

“Sowing a Nonviolent City”  
Saturday, September 26, 2015  
Closing Reflection



We have had an amazing day  
co-inspired . . . by wonderful presenters, speakers, and each other.  
We have been blessed with such a bounty of information, good energy and spirit,  
and a belief in a more sane world  
freed of senseless violence,  
a holy mountain, as Isaiah put it, where no harm is done.  
We glimpsed the holy mountain right here,  
or as Alonzo called it from Zimbabwe “gagchacha,”  
or as Elizabeth Vega called it, “guerrilla ofrendas” —  
shared community spaces of honoring life . . . and lives lost.

We all have heard inspiring words today.  
We have heard Anthony Smith say,  
“Louisville will be different when Louisville had had enough.”

We have heard Jim Atwood challenge a certain “spirituality of the church” —  
an historical theological construct by which  
“we are so heavenly minded that we are no earthly good.”

To those who would say that gun violence prevention is a “political” issue  
and therefore should not be part of the work of our faith communities . . .  
we would all no doubt agree that a funeral is a “spiritual” matter.  
Would not preventing a funeral be a spiritual one as well?

We have also heard Elizabeth Vega remind us that  
“there are children who are going to more funerals than field trips.”

We have heard Mary Lou Marzian tell us that Kentucky and New Hampshire  
are the only two states in the union  
which permit weapons in their respective capitol buildings.

We grieve with the information that Attica Scott gave us  
that the Parkland and California neighborhoods statistically  
have more gun violence than most other places in Kentucky,  
while be reminded throughout the day by Attica and other speakers  
that it is a travesty of analysis  
if we do not see poverty itself as a violence,  
if we do not see racism as a violence, and if we do not see  
the pens and the handshakes used in the hallways

of Frankfort and Washington and Wall Street  
as the instruments, the weapons,  
of a more systemic and profound violence.

And we have heard other things.

We have heard about youth gathering in Louisville to address violence

We have heard about the phone number 502-564-8100,  
the number to call any and all state legislators  
and convey one's support for a more sane gun policy  
and among other legislation  
to demand a task force on gun violence in Jefferson County  
be formed.

We have heard about the pressure to rally for more educational supports  
for children and youth at risk and from poorer neighborhoods,  
to say, "All students matter."

We have heard of the goal to enlist 7 million white Americans  
in the active work of racial justice.



And it has not been all inspiring words.

The workshops and plenaries have called us to this nonviolent vision  
and laid out many paths for our action:

I name only a few:

- \* to demand an end to the school-to-prison pipeline;
- \* to learn how the gun lobby works in Washington and at the state level;
- \* to pressure our state government for a variety of life-saving new laws,
  - like closing gun show loopholes and supporting background checks and waiting periods for all gun purchases as well as
  - supporting a ban on semiautomatic assault weapon and armor piercing handgun ammunition and .50 caliber sniper rifles.

This is some of our political work.

- \* To recognize different experiences and perspectives, and how structural racism and racial stereotypes — what is below the surface — connect with gun violence — which is above and gets more media attention;
- \* To challenge and draw links to male privilege and the proliferation of weapons — in our homes, our streets, and let alone globally.

This is deep systemic work on the one hand and deeply interpersonal on the other.

- To study the history of nonviolence  
and how we can apply it to our own local community;
- to learn about our own communities and context.

This is educational work and the exercise of our feet not just our minds.

- To prepare for the coming of the NRA next June,
- to identify egregious gun dealers in our city, and
- to talk about this issue in our newspapers, schools, and houses of worship.

This is local, activist, mobilizing work.



And what has been clear all through this day infusing all we have done  
is that invitation and call not just to act but to be a nonviolent people . . .  
starting with ourselves.

Yes, our work is political.

It is legislative.

It is activist and economic.

It is structural, and it is face-to-face.

And as we are about to leave here committed to make our own next steps,  
we cannot help but remind ourselves that this matter of “sowing a nonviolent city,”  
cultivating this vision of our streets and communities and our world  
freed of gun violence and senseless disregard for life,  
at the beginning and at its conclusion,  
inspiring the vision and animating each step we take,  
is a spiritual work — a vocation and a way of life.

