‘pacifist’ can have a negative stereotype of being passive and I was certainly fulfilling that stereotype. I knew that I must not contribute to war, but I did not know at that time that this view calls for certain actions (including the works of mercy). Only later would I come to understand this nonviolent lifestyle as an active one and no longer a passive choice. Praying, the works of mercy, civil disobedience, seeking community, and educating oneself, all require an active participation.

The Last Judgment sat within my heart, stirred, and kept rising to the surface but I had trouble articulating my thoughts. I took my next major step on my pacifist journey during my tenth-grade English class when I read one of the most influential passages of my life from All Quiet on the Western Front by Erich Maria Remarque:

Comrade, I did not want to kill you.... But you were only an idea to me before, an abstraction that lived in my mind and called forth its appropriate response. It was that abstraction I stabbed. But now, for the first time, I see you are a man like me. I thought of your hand-grenades, of your bayonet, of your rifle; now I see your wife and your face and our fellowship. Forgive me, comrade. We always see it too late.



That passage introduced me to the meaning of the word ‘dehumanization’. Through the lens of Remarque, I came to realize that soldiers, politicians, and taxpayers, do not believe that drones are dropping bombs on God, let alone that bombs are dropping on fellow human beings. We create an “abstraction” so that we forget that they also have a wife and a mother waiting at home, with just as much anxiety as ours. There is a clear “we vs them” mentality that is embedded in dehumanization.

So, there I was, a 15-year-old with a problem of dehumanization and no solution. The answer was presented to me through a service immersion program between my

first and second years of college. The book for the class was Greg Boyle’s Tattoos on the Heart. Immediately, a light bulb went off in my head for having found the social answer to dehumanization: which is kinship, a type of belonging that goes beyond the service or solidarity usually preached by the Church.

In his latest book, The Whole Language, Boyle writes,

This mystical kinship, this speaking the whole language, is the exact opposite of the age in which we currently live: tribal, divisive, suspicious, anchored in the illusion of separation— unhealthy, sad, fearful, other-izing, and demonizing. Mystics

replace fear with love, vindictiveness with openhearted kindness, envy with supportive affection, withering judgment with extravagant tenderness.

The “tribal” that Boyle mentions is the “we vs. them” mentality that saturates society. The “demonizing” or “other-izing” is dehumanization. Kinship eliminates the “them” and just creates a universal “we” that is as strong as a tie between mother and child.

Boyle is writing on how kinship is the social answer to marginalization, the process of the privileged pushing the poor and the oppressed to the socially constructed boundaries of society.

The evolution from applying kinship to dehumanization, to additionally applying it to marginalization is the step which the “passive pacifist” must take to become a nonviolent activist. Dehumanization is also a factor in the construction of margins.

Boyle writes, “We stand with the demonized so that the demonizing will stop” (Tattoos, 190). In other words, where I choose to stand and with whom determines whom I see as an image of God, and whom I see as “other”.

If it were my own mother, who is on the street corner, someone I believe is clearly created in the image and likeness of God, I would take her in and shelter her. When it is Jesus Christ who is on the street corner, I take Him in and wash His feet. When it is someone, I believe is less than human, then I keep walking by with eyes downcast.

The kinship required to battle the dehumanization that leads to war is an active and demanding lifestyle. Kinship is understanding that we are all sisters and brothers in Christ. This is not done in an abstract way. It is childhood memories of running through the tall grass with your sister, or your mom, holding your hand and applying those loving memories to those who I am persecuting and who are persecuting me.

‘Love your enemy’ requires the deepest radical, mystical, active, kinship. We have no issue with labeling our closest kin as our strongest enemy at times. Why do we struggle with labeling our strongest enemy as our closest kin?

Kevin Fox is a recent graduate of the University of Notre Dame and a current intern at Agape since the end of March, 2022.

Wandering Through the Agape Woods

by Louisa Rossel

In mid-March, just as the snow began to melt and signs of spring arose from a long winter slumber, students from the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, MA arrived at Agape for a rural immersion. On their first day of a week’s stay, as an Agape staff person, I guided the students through the forest on a 5 Senses Meditation Walk. It was essential for students to familiarize themselves with the vast beauty and magic of Central Massachusetts on the cusp of the spring season.

