

The SERVANT SONG

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“Straight Ahead to Agape”: Survival Skills in a Time of War

by Suzanne Belote Shanley

Dreams have their way of entering into the flow of daily life, and in a recent one, a former intern was leading a group of college students to the front door of St. Francis House, while excitedly proclaiming: “Straight Ahead to Agape.” The message seemed too stark, too positive, with my not being in an uplifted frame of mind these days. Who were these young people? Why was one of them loudly calling: “Straight ahead to Agape!”

A week before my dream, we had just said goodbye to students from Holy Cross College in MA and Iona University in NY accompanied by a lively group of Agape extended community, including Jim Robinson, who initiated the Iona trip to Agape for a Spring Rural Immersion. Others, like Nathan Dufour Oglesby, Jeanelle Wheeler, Ryan O’Connell and Asli Arslanbek, Professor of Art Therapy from University of Tampa, facilitated talks and supervised homesteading activities.

Asli found Agape while checking out our website, and seeing this event posted, called and asked if she could attend to learn about the process and to participate in the ministry of a sustainable community, dedicated to peace.

Summarizing her time at Agape, Asli found “daily life and spiritual life are woven together. Faith. ...love for humanity and nature show themselves in compost piles, plant-based meals, devotion to non-violence and mindful consumption. ... a space where you can be your simplest self and still be fully seen and embraced just as you are.”

Riding on these positive vibes, I took a deep drive into my dream world, plunging into the uplifting of reassurance, consolation. Agape’s future is secure: Straight Ahead. But to what? In my awakened state, I doubted the exuberant dream world. What will young people find at Agape after the maniacal madness of Trump, arrests, deportations, executive orders, bombing of nuclear sites, the nuclear doomsday clock now at just seconds from Midnight.

Since Trump’s re-election, my days are a kaleidoscope of resistance plans, rallies, petitions, despair and rage, including news of the bombing of Iran’s nuclear facilities adding to my ongoing heartbreak and inarticulateness. The affirming lure of “Straight Ahead to Agape” seems an empty cheat in its optimism given Trump’s crazed cohorts, the lawyers and judges, his evil cabal tipping the planet Straight Ahead to Armageddon. Will Agape survive? Will this country survive? Will we defeat these deluded demagogues?

Women’s Grief Circles

In a profoundly despairing and existential way the sense of grief and mourning that marked Agape’s first women’s Grief Circle in February 2025, has heightened. I am riveted by conversations of commiseration with women friends spanning decades of peacemaking and community building, who confide: “I cannot talk about what is happening in Gaza. It’s too much.” We feel guilty we are not in Gaza or suffering as the Gazans do. We admit that Rabbi Abraham Heschel’s prescient quote applies

to us: “Few are guilty; All are responsible.”

We women weep. We share our despondency over a barrage of videos, photos, reports of victims of war, starvation,

genocide, prompting anger, bitterness. One dear friend tells others to practice screaming as she does in her backyard.

An organizer and activist for Gaza in

Worcester and mother of three children, confides that she cries over Gaza throughout the day thinking of Gazan children, propelled to join the Veterans Gaza Fast as did some of us at Agape.

Agape hosted another women’s circle led by Nicole Brathwaite-Hunt, whose Native American and African American heritage inform her powerful leadership in exploring the Wisdom Tradition of our foremothers. Sage-smudging set a listening tone as we released our rage and impotency, at the male hierarchical structures, most notably war, as well as the silence of many Christians as we watch the massive collapse of the planet and the American empire.

Veterans for Peace Fast for Gaza

Veterans for Peace (VFP) and their allies fasted by consuming 250 calories a day, the food intake of starving Gazans. Allies were invited to fast as we were able. Agape joined SS Therese and Francis Catholic Worker in solidarity fasting to draw attention to the slaughter of children, entire families, their mangled bodies carried from spurious feeding sites run by the Israeli army prompting recruits to defect from the IDF. The desperate wailing of a grieving Gazan father: “Why don’t you just nuke us?” thrusts us all back to the abyss; instead of straight ahead, I go straight down.

Yet, I keep pushing straight ahead, to create a place of consolation, resistance, honoring the sacred legacy of the gospel of peace, of the crucified Jesus. My nocturnal search for affirmation amid dread and uncertainty opens the way for assessing where we are as a community dedicated to nonviolent resistance. Who will come? Where do we stand?

Straight Ahead to Agape: Open the Door

For the 37th year we participated in Stations of the Cross with friends from Pax Christi, Spirit of Life Community and beyond at Boston’s State House on Good Friday. Spoken stations by participants included a reflection on protest at Boston’s Catholic Cathedral to urge the newly appointed Archbishop Henning of Boston, to use the word “ceasefire”, (yet alone, genocide) in his public statements about Gaza. He won’t do it; not even the word, “ceasefire.” Archbishop Henning pointedly told a member of our group: “I can’t alienate my Catholic constituency nor the Jewish community as I have just arrived.”

Atlantic Life Community Retreat

With this despicable scenario unlike anything most of us elders in the peace movement could not have imagined as it unfolds, Brayton and I attended the 50th Anniversary of the Atlantic Life Community Kirkridge Retreat Center in PA with about 70 other peacemakers. The ALC is a loose-knit group of faith-based resistance communities begun in the 1970’s by Philip Berrigan and Liz McAlister, out of the Jonah House Community base in Baltimore MD.



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Non-cooperation and Resistance:
An urgent call to people of Faith

Strategies for public resistance:
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How do we grieve, process anger, and find resilience.
Join peacemakers from Agape. Freedom Farm, Pax Christi, the Catholic Worker,
Just Faith, Green Faith, Benincasa and others.

Where: The Agape Community, Hardwick, MA
Contact: www.agapecommunity.org/peace@agapecommunity.org
413-967-9369
2062 Greenwich Road Hardwick, MA

Noncooperation or Nonexistence: The Urgency of Now

by **Brayton Shanley**

My horror-struck disbelief began October 7 and continued for three weeks after when Israel invaded Gaza. The war became a live-stream genocide, a retaliatory rage unleashed by the Israeli military and ordered by Benjamin Netanyahu. Trapped, defenseless Gazan civilians have been massacred daily ever since. Homes, hospitals, libraries, schools, mosques have been reduced to pulverized piles of cement with the uncoupled dead lying underneath.

A war between two traumatized peoples spins out: Hamas attacks Israel, killing 1200 people, triggering a “kill or be killed” panic in the state of Israel. The Hamas manifesto: “Israel does not have a right to exist” explodes like a time bomb inside Israel, creating a terrifying picture of what Hamas is capable of. Netanyahu orders his military to kill every Hamas soldier in Gaza, which results in the indiscriminate killing and maiming of civilian Palestinians trapped in the middle.

This vicious cycle is familiar: Hamas triggers trauma—fear of annihilation in the Israeli leaders, their military and the people. Netanyahu acts out of generational trauma of the Holocaust, which was deeply ingrained by his Zionist father throughout his son’s formative years. Hence, the son rules his government and people with an iron law: “We must be in complete control of Gaza, destroy Hamas, as they exist only to kill us and defeat Israel.”

Hamas also acts out of trauma from the oppressive, murderous control of Palestine by Israel since 1948. Israeli soldiers killed thousands of Palestinians driving them off their land, bulldozing their homes. In retaliation, Hamas vows to fight to the last man. Dreaded fear of annihilation and the demise of the Jewish state controls the Israeli side. We need to understand how the Palestinians and Hamas have lived under the death specter of Israeli murderous oppression, driving them to use violence. Doesn’t this then just trigger more trauma in the Israelis? Two traumatized nations are savaging one another, and the cruel madness apparently cannot be stopped. Is there no way to intervene?

