**ADVENT REFLECTIONS 2015:**

**PATHS to PEACE**

**Make me a channel of your peace . . . . St. Francis of Assisi**

Advent Reflections 2015: Paths to Peace!

**Directions for convener:**

The suggested music is optional, but other items are needed. If hymn words are used, borrow books if possible, to avoid printing copies. !

Create a centrepiece with a candle made of beeswax, soy, or other natural substance. (Paraffin is a petroleum product and causes pollution in its production.) It is used for the closing rituals and can be lit at any other times.

**Week One:** Provide each participant (or have each bring) a small candle or vigil light (also natural).

Suggested music for closing:

"Christ, Circle Round Us," Dan Schutte, Breaking Bread 2012 #55

"To Be Your Presence," (2:17), Kathy Sherman, CSJ, The Heart Knows!

**Week Two:** Buy, rent, or borrow Len Sroka's Living Inside Out (www.seescapes.com or

Amazon). Prepare to show it.

Suggested music:

"Let the Valleys Be Raised," Dan Schutte, Breaking Bread 2012 #65

"Every Valley," Bob Dufford, SJ, Breaking Bread 2012 #74!

**Week Three:**

Suggested music: "To Be Your Presence" (2:17), Kathy Sherman, CSJ, The Heart Knows.

Prepare to discuss The Hidden Messages in Water by Masaru Emoto.

Provide the words (and music if needed) of "Make Me a Channel of Your Peace.”!

**Week Four:**

Suggested music: "Consciousness Waking" (4:14), Jan Novatka, Awakening Consciousness.

Other hymns on that album. !

If the suggested closing cannot be done any week, substitute a time of quiet reflection followed by shared prayer — or whatever the group prefers. Allow time to socialize after each meeting. !!Scripture is from E. H. Peterson's The Message. !

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who thanks

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**Week One: Nov. 29, 2015: What Are We Talking About?**

**I. Introduction**

Introductions. Settle any decisions concerning the group. "Change gears" by remembering the presence of God with breathing, music, and/or whatever assists the group. Convener prays aloud that all will receive the Spirit’s gift of peace this Advent. Someone reads the Scripture excerpts:

***He shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.*** (Jer. 33: 15)

***Be on your guard. Don't let the sharp edge of your expectation get dulled by parties and drinking and shopping. Otherwise that day [when God's reign is here] is going to take you by complete surprise.*** (Lk. 21: 29)!

Silent reflection on these readings, Share with the group your feelings about Advent. !

**II. Input**

We often refer to the Christ Child as the Prince of Peace. We exchange a sign of peace during Mass. When someone dies, we pray: May s/he rest in peace. We pray for peace in our world, our families, our selves. Nobel awards a Peace Prize. We assume that

God's reign will be one of Peace on Earth. What are your feelings about the topic of peace!

In the Hebrew Bible, the word we translate "peace" is "shalom." (The image here includes "shalom" in Arabic and Hebrew.) Shalom is about wholeness. Each part of us (e.g., cells, organs, systems) is a whole entity, working for the good of the whole. Each person is part of larger wholes. Ultimately, we are integral parts of our interconnected, expanding Creation. No one and no thing can be excised from that whole. "When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the Universe." (John Muir)!

Aspects of wholeness include harmony and balance: the serenity of equilibrium. Note

that this is not the absence of tension or even of conflict. Think how our Universe began with an expansion of particles and light and the repeated transformation of elementary particles as they gave themselves to become the next generation of elements within evolution. Eventually supernovas had to explode so that the remains could eventually become our solar system — and everything in it. !

Death and conflict pervade creation, yet from the beginning, creation has kept in balance and harmony. Earth repaired disequilibriums whenever that was necessary. (E.g., when too much oxygen threatened the health of the atmosphere, Earth "invented" respiration to assure the presence of the right amount of CO2 to foster life. This required time, even millions of years.) We know from experience that we, too, can heal, though sufficient time must be allowed. !