The students gathered in silence with me at the entrance of an Agape forest trail and took a collective breath. A sense of stillness and calm meandered through the leafless trees. The forest floor was covered by the decaying life of the previous summer, and brown seemed to be the only color that stretched for miles.

After a few minutes of silent walking, as their Forest Meditation Guide, I invited students to focus on their sense of smell. With the abundance of lichen growing on the trees and rocks surrounding Agape, this signals that the air quality is pure and healthy. Sadly, breathing this fresh, clean air is a privilege which we must not take it for granted. The students continued along the trail, breathing deeply while walking uphill and basking in the brisk air.

At the next stop along the trail, I asked the students to shift their focus to their sense of hearing. Some of the Holy Cross crew named sounds they heard: bird songs, the howling wind, the creak of old trees, and the rustle of the leaves. I asked students to close their eyes and paint a picture in their minds of the sounds around them. Their individual imaginations took this prompt and expanded it far beyond my original vision.

Some students pictured an orchestra’s sheet music. The wind served as the ever-flowing melody of the song of the forest, while bird songs and other unpredictable sounds added new and intriguing notes to the musical masterpiece.

Another student imagined the creation of a watercolor painting with the sounds of the wind as gentle, soft strokes of gray. Red paint splattered onto paper signified the sharp tones of bird warning calls.

Everyone allowed the sounds of the forest to guide the creation of the masterpiece formulated in each mind. I was inspired and humbled to witness and facilitate the discussion.

The longer the students listened and stood in one place, the quieter the forest became. The warning calls of birds faded from loud and shrill to distant and gentle. The crunch of the leaves ceased, footsteps in place, planted firmly on the ground. The

group circle quickly became part of the peace and tranquility of the forest landscape.

After, the silence was broken, the students were tasked with using their sense of sight to collaboratively search for elements in nature that intrigued their interest. They noticed thick, emerald-green moss that continued growing on a large boulder despite being blanketed in a thick clump of snow. They took a close look at all the varying colors and grooves of tree bark. Finally, they built a little snowman and decorated it with the finest stones and sticks they could find. With this exercise, students explored their natural curiosity and followed their sense of sight, making intriguing discoveries.

Lastly, I asked two of the students to pick up two objects that stood out to them along the forest floor. With their objects in hand, they felt their objects, better understand the complexities of texture and structure. I asked them to leave behind one of their objects at the entrance of the Agape trail as an expression of gratitude for all they had seen, heard, smelled, and felt along the trail.

They brought the other object back to their rooms as a reminder of all the beauty and wonder that surrounds us, if only we are humble and gentle enough to open ourselves to exploration.



Louisa leading students in Forest Bath

Louisa, a Stonehill grad, former Agape intern and now at AmeriCorps has followed in the tradition of a Stonehill College/Agape alliance, begun in the 1980’s.

The Seventh Station of the Cross: Jesus Falls a Second Time

Read at Agape's Good Friday Stations of the Cross in front of Boston's Statehouse

by Pat Ferrone

We live in a 'falling-down' time; a 'falling-apart' time. With the current war in Ukraine, our eyes latch onto horrific, technicolor televised images of awkwardly sprawled bodies on pavement, lying alongside now useless suitcases or mangled bicycles; a pink nail-polished hand emerges from a coat sleeve, fingers slightly, almost delicately, curled; a child's ragged teddy bear sits alone on a sidewalk, making one look about for its toddler buddy. They all fell and are permanently lost to their families, dead to our world - some mutilated beyond recognition, ready for body bags and mass graves.

"Horror" doesn't begin to describe these daily "failing down" crucifixions of essentially innocent human beings, under siege by bullets and bombs and missiles. Who is guilty of anything more than wishing for a return to the dip and rise of normal life - living and loving as best one can? I pray that the grief and rage I feel toward the blood-thirsty, power driven machinations of military minds and their lethal actions can be put to good use, and lead to meaningful initiatives guided by a Holy Spirit. I pray that our deep hope in something resembling the peace of Jesus, becomes possible, despite a Church history that has neglected Jesus' way of nonviolence.

In the meantime, my heart reaches out to the women and the children of both Russia and Ukraine and the



nearly grown young men who are weaponized, schooled in patriotic righteousness, and primed by hate and fear to

annihilate one another - their common Slavic origins, forgotten.