Biden and Trump, two U.S. presidents, could have saved Gaza from total destruction by pulling back all military support, preventing the ongoing war crimes; instead, they chose to side with Netanyahu and wait it out, presumably, until the last Hamas soldier is confirmed dead. The U.S. continues to fund “Israel’s right to defend itself,” a morally specious rationalization, as the pattern of killing and oppressing the Palestinian people continues.

Empire Spinning Out of Control

At home, Trump remains preoccupied with dismantling fundamental public services and healthcare for the poorest among us, severely defunding education, medical and scientific research and eliminating programs that feed the hungry of the world. Projected estimates are that 55,000 will die due to Medicaid cuts now that the Republican proposed budget is passed. The wealthy ruling class has put itself in charge of making government more “efficient,” and in the process, wages an economic war on the middle class and poor.

Since 1970, middle income families’ wages increased 60% while that of wealthy families 80%. This discrepancy magnifies to an absurd reality that in 2025 three men have more wealth than the 170 million lower half of the economic spectrum. Families and average wage earners struggle to pay for monthly food and housing, surviving paycheck to paycheck. Where in this cruel and unjust budget about to pass in Congress, is there evidence of a “safety net” of funds for the poorest and most des-

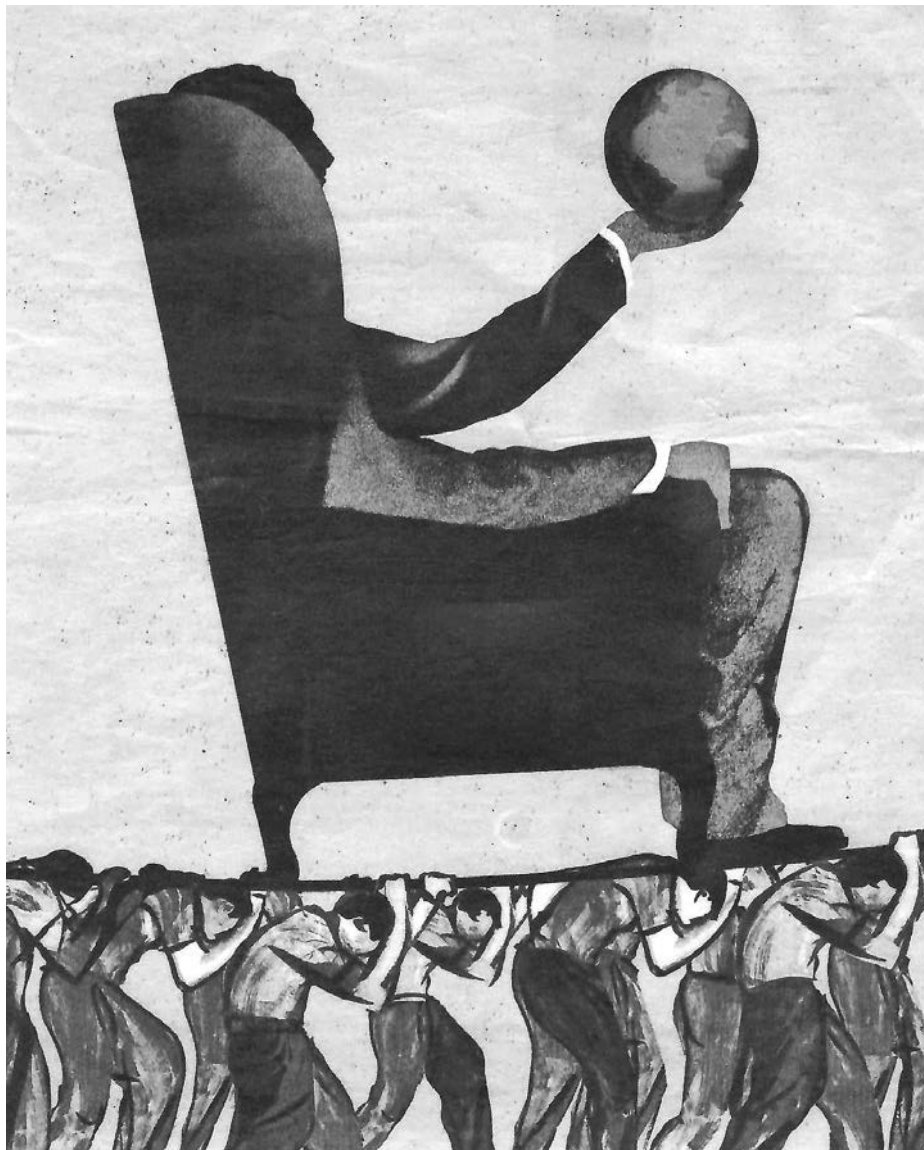
perate? Such provisions are squandered in our nearly one trillion dollar a year defense budget, 50% of our tax dollars.

Trump and Vance set their malicious tone at the top, with the empire showing signs of cracking at its center. Trump is under the spell of the American Evangelicals who delivered the presidency to him for the second time in 2024.

Trump and members of this unholy alliance espouse the extreme patriotism

through active nonviolence.

Gandhi’s journey toward nonviolent resistance began while he was studying law in England. As a Hindu, he joined a group of Christians called “The Vegetarian Society.” Upon reading the New Testament he is struck by its meaning: “The Sermon on the Mount went straight to my heart! ‘Love your enemies; turn the other cheek; pray for them that persecute you. It should revolutionize the whole of life.’”



Brian Stauffer

of Christian Nationalism, a belief that America is a country founded by and for Christians. A “deadly serious” theology of white supremacists with a male dominated social order, Christian Nationalism runs on the “prosperity gospel” —that a person’s wealth is a sign of God’s blessings. Paula White, Trump’s evangelical spiritual advisor and devoted follower, praises his wealth which is “pleasing to God”. But enthusiasm for Trump runs deeper than simple loyalty. His people believe that Trump is “sent by God.” They aspire to “dismantle the present democratic systems and create a Christian nation.”

What can we do? As a global community are we without collective will, as we watch the unrelenting massacre in Gaza? Can we do nothing to change or stop this unstable Anti-Christ, power-hungry, cruel oligarchy? What nonviolent response and contemplative practices are needed to guide us? Can we take Jesus with us as we navigate this deadly fallout from our fallen state?

Noncooperation with Nonviolent Resistance of Mahatma Gandhi

Gandhi’s social justice vision of nonviolence was to develop a method of struggle for the poor masses of India to address the injustices of the white colonialists, first in South Africa and then the British in India. Gandhi observed that desperately poor people of color felt impotent and unworthy to challenge the injustices of the white, politically powerful colonialists. He sought to lead oppressed people out of such indignities and empower them to demand justice

It is important for Christians to remember that Gandhi’s moral grounding consisted of Civil Disobedience and economic boycott. Such practices replaced hatred for the oppressor with nonviolent love, the substance of which came directly from the writings “On Civil Disobedience” by Thoreau and the gospel teachings of Jesus of Nazareth.

What was his conclusion from the experiments in nonviolent resistance? “Non-cooperation with evil is as a much moral obligation as is cooperation with good.” Gandhi contends that if masses of people are willing to risk their security and act in the spirit of nonviolence to challenge evil directly and in public, oppressed people can exert tremendous nonviolent force in exposing evil and even change the conditions of oppression. In this process, the nonviolent practitioner may win the souls of the oppressors. One of history’s best examples of the implementation of Gandhi’s theory is the Civil Rights movement in the US in the 1950s-60s.

As people of faith, we spend a significant amount of time on the virtues of “the good.” We see ourselves as “good” people. We come from “good families,” are successful at “good” jobs, attend church with “good people.” We raise our children with love and security to be “good” virtuous citizens. We seek the safety of cooperating with “good.”