At the end of this day as we are about to go down our very own cherished streets  
where the people we love and care about live,  
let us affirm and be reminded of  
a deep sense of the sacredness of all life,  
and in so doing,  
open our hearts to the suffering of those who have lost their lives and  
to the grief and loss lived daily by loved ones.

We open our hearts to those who have been injured,  
physically, emotionally, and spiritually  
in the very places that should be the safest —  
our neighborhoods and homes.

We have come today not just to prevent gun violence,  
but finally to eliminate all of our violences,  
to challenge and prevent, in our own small ways,

the persistent and multi-faceted abuses of power we see in so many areas  
of our personal lives and our collective lives  
from our individual mistreatment of one another  
to our complex history and contemporary realities  
of racism, economic injustice, and systemic disempowerment.

It seems to me that none is here today solely  
out of some political conviction or ideology,  
but out this dual awareness:

of the sacredness of all life and the suffering of all life,  
A deeper wisdom that we know and feel in our bones unites these two awarenesses:  
the depth of suffering is matched by the depth of sacredness  
and the depth to which we sense and believe in the sacredness of life  
opens us up to our suffering.

Our lives are inextricably linked  
and our sacred paths, our journey as individuals and together,  
demands us to live — with eyes and hearts wide open —  
this tension of sacredness and suffering . . .  
and to cross the lines that supposedly divide us.

Can we depart from here with a desire to lend courage to one another and  
to transform the doubts we have about this nonviolent way of being  
into a durable confidence?

Let us act on and simultaneously rest in  
the deep wisdom  
that nonviolence is part of our greatest calling,  
aspiration, and moment-to-moment invitation.

Because life is sacred,  
our wars must cease,  
and we must find ways to alchemize the energy for destruction  
into a creativity for nurturing and protecting life.

This, it seems to me, is the spiritual nature of our interconnected lives and journey.  
By spiritual I mean that way of living that draws from a deep source,  
that way of orienting our lives and minds and hearts,  
our eyes and ears to a greater heart hidden yet all around us,  
infusing each breath,  
that moment by moment is saying “Yes” to life,  
that way of aligning and re-aligning again, each new day,  
our lives to the deeper and universal truths  
of sacredness and interconnectedness,  
that alchemy that transforms fear into creative love.

The Sufi poet Hafiz wrote,  
“Fear is the cheapest room in the house . . .”

We need not act of of fear,  
fear of some gun lobby,  
fear of some dominant culture that systematizes violence,  
fear of some post-modern meaninglessness,  
or fear of our smallness before the enormity of need.  
Our fear is a construct.

When we feel weak,  
let us draw strength from the parade of saints on whose shoulders we stand.  
When we feel weak, let us support each other.  
When we feel weak, let us find constant refuge in that deep source,  
however we understand it,  
of meaning and blessing.  
We are drops of love in an ocean of love.

This day has reminded me that we are engaged in a deep and patient work  
of shifting our culture's values and norms,  
being witnesses to and participants in  
that long arc of justice of which King spoke so powerfully,  
and transforming fear into bold love,  
even in our own personal lives.

I'm reminded of a statement by Gandhi who said,

I have only three enemies.  
My favorite enemy, the one most easily influenced for the better,  
is the British Empire.  
My second enemy, the Indian people, is far more difficult.  
But my most formidable opponent is a man named Mohandas K. Gandhi.  
With him I seem to have very little influence.

Gandhi worked on all three levels  
with the Empire,  
with his people,  
and with himself,  
and so must we.

It begins right here (*touch heart*).



I would like to close this conference on sowing nonviolence in our city  
by inviting us to some moments of silence,  
to start right here.

I would invite you to close your eyes if you wish,  
to sit quietly and breathe calmly and naturally and  
to take a moment to give thanks for your own precious life. *(Silence)*

Let us take a moment to give thanks for the people here,  
to your left and right, in front of you and behind you. *(Silence)*

I invite you to take a moment to give thanks for those  
who have suffered from violence directly and indirectly,  
to give thanks and extend care to them. *(Silence)*

And I invite you hold those who are supposed opponents  
to give thanks for them, as well.  
We are they, they are we. *(Silence)*

May it be so. Amen.

In the great tradition of the church let us greet one another with signs of peace.

Phil Lloyd-Sidle