Others have shed light on the meaning of peace. Margaret Anna Cusack (foundress of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace) was perhaps unique in the 19th century for rediscovering the biblical conception of peace not as the absence of hostility but as the establishment of right relationships based on justice. Pope Paul VI (1972) repeated this concept in his famous quote: "If you want peace, work for justice." The world awoke to yet another aspect of peace when Wangari Maathai won the Nobel Peace prize because of her efforts to save the environment and plant trees. Ecological justice! What connections do you find among these meanings?

What right relationships based on justice seem most needed in our personal lives, our

groups, our nation, church, and Earth? How can justice bring peace to these issues?!

As we ponder God's gift of Jesus and of peace this Advent, let's remember that "justice

and righteousness" are needed to keep ourselves and the entire web of life whole/ at peace. Any single thing we do for peace will affect many people, many other issues. As with a mobile sculpture, touching any one part affects the whole. (Note image on p. 12.) Butterfly wings flapping somewhere influence weather patterns elsewhere; stones cast into water result in ripples that extend and intersect. We cannot do *one* thing in our interconnected universe!

**III. What is God saying to us?**

The Scriptures tell us to "Be on your guard." Take a minute to silently listen to the Spirit within and decide how we could be better "on our guard" this week to become peace- and justicemakers, whole-makers, ecological-care-makers. Share if you wish. !

**IV. For Advent this week**

Be alert to "set things right" by keeping better balance/ harmony/justice during these days of "parties and drinking and shopping." Think about what we've discussed and prepare to share next week any follow-up insights you might have about peace, justice, and wholeness. !

**V. Closing**

Each participant needs a candle or vigil. Dim lights as much as practical. Light the center candle. Pass it from one to another, allowing time for the group to look at the individual holding the candle and send blessings of shalom to him or her. After the candle is returned to the center, each lights his/her candle from it, thus symbolizing the unity of the group. Sing or listen to "Christ, Circle Round Us" or "To Be Your Presence" or another of your choosing. Extinguish candles. They can be taken home and used during the week as a reminder of the group's journey to peace this Advent. !

**Socialize.**

**Week Two: Dec. 6, 2015: It is an Inside Job!**

**I . Introduction**

Introduce any new participants. Share experiences/insights from the past week relevant to peace, justice, wholeness. "Change gears" by remembering the presence of God: breathing, music, and/ or whatever assists the group to be attentive to the Spirit within. Someone read the Scripture:!

***You will be named by God forever the peace of justice, the glory of God's worship.*** (Baruch 5: 3)

***Prepare God's arrival! Make the road smooth and straight! Every ditch will be filled in, every bump smoothed out, the detours straightened out, all the ruts paved over . . . .*** (Lk. 3: 4-5) !

Silent reflection on these readings. Share with the group: What "road" do you feel called to smooth and straighten this Advent?

**II. Input**

One “road" is to our innermost self. Dag Hammarskjold said: "The longest journey is the

journey inward." Joseph Campbell showed Plato's soul-circle with a dot in the middle

representing our center from which all energy comes (and where divinity abides). Above the dot he placed a horizontal line separating the conscious and unconscious. Above the line he placed a square representing what we often think of as our true self, but that is only our ego. What helps you to feel centered (e.g., nature, quiet prayer, music, Scripture, poetry)? (Pause, but do not share.)

Consider why that might be so. Is consciousness/awareness involved?!

When considering the violence, lack of justice, isolation and separateness in our world

and in many hearts, one recalls an old Chinese proverb: "Unless we change our direction, we'll end up where we are heading." The flip side of that seems to be: Unless we know where we want to go, we won't know how to get there. Assuming we want to reach the goal of shalom as we discussed it last week [justice, wholeness, centeredness], what awareness needs deepening or smoothing out?!