Such scenarios were quite familiar to me growing up in a social climbing, non-boat-rocking wealthy suburb of New York. I attended church with “good” white people like me. The Catholic mass was

replete with sermons that did not disturb me or those in the pews, or call attention to the comfortable, safe harbor we lived in that counted on the predictable privileges of being white. We were not following the unconditional love of the enemy espoused by Jesus by standing against the systemic injustices heaped upon the oppressed, especially Black and Brown people. Our privileged social class helped to create these evils.

I found no insistence from the pulpit that, yes, we need to hold up virtuous good but, also, as the prophets inspire us, we must acknowledge evil and stand against it instead of ignoring or allowing it.

To challenge ourselves, our church and our government is a moral duty. To uphold a higher moral law, one relies on spiritual conversion, something utterly true, a bold act on behalf of that truth: to non-cooperate with an evil law or injustice.

The Hebrew prophets call attention to such injustices. Isaiah, Jesus’ most often quoted prophet challenges us all. “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil” (Isaiah 4:20). A clear majority of Americans call building weapons of mass destruction a “necessary good.” Supplying Israel with the weapons of war and billions of American tax dollars to kill, maim and starve thousands of Palestinian men, women and children in Gaza could never be anything but grave evil. Yet, most Americans and a monolith of Republicans in government, either support or ignore this genocide. Isaiah counters “calling evil good” with the ultimate prohibition of the supreme violence: “They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. One nation shall not raise the sword against nation, nor will they train for war ever again” (2:4).

“War is simply evil,” preached Martin Luther King, “the most preposterous of all evils.” Following Jesus in the line of prophets, King called out the evil of our times—the triplets of materialism, militarism and racism.

The Lethal Idols of Silver and Gold

In what manner can the Israeli government ever claim “victory over Hamas” given the savage hatred it has engendered throughout the Middle East and the world? Here is the revenge killing tally of the Israeli government: Hamas kills 1200 Israelis on October 7th. Israel in response kills 56,000 Palestinians, including 16,000 children and 17,000 have been orphaned or separated from their caregivers.

And what about Yahweh God’s condemnation of the idols of silver and gold, land, territory, hegemony, leading to endless war? “It is you who have devoured the vineyard; the loot wrested from the poor is in your houses. What do you mean by crushing my people and grinding down the poor when they look to you” (3:15). Trump and his Republicans in “grinding down the poor...when they look to us” tell the crushed people: You arrive poor with nothing; you are foreign people of color; I condemn you as inherently criminal; you are bringing in drugs; you are thieves and gang members. This country belongs to us. You can’t have any of it.

Jesus, on the other hand, calls us to treat the “least” with a heart of compassion saying in effect: You are hungry, so I give you something to eat? Thirsty? Have something to drink. A stranger? Come in. Naked? Here are some clothes. Are you sick? We’ll care for you. In prison? We will visit you. (Matthew 25:35-39).

In the spirit of Matthew 25, Agape joined many in the extended peace community nationally in the Veterans for Peace (VFP) Gaza Fast of 40 days. Experienc-

The Evangelion

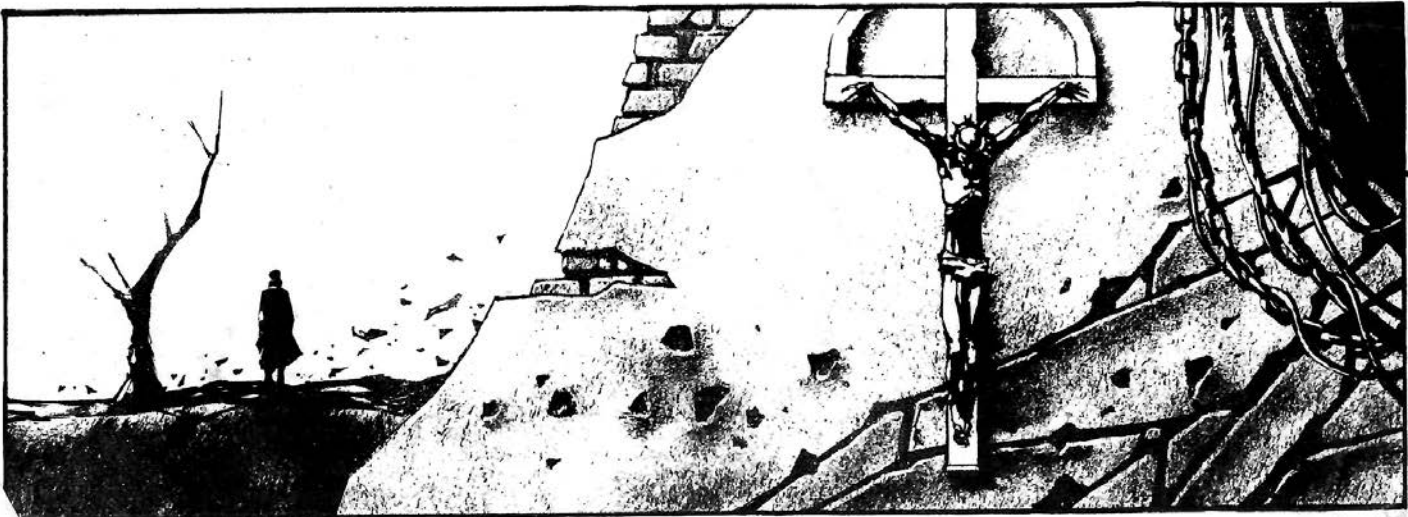
by Fr. Mark Korban

Evangelion from the Greek means proclamation, and in relation to the Jesus Event, a proclamation of the good message or more commonly, Good News. For the proclamation to be ‘good’ it must also be accurate and truthful vis-a vis what Jesus taught and did. If it is not accurate then it is not the good message that Jesus taught or that his early followers proclaimed. The evangelion is a particular truth, the one that Jesus revealed about who God is by God’s very nature.

Those first written proclaimers of this truth Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, regarded as their task to accurately inform their communities, the would-be followers of Christ, the truth about God that Jesus reveals to avoid distorting, hiding or changing what Jesus clearly taught. Any change or distortion of the original *evangelion* would negatively affect how people would come to view God and consequently how they would behave. To know the true nature of God is seen by the evangelists to be critical in engaging the inner and outer change that God desires for each person and for the world at large.

In reading through the Hebrew scriptures, what we call the Old Testament, one often has the impression that God’s interests are the same as the interests of the nation of Israel. It’s as if an expansionist vision of the nation is in harmony with God’s will. Yet Jesus claims that He came to fulfill or complete this kind of understanding of God. He teaches that the Old Testament understanding of God is far from adequate.

Although the ancient Hebrews did indeed progress from the harsh reality of an “eye for eye” to a form of limited love in the later prophets, Jesus expanded the truth of God’s love: that it is for all, that it is unlimited love. This expansion of meaning



Danijel Zezeli

raised the bar exponentially to the point where this new teaching precluded any form of the imposition of dominance using violence. The *evangelion* makes clear that the former understanding of God’s nature and God’s will was at best inadequate. In teaching that love of even one’s enemies is the *evangelion*, the whole premise that one’s own nation or tribe is primary is shattered.

Now we know that all people are beloved children of God, even those viewed as enemies. Many leaders within modern U.S. Evangelical Christianity teach a deviation from this original evangelion in that they view our own nation as the new Israel, the new chosen people endowed with the same prerogatives of using dominative violence in what is regarded as a holy project of expansionism. Over time this ‘holy project’ has evolved into a virulent form of nationalistic idolatry that replaces the *evangelion* with a spurious faith in the redemptive power of force to bring about a version of Christianity that is far removed from anything Jesus taught or did or instructed his followers to do or teach.

I remember in my early adulthood observing members of my extended family being drawn into this truncated form of *evangelion*. While such a draw may have started innocently enough, it evolved over the decades into what can only be termed fascistic nationalism. I have been enraged and frustrated at times, sad to see loved ones being misled by ill-informed and unscrupulous religious leaders.