My own ethnic roots originate in the lush bread-basket of Ukraine. I have walked the streets of Kyiv, been brought close to heaven when subsumed into the beauty and power of the soaring music of Divine Liturgy. I have driven the rural roads into the countryside of modest homes, spent time in an orphanage for disabled children, and visited the village created for Chernobyl survivors. I've seen the patience of the "babushkas" near this village, sitting alongside the road, selling their foraged mushrooms.

Because of these memories, and my father's Russian Orthodox heritage and my mother's Polish Catholic faith, I pray for reconciliation among Christian faiths and the acceptance of the nonviolent gospel of peace. In a recent prayer created by Pope Francis, he begs forgiveness "for the hands which You created to tend," (that) "have been transformed into instruments of death" and, in the spirit of Oscar Romero says, "Stop us, O Lord, stop us, from killing one another." And if we must fall down, as Jesus did, let us fall down on our knees, in repentance and prayer for the wars of destruction we bring upon our brothers and sisters, our kin.

Pat Ferrone has been a companion to Agape's co-founders, every step of the way, leading to the formation of Agape and before. She is the regional coordinator of Pax Christi Regional and a key member of St. Susanna's Parish in Dedham, MA.



Jessika on the tractor at Agape

Floral Faith

by Jessika Crockett-Murphy

It is crazy how someone finds a connection to the divine in the churches, temples, mosques, homemade altars or sanctuaries. During my weeklong immersion at Agape, as a Stonehill student, I found the strongest feelings of belonging and love while working in the little rock garden which features three levels of flower beds, surrounded by trees, greenery, rocks, and driftwood from the nearby Quabbin.

The rock garden reminds people to slow down and smell the roses (or in this case, the perennials), to reflect on where they are in life. With the hustle and bustle in life there is rarely time to look at the beauty of the flora and fauna around us, their diversity and variety.

Nature doesn't want uniformity, and neither should we. The mix of yellows and oranges and purples creates a living piece of art for all to enjoy, and for all to try and create in their life. In the rock garden, I found a sense of peace that I had never really experienced in my life before.

I noticed how the birds sound, how the sun felt on my back, and what the compost that used to be food felt like in my hands, when broken down into dirt to aids in growing more food. It is such an astonishing cycle that many take for granted or do not realize how impressive it is.

I felt a new sense of belonging in nature and an appreciation for how our world works, and what my place is in it regarding the Earth and the Divine. I can look back on my time in the Agape Rock Garden and how much it helped me blossom, just like the flowers there.

Seeking Through Silence

by Andrew J. Borus

After nearly 4 years working in Wealth Management, I was left feeling burnt out, unfulfilled, and still years away from any form of respite from the corporate rat race. In the wake of the catastrophic events of 2020 my consciousness and sensitivity to social justice issues and the needs of the oppressed increased tremendously. While my heart grew, I also felt increasing anxiety about spending 40+ hours a week in an insulated skyscraper office, and deepening dread related to using my talents for a job that helped to enrich those who are already relatively wealthy. The droning buzz of racist-capitalism and cries of oppressed people seemed to be growing louder and louder, yet I felt helpless to make it stop. To find answers, I sought out silence.

In February of 2022, amongst the cold and snow, I took a three-day retreat to the Hermitage at Agape to reflect on my role in the world. I spent three days mostly in silence, pondering how to be less of a consumer and more of a giver. At times the silence seemed louder than the hustle and bustle of my daily life. Without a phone or computer to keep me occupied I felt finally able to rest and allow my mind to begin thinking about larger issues than the day-to-day minutiae of my life.

Upon arriving at Agape Brayton led me along the short path up the hill behind Francis House to the Hermitage. Trudging through the snow up the steep hill, Brayton's agility and stamina amazed me. I had been to Agape several times but had never seen the hermitage before. Although I had spent many weekends as a teenager in the Scouts camping, the Hermitage and woods surrounding felt different - there was something sacred about the place.

After a short discussion about my retreat and itinerary, Brayton left, leaving me by myself in the silence. Completely alone in the woods, and without my phone I felt the weight of my anxiety lifted for the first time in a long time. Free from worry and with nothing to do for the next few days, I felt able to relax and begin my discernment process of what changes I needed to make in my life.



Andrew Borus, new Agape Office Assistant with girlfriend Emily.