Dr. Ervin Laszlow, Creative Director, Global Peace Meditation and Prayer Day writes:

"We need to evolve our consciousness. This is possible, for human consciousness is not a permanent fixture: cultural anthropology testifies that it developed gradually in the course of millennia. In the thirty or fifty thousand year history of Homo sapiens the human body did not change significantly, but human consciousness did.” Is this true even in your own life? !

We know that creation has followed a trajectory towards more complexity and consciousness. As parts of this creation, we, too, develop this way. Mature people develop a sense of connectedness and accept the complexities of life. Especially as we deepen our awe and gratitude for the mystery of life and the divine within it, "we begin to experience ourselves as part of creation . . . not separate from it." (*Renewing the Earth*, USCCB) This brings the gift of a more peaceful spirit. When have you felt yourself "part of creation . . . not separate from it"?

How did/does that effect/affect your inner peace? !

Tending the road on our inward journey takes patience and continuing effort. As you

consider your journey within, what might you judge needs smoothing, straightening, and balancing? These excerpts from a Prayer for World Peace (Iyanla Vanzant) might assist us: ". . .

Today, I am laying down all weapons of anger and attack in my thoughts, words, and actions. Today, I am laying down the grievances and upsets that have led me to attack others and brutally assault myself. . . . Today, I ask that you remind me how important I am in ensuring the active presence of peace. . . . Today, I humbly surrender myself . . . to the creation, maintenance, and advancement of peace . . . .”!!

**III. What is God saying to us?**

God speaks to us through Jesus' life. When was it probably challenging for Jesus to maintain his peace? How did he develop his consciousness? What can we learn from his example? !!

**IV. For Advent this week**

What insights from this meeting can I bring to my journey inward? How can I smooth and straighten the road to my innermost self this week? !!

**V. Closing**

Watch "Living Outside Our Inside," the first part of Len Sroka's Living Inside Out

(www.seescapes.com). Ponder its message silently. Share any one thought or insight that struck you as you watched. !

**Socialize.**

**Week Three: December 13, 2015: Obstacles Were made to be transformed!**

**I. Introduction**

Share experiences/insights from the past week. Settle into your place of peace and wholeness; remain there for several moments. Pray to be attentive to the Spirit within. Someone read the Scripture:!

***From now on, God is Israel's king, in charge of the center. There's nothing to fear from evil ever agin! . . . Your God is present among you . . .*** (Zeph. 3: 15,17)

***John intervened: "I'm baptizing you here in the river. The main character in this drama, to whom I am a mere stagehand, will ignite the kingdom of life, a fire, the Holy Spirit within you, changing you from the inside out.*** (Luke 3: 16)!

Silent reflection followed by sharing: What helps you to remember that at your center, and the center of all creation, the Holy Spirit is within, *changing you and creation from the inside out*? !

**II. Input**

Note that Zephaniah does not say that there will be no evil, but that we have *nothing to*

*fear from evil* because God is present. John the Baptizer was aware of many evils: Herod ruled maliciously and did evil deeds; Herodius (Herod's brother's wife) would ask for John's head on a platter; John urged the "brood of vipers" who came to be baptized to repent their many failings. !

We, too, are aware of evils — personal, family, local, church, and national, but also global conflicts, violence, lack of harmony. For example: military-industrial structures that benefit from conflict and resist control; climate change that threaten our air, water, soil and all life; hunger, thirst, and disease that are still major killers, especially of children; extinction of species that is greater now than at any time since the extinction of the dinosaurs; human slavery/ trafficking that is greater than at any time in recorded history; racism, sexism, intolerance of "others"; wars and the inhumanity resulting from them (budget imbalances, refugees, pollution, etc.). In *Laudato Si’*, Pope Francis writes: *War always does grave harm to the environment and* *to the cultural riches of peoples, risks which are magnified when one considers nuclear arms and* *biological weapons.* (57) What evils threaten your peace of heart?!

Inner peace is possible not just in spite of, but sometimes because of, these conflicts.