The problem of nationalistic Christianity is certainly not unique to the Evangelical Churches. It has long been a plague in all the Christian churches with a few exceptions. But it does take one’s breath away to see it descending to such a depth that an obviously and deeply corrupt group of political leaders would be regarded as agents of God’s holy will.

The widespread perception of modern Israel as the exceptional country is based in a faulty reading of scripture. This is mirrored in how the US is seen by many (the majority?) as exceptional. Both therefore are given a pass on what otherwise would be viewed as immoral and criminal behavior.

A good example of this is the way in which some people have invoked the Old Testament “command” from God to destroy the Amalekite people. (Deut. 25:19) This and similar passages have been quoted to justify the current genocide in Palestine. Reading the Old Testament at face value rather than considering the four Gospels has enormous consequences. The Evangelical Churches, and indeed, all the Christian Churches would do well to examine honestly the glaring contradictions between how God is often portrayed in the Hebrew scriptures and how our non-violent God is revealed by Jesus.

Clearly, what is needed, is to understand the original proclamation of the gospel, the authentic *evangelion* and to teach the *evangelion* today, as it was taught in the apostolic era. To live the Good News is to be willing to pay the cost to the degree that each of us may be called upon to do.

Fr. Mark Korban is Pastor at St Jacob’s Orthodox Church, Northfield Falls, VT, who, together with his wife, Reba, have been Agape co-travelers since the 1980’s.

What is Ours to Do?

“We are our world knowing itself. We can relinquish our separateness. We can come home again – and participate in our world in a richer, more responsible and poignantly beautiful way than before.”
Joanna Macy

by Meghan Breen

It can seem so trivial to live daily life with any sense of normalcy in these times of urgency. An errand at the Post Office, a visit to the library, a trip to the (fully stocked) grocery store. Everything in daily life in my part of the world moves on with a stride of “business as usual.” The horrors of Gaza, the screams of the people intentionally starved in blatant genocide, the deportation of human beings from the US, the plight of the women in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Sudanese civil war, the families and communities of Ukraine ripped apart – these

all feel a million miles away.

And yet, because of computers in our pockets, these horrors are brought 12 inches from our faces, “livestreamed genocide” as Greta Thunberg repeatedly reminds us. Thunberg was recently aboard a ship, the “Freedom Flotilla,” carrying aid to Gaza to open a humanitarian corridor to deliver desperately needed live-saving aid. The ship was intercepted by Israeli Occupational Forces, the passengers held illegally and then deported to their home countries.

Simultaneously, thousands of brave people, from at least 80 countries, participated in a Global March to Gaza to break Is-

rael’s blockade, raising their voices and taking things into their own hands while those in power systematically support the murder and starvation of the Palestinian people. Instead of giving up because 12 people were stopped, thousands of people moved to action.

God is present in the pain. Humans of the world, observe on the sidelines, but are never separate from a God that calls us to action.

In the morning, I walk down my quiet rural road, for my “daily rendezvous with God”, as spiritual writer, James Finley, refers to time set aside to open our hearts to the infinite love of God. I pray. I pause. I listen to the breeze rustle the new leaves. I close my eyes and experience the presence of the Holy Spirit, encircling me and leading me on a path of humility and trust, openness, patience and love.

In this part of Upstate New York, we finally received a break in the endless deluge of rain that has been slamming the earth from May through early June. Unfortunately, the excess of rain we have had here would have been an absolute blessing and gift to parts of Canada. Instead of the rain as a constant companion on my walks, the air now stings my eyes and the back of my throat. Particles from scorched Black Spruce and Jack Pine trees from boreal forests 700 miles away cloud my vision and fill my lungs.

I can’t bring rain to Canada. I can’t put out a wildfire. The air, in the form of a gentle breeze on a bright blue June morning, that recalled the Holy Spirit, I realize, now brings toxins to our bodies, land and world. I witness this burning planet. I feel helpless. Yet, by the grace of God, in this

moment, I realize that the existence of one doesn’t cancel out the experience of the other: smoke and the Holy Spirit.

God is present in the pain. We have never really been separated. God reminds us we are one.

Pentecost readings are still fresh in my mind: “On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Abba God sent me, even so I am sending you.” And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” (John 20:19-22)

The disciples were behind locked doors, still grieving and afraid. In this space, God is present in the pain.

Humans of the world, who observe on the sidelines have never really been separate from a God who calls us to action.

God is sending us forth. Each of us must determine: what is ours to do at this moment in history. Through discernment, quieting ourselves, listening and gathering with others, we learn, plan and dream.

There is no “right way”. Even when we feel helpless in the face of suffering, there is always something we can do. Joanna Macy reminds us that sometimes, “the most radical thing any of us can do at this time is to be fully present to what is happening in the world.” When we are overwhelmed by the pain of the world and need to go “behind locked doors”, God will meet us there. And when we are ready to



Jesus calms the storm.

Sowing Seeds

From Iona University to the Island of Iona, and Back

by Jim Robinson

This past March, during our spring break, Eli, Makena, Tyler, Una, Dr. Christina Carlson, and I loaded our luggage into the Gael Express, and left Iona University's campus in New Rochelle, NY for the Island of Iona, on the western coast of Scotland. After two flights, a cab ride, a train ride, a ferry ride, a bus ride, and another ferry ride, we finally made it to the island. As the sun was setting, we dragged our bags up the stony paths leading to the Catholic House of Prayer, where we would spend the week. Even though we were eager to get to where we were going, Makena suggested that we stop, for a moment, and listen. We had already arrived. And so, we stood together in silence, surrounded by swirling winds.

Nobody makes it to the island of Iona casually. It is the kind of place that you can only get to after what feels like vigorous upstream paddling. At the same time, it seems like you can only arrive there after being carried by the wind. It is a distinctly sacred place. Its threshold is mysterious.

On Iona, I frequently encountered people who were brimming with the qualities that blossom after arriving somewhere sacred: presence, attention, and above all else, gratitude. I felt these qualities welling up within me, too, while seeing, amidst a landscape dotted with sheep, a newborn lamb leaning against another, or while touching one of the ferns that grow through the stone walls of the abbey. One day I let my attention linger on a streak of gold paint that had dripped, over the years, from an icon of Theotokos down the white facade of a

seaside cottage. The weathered beauty of this scene seemed to encapsulate the place itself.

I have been blessed to have tasted the fruits of arriving somewhere sacred before. For instance, when I walked through the door of Thomas Merton's hermitage in the woods of the Abbey of Gethsemani, I found myself surrounded by the familiar cinder block walls that I had previously only seen in pictures. I knelt before Merton's icons. I had arrived. I also felt this sense of arrival when I first came up the winding path leading through the woods to St. Francis House for an Agape workday nearly 10 years ago. I continue to feel it whenever I return.

On the last day of our trip, when I stood at the top of Dun I, the highest point on the island, these winds enfolded me in a way that felt both uncontrollable and comforting, simultaneously. My sense is that these two characteristics capture something of the paradoxical spirit of the island. It is utterly uncontrollable. It is filled with what Gerard Manley Hopkins calls dappled things: undomesticated things, ephemeral things that have never been seen before and that will never be seen again, wild things. It therefore stands as a living sign of contradiction against the plastic McWorld proffered by mainstream culture.

At the same time, the island is incredibly soothing. It is remarkably homey, like Yeats's Lake Isle of Innisfree or Tolkien's Shire. It is awe-inspiring but it is not overwhelming, like Spirit, Paraclete, the Comforter.

One afternoon, our group set out on a long walk to St. Columba's Bay. When we arrived at the water, we stood amongst thousands of rounded stones. Some of these stones

were red and white, some were flecked with green, some glittered with silvery specks. Our whole group spent well over an hour looking at the stones, then sitting on them, and then lying on them. These stones were surprisingly hospitable.