I spent most of my time at the hermitage alternating between meditating in the prayer loft, reading the Bhagavad Gita, and making ginger turmeric tea. I tended to the wood stove and ate small meals cooked on the camp stove. Best of all, I got to catch up on sleep - Brayton said sleeping is how we detoxify from the hustle and bustle of working life.

Most memorable of all was my walk to the Quab-



bin reservoir. I followed an unmarked path back behind the Hermitage. I got a little lost as the snow made the path hard to follow, but eventually found my way. The sleeping forest was beautiful; I could hear trees creaking and the snow crunching under my feet. Sunlight poured over me, and I felt so grateful to be alive. I had not seen the Quabbin since I was a child and was struck by its immense beauty. I found my way out to a jetty of rocks and let the water splash up all around me. On my way back to the cabin I did a Maitra prayer and sent thanks and well wishes to every person I could think of. Amidst my prayer a mighty burst of snow came pouring down out of nowhere. A moment later it was gone.

Despite the beauty and grace of my three days spent in relative isolation at the Hermitage, I left without any firm answers on what changes I should make in my life. Despite that, I had three main takeaways: 1. To spend more time contemplating and enjoying the silence 2. To do my best to always act with love, and 3. To drink more Ginger Turmeric Tea.

Borus's discernment outcome: he is now Agape's office assistant.

In Memoriam

Paul Mendlewski

Our beloved brother-in-law, Paul Mendlewski was born to eternal life on Jan. 13. Paul was my sister Bev’s husband, of 50 years and was 72 years old. Paul, Bev, and our daughter Teresa were bonded in a deep and compelling way, as Brayton and I are with their children and grandchildren. This is a gigantic loss for us. Paul died of covid and underlying conditions.

Paul gave us all a lesson on the need to be quiet, to listen, to respond with one’s eyes and with one’s long looks of compassion.

He was a portrait in restraint, giving us all an example of how we talk and don’t listen. In this respect, he resembled a zen koan or a monk...open heart, closed mouth, eyes of compassion.

Paul will forever be in our hearts as he and his sons, Dave and Rob, and his daughter, Melissa, helped to build our Agape Community and Paul was thrilled to be part of the building project and every year he would return with his reassuring smile and loving heart. Paul worked with Agape’s architect, Bob Wegener

on raising the main beam in Francis House.

Daniel Lawrence, Agape’s head carpenter during the early building phase of Francis House, befriended Paul in a profoundly stirring way. Theirs was a relationship of mutual monks, Dan the actual former Trappist, and Paul the man with a penetrating gaze. We picture them in mutual gaze from the eternal realm.

We love you Paul and will never forget your, our dear, quiet man of great soul.

Singing the Redemption Song for Allah Mathematics Allah

Allah Mathematics Allah, (Anthony as we knew him when we first met him at age 7) died of Covid complications on December 19th.

At 48, Allah had attained the status of leader in his Roxbury Community, where for nearly 20 years he served as a barber-philosopher and community mainstay, (Everything is Real Barbershop) shepherding his African American community members in Dudley Square with the energy and zeal of a charismatic leader.

His theme song was pride in his African heritage, encouraging male parenting models, rootedness in community and modeling entrepreneurial success. Allah took the words of Bob Marley quite literally: “Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery, None but ourselves can free our minds.”

His sudden death was catastrophic for his mother, Jessica, whom Brayton and Suzanne had known for over 40 years, son, Kolanji, and new grandson as well as siblings, including Julie



Allah Mathematics with his sister Julie Bradley

Bradley, Agape’s office manager. The extended Bradley-Clifford family are family to Brayton and Suzanne.

Allah attained a revered status in the African American Community in Boston’s Dudley Square. A large crowd gathered on his birthday in March, to pay a moving tribute to him at the corner of his barbershop. A sign, tall and impressive is planted on a square near the shop, now named after him. Allah Mathematics Allah.

Allah’s yearly “Grillin and Chillin Customer Appreciation Day” attracted hundreds of barbershop customers. Allah distributed trophies and awards for leadership to the men in the community, as well as encouraging the youth in Dudley Square to realize their full potential with pride and dignity.

Years before the barbershop opened, we at Agape planted a tree dedicated to Allah and all African American men who have served jail time in our racist new “Jim Crow”. The 40 foot tall ornamental apple’s exquisite white blossoms remind us yearly that Allah’s memory will live on in these Quabbin woods.