Throughout our week together, we learned about the Iona Community, an international movement grounded in commitments to social justice, ecumenism, and peacebuilding. We joined a candle-lit healing service at the abbey. We contemplated the way in which this community draws inspiration from the deep well of the Christian tradition while engaging in an ever-evolving quest to read and respond to the signs of the times and the needs of the actual neighbor in the 21st century. We touched Celtic crosses dating back to the 8th century. We discussed Anam Cara and the gospels, Mary Oliver and Chappell Roan. We spent our nights sharing delicious meals with Jane, Warden and Chaplain of the Catholic House of Prayer. We spent our mornings in communal prayer.

We all left the Island of Iona with the same question: how do we bring the spirit of this place back to our place, our Iona? My sense is that every pilgrim to this place boards the ferry off the island with the same question.

Our experiences on the island were punctuated by sharing tea from the abundant selection at the Catholic House of Prayer. And so, Makena has been struck by the inspiration to create a student-led tea club on campus, devoted to the practice of "slow living." The members of this club will cultivate a place on campus for students to come together and to steep into the kind of stillness which the island of Iona emits and elicits. Makena shared this



Ruins of the Iona Nunnery.

idea during her recent visit to Agape, for a rural immersion which brought together 6 Iona students with 2 Holy Cross students.

Those of us who have been to Iona know that the land itself is uniquely sacred. Our work on returning is to uncover the sacred qualities in our own places, and to resist the systems of violence that pave over or tear apart the sacred. May we move, as pilgrims, toward a future marked by wider justice, greater sensitivity, and deeper joy.

Jim Robinson, PhD is the Director of the Deignan Institute for Earth and Spirit at Iona University, and a member of Agape's Mission Council and Board.

Circle of Being

Amnesia that Accompanies Worldliness: The Cure?

by Ryan O'Connell

My relationship with Agape began in the Spring of 2024 by accident or, better yet, by Providence. I was researching intentional Catholic lay communities that took seriously a commitment to integral ecology and a radical approach to Christian living. My family resides in Schenectady, NY and most of my efforts were focused on finding a community in my neck of the woods, westward toward Central NY and the Finger Lakes, or north into the Adirondacks.

After contacting a few friends who were living in communities associated with the Catholic Worker one of them asked: "Have you heard of Agape in central Massachusetts?" I responded, "Not yet!" and was given a phone number, and thus began my relationship with the extraordinary family of listeners, seekers, and radicals that make up the Agape community.

What initially drew me to the community was something Brayton, Agape's co-founder, said to me on our first phone call that "flipped a switch" in my mind. While discussing Agape's history, Brayton shared that Agape grew out of the co-founders' desires to live a "morally coherent lifestyle." That phrase, a "morally coherent lifestyle," hit me like a lightning bolt, a simple, yet profound articulation of what many of us are seeking. Amidst an infinite number of avenues to explore, we may have a difficult time finding a lifestyle where our deeply held principles and beliefs, our ways of living in this world are integrated.

I came to Agape to be among my brothers and sisters striving to live a morally coherent lifestyle within a country dominated by a culture that afflicts all of us with a sort of amnesia. Who are we? To whom do we belong? What are we meant to be doing here on this good Earth?

When I finally got to Francis House, Agape's main residence, I realized that those I



David Klein

met in the extended community, foster a space that seems unaffected by this amnesia and its symptoms that affect those participating in a "typical" American life. Amnesia afflicts many of us while we are trying to make sense of a world and a way of living that doesn't make

sense.

How was I to know that my treatment for a particularly acute form of this amnesia would be found in morning prayer and hearing a few soft voices singing to God in unison? And what about my blistering palms after a day in the gar-

den, and simple fellowship around the dinner table or the outdoor fire circle?

After a year of regular visits, I am beginning to experience the healing that can only occur in a community like Agape. Finally, Pope Francis' image of the Church as a "field hospital" now makes concrete sense to me. If that isn't Good News, then I don't know what is.

When leaving Agape how do I return to "the world" where moral incoherence reigns and the expectation is that I simply shrug off the questions: Is it possible to worship both God and money? Can I "be for peace" while adding to the government's war chest on a weekly or bi-weekly basis? How am I to understand a dual position that I have a God-given right to choose to be simultaneously, both environmentally friendly and environmentally hostile?

I, like many who have come to Agape, have tried to bring the community ethos with me into this chaos, with mixed results. Like any chronic condition, the amnesia that accompanies "worldliness" cannot be cured with a single treatment, but only with constant attention.

Therefore, as quickly as I depart from Agape, I begin planning my return. While I go about my life and work, I can also consult those who have apparently been cured of their amnesia: Christ, Dorothy Day, Peter Maurin, Thomas Merton, Thea Bowman, the Berrigans, and others who can assist me on my journey toward the place and time where, as St. Paul says, "...we shall know fully,...even as we are fully known."

I ask you all dear readers, let us pray that the healing we experience at Agape which the world so desperately needs, will ripple out from us to those whom we meet. As we struggle with our amnesia, let us never forget that there is a cure for what ails this world. Hallelujah, we know His name.

Ryan O'Connell is a former Jesuit volunteer who works as a clinical social worker in southern, VT. He resides with his wife and two children in Schenectady, NY.

Divine Obedience

by Patrick Murray

“Shout out, do not hold back! Lift your voice like a trumpet! Announce to my people their rebellion, to the house of Jacob their sins.” (Isaiah

I’ve had several pastors in my life state that they believe it’s not scriptural for me to participate in civil disobedience. In response, I will often quote the above scripture. Clearly, Isaiah believes it’s appropriate for us to raise our voices when, as Christians, we lose our way and rebel against the will of God. In fact, I would say that the Isaiah 58:1 reference is written more like a command than a suggestion. As followers of a God who has a heart for the poor, God looks to us to edify the Church and our nation when they lose their way.

One may counter: “Isaiah is talking about the temple and the Jewish people and their relationship to God. Isaiah is not referring to the Church.” That may be so, but all scripture can help to enlighten similar situations of our modern day. Here the prophet is speaking to the King of Israel, the lawmaker, through the citizens of Israel and the house of Jacob. He was telling the people of Israel to shout out the injustices of the law to the king.

As our present time would have it, Congress is our lawmaker. Many of our senators



Rev. William Barber approaches arrest with Repairers of the Breach at the US Capitol.

and representatives who promoted the Big, Bad, Ugly Bill (BBUB) are people who proclaim to be Christians. In fact, there are so many of them who claim this that it would only take changing the minds of half a dozen of them to bring this insanity to a stop.

So, a group of us tried to change some Christian minds though unsuccessfully, on the

morning of June 30th as we stood in front of the Supreme Court and across from the Capitol to hear from Bishop Barber, and many others who will be impacted by this BBUB.

At around 12 noon, many of us headed over to the Capitol risking arrest where, prayerfully, we shouted out, not holding back and lifting our voices in the prayerful hope

that Christians in Congress who promoted this bill would be convicted that it is immoral. The lives of millions of Americans, as well as others coming to us to escape deep poverty and persecution, hang in the balance. But alas, the Republican in power passed it anyway. Nevertheless, it took the Vice President to break a tie vote, so perhaps our witness had some impact.

So now the real work has begun. We must now shout out to the people of our country who will be devastated by this budget. We must reach out to them and draw them into the voting franchise. We must help them to understand the power that they hold because the margins for the Republicans in many places is very thin.

So, I urge us all to shout out in your churches. Make your representatives and your senators aware of what they have done. Hopefully in the next 18 months, we might see the House and the Senate turned over so that some sanity can be brought to bear on the problems of our nation.

Isaiah closes out Chapter 58 with this promise: “Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in.” (Isaiah

Patrick O. Murray, Esq. is a member of the Nehemiah Community in Springfield, MA

Disconnecting to Connect

by Grace Perkins

On the last morning of the five-day Rural Immersion retreat at Agape Community with college students, professors, and mentors, we reflected on what we were taking with us from the experience. For me, I knew I wanted to incorporate the habit of not using my phone as often into my daily routine. During our week at Agape, we agreed to leave our phones in a designated place and did not have them with us for the entirety of each day.

Instead of turning to our devices as soon as there was a moment of quiet or nothing we needed to do, we turned to each other. We learned to slow down and connect, embracing the present moment. Although I expected that spending a week without using my phone would lead me to encounter boredom quite often, I never even for a second felt bored.

I used to always have my phone in hand to take pictures because I wanted to remember my experiences. However, out of the fear of forgetting a moment, I was losing the moment anyway by being preoccupied trying to capture it instead of experiencing it fully. So, although I did not take a single photo during our week of Rural Immersion at Agape, I have more vivid memories of the experience because I was fully present in every moment and connected to all

around me. I learned to let go of this fear of not having enough photos and to feel at peace and content, accepting each moment with gratitude instead of desperately trying to hold on to it.

Throughout the week, questions often came up in conversations, and we students wanted to look them up, but we couldn’t, so we learned to just let it go, almost like a form of constant meditation. I would only check my phone once each day to make sure no one was trying to contact me. When I saw that there were not any urgent notifications, I returned to my day. This week-long experience was refreshing, and it left me with a strong sense of mindfulness, calmness, and fulfillment. I especially enjoyed feeling others deeply present with me because no one else was on their phone either.

Before this retreat, I would often unintentionally distract myself by scrolling on my phone. This habit of checking my phone in every moment of stillness took away my ability to experience being truly alive, and I checked all the time without even being aware of it. It also caused me to have a much more stressful lifestyle, removing me from the present moment and limiting my ability to focus. I would end up feeling constantly rushed and in a hurry. Time would fly by, and I would mindlessly waste hours of each day on my phone. My habits lacked intention, and I needed to make a change.

A positive aspect of cell phones is the ability to connect with loved ones who are far away. When used intentionally and at certain times for this purpose, my phone is, of course, important and beneficial, something I am grateful for. But this use must be intentional for me, so that I do not repeatedly unlock the device for no other reason than to escape my mind, losing my sense of time and awareness of the present moment. The habit of using my phone can have negative effects, but it is up to me to choose how I want to use it and whether my habits serve the lifestyle I want to cultivate.

Since returning home from the Agape retreat, I have made changing this habit a priority.

Now, my routine is, first thing in the morning, before checking my phone, to walk outside and just be: listening to the birds, feeling the air on my skin, giving my eyes exposure to sunlight, and reflecting with gratitude for the gift of life.

I have noticed that this morning routine sets up the direction of the rest of my day. Instead of seeking entertainment from my phone as I did when it was the first thing I looked at in the morning, now I barely think about it. I now feel more compelled to do things I want

to do such as being outside, connecting with others, and creating the life I want. I am no longer overwhelmed and distracted by the bombardment of information that my phone is

constantly spewing.

To maintain this more focused mindset for the rest of the day, I have discovered that creating physical distance from my phone and putting it somewhere that it is not visible makes it easier to not be distracted by it and to use it only when necessary. My days feel much longer, almost as if time moves slower, and I have the space to do all that I desire. Amidst the constant hustle and bustle of our culture, I am learning to slow down and organize my priorities.

This change in my lifestyle has brought me a strong sense of inner peace, which I believe is necessary to have peace in our communities. It starts within. Through these efforts I have found it much easier to do everything I dream of and what makes me come alive. I experienced tremendous growth when I learned to sit with my surroundings and just be. Intentionally forming this new habit has made me feel deeply grounded and clear-minded. Instead of constantly filling the stillness and silence, our experience together at Agape helped us to embrace them, listen to the Divine, and connect with the Earth. From this place of deep presence, I believe that I am better able to be lovingly present to others, to work for justice, and to promote peace.

Grace Perkins is a sophomore at Holy Cross, studying Sociology and Spanish, and has been involved with Agape since 2017



Words and Silence on Genocide in Gaza

by Jeanne Connerney

In his first Sunday blessing as the new pontiff, Pope Leo XIV urged that humanitarian aid flow into Gaza and stated, “May there be an immediate ceasefire!” This message was reiterated days later as he bemoaned the catastrophic loss of life and noted that, “the heartbreaking price is paid by the children, elderly, and the sick.”

During the past 20 months at least 62,000 people have been killed by Israeli airstrikes, shootings, starvation; and lack of access to clean water, medicine, and fuel. The actual number of deaths is undoubtedly much higher. At least 110,000 have been injured. Two-thirds of casualties are women and children. Journalists, doctors, and aid workers have been targeted, and no one is spared.

Despite these repeated violations of international law, Israel acts with impunity while the International Court of Justice debates the definition of the word “genocide.” Global protests regularly draw hundreds of thousands of people, but most world leaders remain unwilling to act. Meanwhile, the United States continues to supply 70% of the weapons used on Gaza, and President Trump hopes to relocate the population to build a resort there.

With his recent statements, Pope Leo continues the legacy of Pope Francis in con-

demning the genocidal acts of Israel. The late pontiff called for a ceasefire repeatedly and phoned the last remaining Catholic parish in Gaza every night to offer comfort. In his final Easter Sunday message, Francis condemned the “dramatic and deplorable humanitarian situation” in Gaza. He died the following day.

Although both popes have been outspoken about the suffering endured by Palestinians, Archbishop of Boston Richard Henning has neither condemned the situation nor urged its cessation, despite repeated requests. In response to a letter sent to the archbishop on December 11, 2024, members of the Massachusetts chapter of Pax Christi were told via a spokesman that Henning was “not prepared” to call for a ceasefire, nor did he have time to meet with the group to discuss the issue.

A protest was held outside the Holy Cross Cathedral on December 29 at which Pax Christi and other local Catholics distributed flyers entitled, “Pope Francis Calls for a Ceasefire: Why Won’t Archbishop Henning?” and held signs with slogans such as “Ceasefire Now” and “Save the Children of Gaza.” While the Archbishop led the congregation in praying for Mary’s intercession after “a very horrific year of terrible violence” in the Holy Land at the end of mass, he stopped short of calling for a ceasefire. Several protesters reiterated the request to

Henning in person as he greeted mass goers after the service. Some were simply brushed off, and others were told, “I see myself as more of a local bishop.”

In late January Pax Christi sent a second letter, which once again asked Henning to both call for a ceasefire and meet with members of local parishes for further discussion. Neither the letter nor subsequent phone calls and emails received any response from the Chancery. Several bishops in the United States have spoken out about the genocide in Gaza. Unfortunately, Archbishop Henning has chosen not to join them.

On October 11, 2023, a statement from Henning’s predecessor Sean O’Malley, offered sympathy for the 1,100 Israelis killed on October 7 and stated that “Resisting such terrorism and aggression is the moral duty of states.” Twenty months and 62,000 deaths later, there has been no statement of sympathy for dead Palestinians.

On April 25, in his weekly column in The Pilot, the newspaper of the Boston archdiocese, Henning paid homage to the late pope, instructing the faithful to follow Francis: “notice those who do not get noticed” and “speak for those who have no voice.” On May 24, nine children in the same family from ages 12 years to seven months old were killed in an Israeli airstrike. As these and other children continue to perish in Gaza every day, it’s not too late for Archbishop



Henning to break his silence and follow his own advice.

Jeanne Connerney is a writer and activist living in Watertown, Massachusetts, member of Saint Susanna’s parish in Dedham, Pax Christi, Massachusetts Peace Action, Watertown Citizens for Peace, and Irish Americans for Palestine.

On Gaza: A Palestinian American Catholic Speaks Out

Palestinian, American, Catholic, Christian - my complex identity includes all these signifiers. I am the child of a Palestinian refugee father who immigrated and became a naturalized US citizen, and a white, seventh generation American mother from rural America. Despite the very different backgrounds of my parents, they shared their Roman Catholic faith.