In a Facebook post after his birthday on St. Patrick’s Day, Allah wrote this to Brayton and Suzanne in 2019: “Peace sincerely thx u 4 all the Love u have given me in my lifetime, it will live with me and be we pressed to my grand sun.”

Suzanne Shanley

Voices

Transitioning

by Colleen Shortell

I am appreciative of Agape’s example of inner peace and mindfulness, despite returning to a high stress environment at Holy Cross. I have noticed a change in me since spending the week at Agape: a deeper awareness of pockets of peace in my day.

I tend to worry about the future; Agape taught me to live in the present and soak in the beauty of small, special moments

Spending spring break with all of you was one of the special experiences of my life which is far richer now because of your community, wisdom, and commitment.

Some of my classes upon my return have reminded me of all I learned. In my Environmental Sociology class, we spent a day on pipelines being built through Indigenous lands - a perfect reminder of the Standing Rock movie and the unwavering perseverance and nonviolence among these people. I am grateful for the sense of an amazement I gained at Agape, of love, faith, community, and our Earth.

Colleen Shortell graduated from Holy Cross this spring.

Being Truly Nonviolent

But it goes without saying, push comes to shove—being truly nonviolent (“non-violent love of friends and enemies” as Charlie McCarthy says) in the face of overwhelming physical violence takes far more courage than picking up a gun and fighting to save your country.

I’ve always had fundamental doubts about whether I have or could have that sort of faith and courage, not to mention love. Nonetheless, I simply can’t pretend the way of Jesus isn’t “the way, the truth, and the life”. By “life” here clearly Jesus is not talking about our physical life, but eternal life. Without that eschatological perspective, we are doomed following Jesus here in our mortal flesh. It didn’t work out for Jesus; it certainly won’t work out for us. “If for this life only we have hoped in Christ” says my namesake, “then we are of all people most to be pitied.” Martyrdom was practically routine in the first 3 centuries of the Christian era. The resurrection of Christ is all about giving us that eschatological perspective, the life of the world to come, while still here in this “vale of tears”.

Paul del Junco, who helped to build Francis House in 1987, is a long-time friend of Agape.

COMFORT ZONE | from page 4

ingful to any of us. I managed to add some comedic relief at the end of the night with my performance as the little girl from Sound of Music.

The love surrounding Agape provided a safe space for people to share. For example,

it is difficult for me to express how meaningful it was to watch a friend of Agape, Peter Anderson, remember his wife who had died a year ago, through the sharing of a poem she had written.

Another participant sang a tune that reminded him of his father, making night five the most meaningful of the trip.

To end the week, we students affirmed one another, hearing from and telling others how we respect and appreciate them, making me reflect on how meaningless much of our daily interaction is. I learned how to impact positively and to recognize the achievements of others, so that they can feel appreciated for what may otherwise go unnoticed.

Andrew Cowles is a Pre-med, Chemistry major of the class of 2024. At Holy Cross, he is a member of the club rugby team, who this past fall, placed 3rd nationally in the small college division.

UNBEARABLE | from page 1

...” And by analogy, the war on guns, the Pentagon budget.

The Forgiveness Frame After the Fact

One example of an “unregulated” narrative frame is the iconic photo by Nick Ut, of Kim Phuc Phan Thi, the “Napalm Girl” from the Viet Nam War, as a nine-year-old, running naked, her back seared with American dropped napalm. Fifty years later, Thi weighed in through several media outlets on her trauma and maiming, relating them to the victims of Uvalde: “The thought of sharing the images especially of children may seem unbearable—but we should confront them. It is easier to hide from the realities of war if we don’t see the consequences.”

Thi insists that as human beings we must connect the “wars abroad and that of the domestic equivalent of war,” the gun massacres. In a counterpoint to many critics who stress the invisibility of American war victims, Thi contends that we “don’t see bodies” in the carnage of Uvalde as we do “in foreign wars.” Thi says that “we must face the violence head-on, and the first step is to look at it.” (*The Hill*, Chloe Folmar, June 8, 2022)

Butler posits that “we feel more horror and moral revulsion in the face of lives lost under certain conditions than under certain others.” American children’s lives lost, for example, may elicit more “revulsion” than “certain others,” children of the enemy, of the “other.” Thi insists that we must merge these frames.