“I cannot marry someone who is not Roman Catholic,” my mother informed my father soon after they met, not realizing that the Middle East was still home to a large indigenous population of Christians, descendants of the first followers of Christ. “But that’s me,” my father insisted, “I am Roman Catholic.” I have always felt proud of the fact that their love reflected the universality of our church that currently unites over 1.4 billion people from around the globe.

Not only as a Catholic, but also as a Palestinian, my father traces his Christian community’s lineage to the earliest Christians in the Holy Land. His family fled Northern Palestine to Lebanon when Zionist forces attacked, and it became too dangerous for families to stay. His family members thought that they would return as soon as hostilities ended, but the Israelis closed the

border, and Palestinians were not allowed reentry.

This enforced flight of my grandparents violated UN resolution 194 which called on Israel to allow refugees who had fled, to return home or claim compensation. Neither one of these UN demands was ever enforced, and no Western power did anything about their lack of enforcement. Eventually my father’s family gained Lebanese citizenship when offered to Palestinian Christians who had fled to Lebanon. Yet, their experience of forced exile and losses led to intergenerational traumas.

Both my parents lived their Catholic values. My father, having attended British missionary schools as a child in Palestine, spoke perfect English, although with an accent. He offered free English classes to workers from Latin America and food and clothing to immigrants in need. Meticulously preparing his lessons for the classes, he tried to think of creative ways to convey grammar and vocabulary. My mother taught Catholic social justice at her parish for those converting to Catholicism.

My father cared deeply about Palestine, seeming to own and read every book written about his land, while incessantly watching

mainstream TV news, taking notes to document perceived biases. He believed a deep injustice had been done to the Palestinians, starting with the 1917 Balfour Declaration, in which the British, who had no jurisdiction whatsoever over Palestine at the time (in fact it was still part of the Ottoman Empire), promised Lord Rothschild that the British could create a Jewish homeland in Palestine.

No one one consulted the Palestinian people—about 75 percent Muslim, 15 percent Christian, and 5 percent Jewish at that time—despite these groups having lived harmoniously together. Instead, Zionist ideology which called for the establishment of a Jewish state had emerged in Europe in response to virulent European anti-Semitism, particularly in Eastern Europe and Russia in the late 19th century. Zionist proponents argued that the Jewish people needed their own state to protect them; yet that envisioned state was already fully populated with mostly Muslim and Christian Palestinian Arabs who had lived there peaceably for centuries.

The Zionist project worked to bring European and Middle Eastern Jews to Palestine and to ensure the removal of the majority Palestinian population, by force, including massacres. More than half the Palestinian population fled, hoping eventually to return to their homes. The forced exodus of Palestinians in 1948 is known as the Nakba, or catastrophe, also marking the establishment of the State of Israel.

Many today refer to the genocide and ethnic cleansing going on in Gaza as The Second Nakba, pointing out that the first never ended as Israel has constantly expanded its territory and maneuvered to expel the Palestinians living on it.

As a Palestinian American Catholic, I was grateful to Pope Francis for his support for the Palestinian people by calling Gaza’s Catholic Church of the Holy Family daily to check on its parishioners sheltering there for safety. The Pope also called for an investigation into the “genocidal acts” by Israel. During his 2014 visit to the Palestinian territories occupied by Israel, the Pope stopped to pray at the huge separation wall that encircles the Palestinian town of Beth-

lehem in the West Bank, the site of the Nativity.

The new Catholic Pope Leo XIV used his first public address to call for a ceasefire in Gaza, the release of all hostages, and full compliance with international humanitarian law. On a more local level, the Archbishop of Boston has led prayers for peace in the Holy Land but has not yet called for a ceasefire, despite urgent petitions for him to do so from Pax Christi MA members in view of the leading role of the US in supplying arms and diplomatic cover to Israel. A Boston diocesan priest recently condemned anti-Semitism in the US but failed to condemn the dehumanizing anti-Palestinian racism that has enabled the appalling genocide in Gaza.

What Palestinian Christians Ask from You

Palestinian American Christians urgently ask fellow Christians for their active solidarity by becoming informed about the silences and biases of mainstream media, complicit in hiding the grotesque atrocities inflicted on Gaza. Journalist Chris Hedges, a former New York Times Mideast bureau chief, provides excellent analyses of political developments in the Middle East and the US as does the Amy Goodman newscast, Democracy Now.

The genocide in Gaza is a moral outrage that has shattered any illusion of a fair international system. Yet, our concerns need to be not just about what’s happening “over there.” U.S. police and ICE are trained by Israeli forces, and the surveillance tech tested on Palestinians is used at the U.S.-Mexico border. Those who speak out are censored, fired, or silenced. Pro-Palestinian speech is being criminalized and erased across media, campuses, and workplaces, setting a disturbing precedent around shutting down voices oppose the interests of the powerful.

This is the moral issue of our time, and your voice is needed. Any action, big or small, helps. Your Palestinian Christian sisters and brothers thank you for helping Gaza to live.

The author of this article chooses to remain anonymous.



The following letter was sent to Cardinal McElroy of Washington DC, after he received petitions, signed by hundreds to stop the display of the American flag from the bell tower of the Catholic Basilica in DC.

I almost cried when I saw the huge American flag blowing off the bell tower at The Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington DC, the largest Catholic Church in America, and not a prop for nationalism. The flag says we are proud of Genocide by providing money and weapons to Israel as it starves and slaughters the people of Gaza; that we stand with government that eliminated 17 million people from health insurance to benefit the rich and increased the ICE budget to terrorize immigrants. Jesus warned His followers to “stay awake” as His crucifixion drew near. We have not only fallen asleep, but we have identified with the crucifiers.

Kathy Boylan is a member of the Dorothy Day Catholic Worker, the Atlantic Life Community and long-time friend of Agape.

**Excerpt from John Bach’s
50th Anniversary History of
The Atlantic Life Community**

Kirkridge, PA, May 30-June 1st.

All movements toward social justice and peace begin with people telling stories about their lives and that the best antidote to despair is action. ...We added one more component... activism and meditation are best done in communal life

After a year and half 3 folks from Jonah House, with love and support, branched out to Hartford (Connecticut being the highest per capita war profiteering state) to continue that vision. Connecticut produced submarines, jet aircraft engines, helicopters, rifles, munitions, and tanks. ... and thus, the Whale’s Tale was born. ...

Like the mother ship in Baltimore, we worked in menial jobs, enacted the sacrament of dumpster-diving, embracing voluntary poverty. We organized and participated in demonstrations, building alliances. Leafletting, die-ins with chalked homicide silhouettes, occupations of corporate and politicians’ offices, public disruptions, defacing billboards, unfurling banners, pilgrimages, fasts, spray painting, climbing water towers, pouring blood, and going to jail, we did it all.

And yes, there was time for celebrations and parties. We were never far away from laughter.

People of conscience, not willing to accept the rule of brutes like Netanyahu, Biden, Putin, Trump and their ilk, struggle with the apathy of Americans. Do not despair. Our numbers are growing. We are in the vanguard of the revolution. Frederick Douglass said that “If there is no struggle, there is no progress.”

The Revolution must be nonviolent. Lech Walesa said that Poland overthrew its oppressors “without breaking a pane of glass.” The Revolution is coming. A General Strike can happen as the oppression grows. The will of the people will make it happen. It will not happen if we give in to the oligarchy—the rich and powerful—and AIPAC (American Israel Public Affairs Committee) which now controls the US Congress, along with a totally evil organization promoting genocide and calling itself sacrilegiously, Christians United for Israel, a murder incorporated organization.

Jack Gilroy Pax Christi Upstate NY; Veterans for Peace, Ch 90

**Sisters Speak Out:
Litany by Maryann Mueller, CSSF**

Read by SSA’s (Sisters of St. Anne) members of PVP {Our People, Our Voices, Our Power} in Springfield MA on July 2, in a Vigil for Solidarity and Action

As we come together in prayer, we stand as a united and faithful force in our nation’s democracy, demanding better from all officials across our three branches of government. We, as citizens, hold the power to ensure that our government serves and protects all people. We demand accountability, to hold our leaders to the highest standards. As we pray to Isaiah, who criticized the corruption of national leaders and emphasized the significance of caring for the poor and vulnerable.

Poetry Corner

*God seems like a tally master; so cruel
Keeping track of the bad we have done.
God seems like a gift-giver; so generous,
Granting boons and divine blessings.
Who is God? What is God?
God can’t be put in a box.
O’ my finite mind.*

Poem by Chrisopher Tetreault, inmate, Worcester County Jail
Correspondent with Brayton Shanley

I WILL NOT LOOK AWAY

*I will not look away.
No matter how horrific it gets, I will not look away.
No matter how many children I see killed and injured
in the most gruesome ways imaginable, I will not look away.
No matter how much human suffering I see
by keeping my gaze on Gaza, I will not look away.
No matter how many nightmares I have, I will not look away.
No matter how many tears I shed, I will not look away.
No matter how many reasons the propagandists and manipulators
come up with for me to turn my gaze elsewhere, I will not look away.
No matter how many insults and accusations I am tarred with for
refusing to look away, I will not look away.
No matter how much easier it would be to look away,
I will not look away.
I will not avert my gaze. I will not become distracted. I will not lose
myself to the sedated stupor of escapism. I will not do my best to
pretend that everything is normal and that life is basically fine.
The people of Gaza are suffering far more than I have ever suffered,
and probably far more than I ever will suffer.
To the extent of one person’s gaze, one person’s attention,
one person’s reverence, I can ensure that the world
has not turned their back on them. I can ensure that,
to that extent, they are not forgotten.
Even if we can’t stop this,
at the very least we can give them our seeing.
At the very least we owe them that.*

- Caitlin Johnstone

ing hunger voluntarily is a way of responding to the powerlessness we feel to stop the genocide supported by our own country. Sensing hunger, in even a modest fast, physically reminds us (only remotely) of what Palestinians in Gaza and their children feel daily. Joining the fast, we prayed: “Please God, give us the courage to stop this mass killing and torture... show us a way out of no way.”

If we are true Christians first, who happen to be Americans, Jesus will define our moral and spiritual truths, not our national identity as Americans. Most Americans did nothing to deserve the advantages that we are simply born into. Our moral duty then is not to judge the desperate poor, but to serve them as Jesus would. “Lend expecting nothing in return.” (Luke 6:35), by offering our marginalized human family members a chance to live in peace with some financial security.

We are left with the central question of our times: Will we stand with the undocumented, the victims of genocide, the poor in our midst? Will we offer our generous love in opposition to the cruel arm of The State risking our privilege and social standing?

John Bach, one of the founders of ALC, offered a moving tribute to the tenacity, jail time, significant arrests and broad-based movements including the international Plowshare witness, that encompasses ALC. For those of us present, Brayton and I being two of the “early” ALC members, the two days were packed with reminiscences of a passionate commitment to the lineage of Christ-centered consciousness.

We recalled together the “straight ahead” to the Pentagon and White House days, that grounded us in nonviolence, as we embarked on frequent trips to DC for protests and arrests with Liz McAlister and our Berrigan brother prophets, Daniel and Philip, to The Blight House, as Phil would say.

**“Someone Spilled Blood
on the White House”**

In 1980, I was on the White House tour line with Daniel Berrigan and Liz McAlister, where Liz splashed her own blood on the Blight House pillars. Daniel Berrigan turned to tourists in line and with a theatrical flair, called out: “Someone has spilled blood on the White House. Who would spill blood on the White House?”

Along with personal reminiscence, Ched Myers addressed the “conversion

of Saul— captain of the paramilitary force trying to crush the nascent Christian movement,” relating that “Jesus appears to him in the guise of Saul’s victims! Jesus is continually, if inconveniently, present among the brutalized and marginalized of our world.”

Jesus insists that his followers “examine his hands and feet... mutilated by the process of being nailed to a tree. ...mangled extremities, ... the Risen One is the Crucified One.” His “brutalized body here becomes the central object lesson concerning both lynching and liberation.” Meyers makes the point that in the Ascension, Jesus appears with the wounds of crucifixion inflicted on him by the state.

Myers’ juxtaposition of lynching and liberation underscores what “straight ahead” to a mutilated Jesus means as we see his “unending suffering” in human family. This is the cost of opposing the empire. What will I be willing to risk? How to go forward in the tempo of global lynching, unending suffering to liberation?

None of us knows where we will land as we move through the sickening realities of lies, deceit, imprisonments, deportations, bombings, the specter of nuclear war. What does our prophetic call to go “straight ahead,” through the door of Agape, Christ’s unconditional love, mean to each of us?

The message is clear, and we continue, within our communities to seek the

path of resistance. It will not be an easy journey. It has never been. Our Francis Day this year on October 4th will call together individuals and communities to determine what type of resistance we will practice.

Risk-taking, will no doubt, take us from complicity, silence, guilt, maybe even away from signing petitions and attending rallies to a door into the unknown: creative acts of resistance that may be a response to Divine Obedience.

Where will the door, straight ahead to the heart of Jesus, of Agape, lead us? These are the questions we may want to push away. Where will I stand? With whom? We envision Agape’s 38th Francis Day on October 4th, to assist the gathered community in determining where “straight ahead” is for each one of us.

Tremendous emotional fragility accompanies the carrying of planetary pain with a meditative centeredness. Instead, a pall of defeat demonically appears: How to come to grips with one diabolical event after another: National Guard in LA, eclipsing the bombing of starving children in Gaza, Iran and the threat of nuclear war overshadowing both, and the calculated madness at the helm.

What does it mean to be called to community, to be followers of the nonviolent Jesus during the reign of a deranged, mentally ill cult leader? Were we created for these times? What am I willing to risk?



Over 80 Veterans for Peace and Allies were arrested at the US capitol on June 14, while nearing the end of VFP's 40 Day Fast, joined by over 800 fasters, in solidarity with the Palestinian people in Gaza.



Annual June workday with 40 strong and determined wood cutters, stackers and gardeners from the Sirius Community, a local eco village, the McCarthy and Shanley clans and friends from the Worcester-Springfield area. Winter wood is ready, and garden fully planted. We need more volunteers...join us!!!!

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Students from Iona University and Holy Cross College spent four days at Agape's May Rural Immersion created this colorful mural art, planted seeds, stacked wood, ate vegan meals, and communed with the Nipmuc forest.



Justin Duffy is joined by his children Isaiah, Mae on the hoop, and Fran below. They were joined by three of the Spicer- Hankle children all taking trips to the Hermitage for prayer time (yea, sure), with moms Patricia Kirkpatrick and Emily.

OURS I from page 3

step out, “filled with the Holy Spirit”, God will be with us there too.

I am greeted by a thread of connection to the Divine to nourish me as I return to the beautiful and challenging work of raising a family and homesteading and being a human with an empathic heart in 2025.

God of compassion, remind us that we are all here together, co-creating our lives on this planet with you. Show us how to love. God of mercy, bring comfort to those

who mourn. Tenderly hold those who are weeping. Show them your face. God of wisdom, guide our hands and our feet as we seek ways to bring the peace you gave us in your ministry out into the world so that we can minister to others. Show us the way.

Meghan Breen, friend of Agape since 1998, lives as a homesteader, herbalist, amateur Irish fiddler, and writer, outside of Albany, NY with her husband and five kids and many goats, sheep, chickens, ducks, cats and a dog.