Grieving for American children gunned down in schools, blunted though it may be without a “National Day of Mourning,” points, however, to a distinctive discrepancy. We process the murder of children and innocent civilians in war in which we are the aggressors different from our home-grown killing of each other.

Case in point is the American bombing of the Amiriyah Shelter in 1991 during the Persian Gulf War, where hundreds of Iraqi civilians, mostly women and children, were sheltering. More than 1,500 people were killed in total. “.... black, incinerated handprints of some of the victims remain fused to the concrete ceiling of the shelter and can still be seen today.” (Wikipedia) One is reminded of the shadows of those incinerated at Hiroshima. Russia’s bombing of the art school in Mariupol is another example

of disputed frames and how the frames become manipulated and the real enemy, that of indiscriminate violence from any side, remains obscured.

The Weeping Mother of Jesus

Jesus, inert and lifeless in Mary’s arms, is the “frame” of war we embrace as Christians to move us to enact public rituals of grief. We at Agape participated in a public grief ritual with Eric Wasileski, Veteran of the Persian Gulf War. Eric was part of the missile launching crew which on Christmas Eve in the 1990’s sent missiles indiscriminately raining down on civilian targets. He suffers from severe PTSD as the launch commander for the barrage.

During America’s invasion of Iraq, Eric came to an anti-war vigil with Agape members in downtown Ware. As a member of Veterans for Peace, Eric was journeying from town to nearby town, unfolding an American flag, and in a prayerful gesture of cleansing, washing a blood-soaked flag. We all washed the flag with a bucket of water, reciting prayers of lament.

Eric led us past trauma and complicity, cleansing our moral wound. Similar rituals enacted in churches and communities of

faith, for victims of domestic terrorism and the American killing machine, might finally smash the illusion that the photos of grief in one country are different from the frames of war in photos of war in another.

“Forgiveness set my heart free.”

Perhaps Jesus was comforted by the sight of the grieving women at his feet: his mother and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. From the cross, Jesus forgave his executioners. As the US descends into the hell of unremitting violence, we hear the words of Christ in those of Kim Phuc Phan Thi: “Forgiveness set my heart free. ... I forgive everyone who caused my suffering, even the pilot. ...” After suicidal descent into utter despair, Thi found redemption through her conversion to Christianity. She does not deny the “unspeakable evil of which humanity is capable.” In the frame of the crucified Jesus, Thi intones that “peace, love, hope and forgiveness will always be more powerful than any kind of weapon.”

Mary, Mother of God, pray for us, for you have borne the Savior of our Soul.

News Notes

Agape joined the newly formed Mass Catholics 4 Indigenous Rights (MC4IR) and participated in its first virtual meeting, Apologize: Decolonize in support of Pope Francis’ trip to Canada the last week in July. We plan to stand with the victims, survivors, and families of Indigenous residential schools. We stand with Secretary of Interior Deb Haaland’s report on residential schools in the US. We are a Catholic voice for the Indigenous Peoples and victims of the schools. For more info contact Craig Simpson: cs4202144@yahoo.com



Interns – Left Sohyeon and Maria are working in the Agape garden



Students from Jesuit Nativity School celebrating their 8th grade graduation

Nativity School, Worcester MA, Stripped of its Catholic Identity by Bishop

Before Bishop Robert McManus of the Diocese of Worcester officially declared that the Jesuit sponsored Nativity School of Worcester is no longer a Catholic school, eighth grade graduates came to Agape for a day-long retreat, led by Fr. Warren Savage. Fr. Tom McMurray, the Executive Director of Nativity, also present at the Agape program, was told weeks later that Nativity cannot use its Catholic title, offer Mass and other religious services at the Jesuit-run school. Agape has supported the Nativity and continues to stand by the decision to fly the flags.



Students from Stonehill College in May Rural Immersion



Folks from 4 different communities gather for Agape's Annual Workday

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Calendar

Oct. 1st 2022—10 am – 4 pm 40th Anniversary of Agape...bring lunch and vegan potluck, a friend, instruments, join the celebration.

Please remember Agape in your will and in estate planning as we hope that Agape’s future will be sustained by the generosity of our supporters. Call Agape for details of how to forward bequest funds. We rely on our supporters in all things Agape.