Sometimes people only turn to the Divine Presence within when things are most difficult. People feel called to actions together such as advocacy, education, prayer, demonstrations, new "social inventions," and creative nonviolent actions to stop injustice. Not everyone is called to act in the same way. The question is not: *Why does s/he do that?* But: *What am I doing for peacemaking?*

People can disagree about effective actions and responses; moral dilemmas are often involved. !

Love can enable us to change the situation from the inside out by our attitude. Albert Einstein said: "No problem can be solved from [using] the consciousness that created it." Choose any problem (e.g., poverty; oppression; destruction of life systems for energy; manufacturing, sale, and use of weapons). What mind set causes it? Apply Einstein's insight to suggest solutions. !

Mark Nepo: "[T]he best chance to be whole is to love whatever gets in the way, until it ceases to be an obstacle." Lisa Arends, reflecting on her husband's abandonment of her and the resulting crises in her life, says: "I could have easily . . . lived the rest of my life . . . staying hurt and angry. . . I had no choice about what he did, but I had the power to not let his choice control the rest of my life. I chose to see [this] as a gift, a present that has allowed me to live my life with purpose and joy. I have decided to own this unwanted gift, using my story to help others along their own journeys." Have you examples of forgiveness from your own or other's lives!

December 21, the winter solstice, starts the gradual increase in daylight in the Northern

Hemisphere. It's one of the reasons that Christians (in the third and fourth centuries) chose December 25th to celebrate Christ's birth. During Advent we light candles, reminding us to effect changes from within: *igniting* the kingdom of life, a *fire* . . . *changing [us] from the inside out*. This consciousness affects universal consciousness and the continuing evolution of creation!

**III. What is God saying to us?**

Here's one quote (of many) from the Catholic Bishops' *The Challenge of Peace* (1983) that deserves repeating: "Peace making” is not an optional commitment. It is a requirement of our faith. We are called to be peacemakers, not by some movement of the moment, but by our Lord Jesus.”!

**IV. For Advent this week**

Plan a simple party for Week Four. Use nothing disposable. Prepare to share your feelings about Mary and inner (or outer!) peace. !

**V. Closing**

U. S. participants, read pp. 9 - 10 silently. When most have finished, share anything that struck you that related directly to what we’ve been considering about Advent and peace-making. When the group has finished sharing, sing or say together: "Make Me a Channel of Your Peace.”!

B. Other participants can read those pages, too, of course, or share what you know about Pope Francis’ *Laudato Si’* and how it contributes to peace-making. When the group has finished sharing, sing or say together: "Make Me a Channel of Your Peace.”!

**Socialize.**

No more will nation fight nation . . .!

The readings for the Third Sunday in Advent include this verse: ***The Spirit of God, the Master, is on me because God anointed me. He sent me to preach good news to the poor . . . .*** (Isaiah61:1) Earlier in Isaiah is a famous passage (here in Peterson's translation) that calls fortransforming weapons to life-enhancing alternatives: ***They'll turn their swords into shovels, their spears into hoes. No more will nation fight nation, they won't play war games any more.*** (Isaiah 2: 4)!

Note: The foundation of pages 9-10 is religious, not political, though solutions will usually involve politics. !

**Today's swords and spears**

What do you remember or know about the atomic bombings at Hiroshima August 6 and, just three days later, at Nagasaki, Japan? The overwhelming chaos made accurate counting impossible, but in the first four months after the two bombings, about 150,000 people died in Hiroshima, while about 75,000 people lost their lives in Nagasaki. In addition, these bombs left behind radioactive waste that causes genetic mutations and cancers suffered by children and adults to this day. Damage to soil, air, water and other species in incalculable.

Nuclear weapons have threatened the security of human and all life forms ever since. !

Richard McSorley, SJ, said years ago: "The taproot of violence in our society today is our

intent to use nuclear weapons. . . all other evil is minor in comparison." These weapons, even if not used, could never be part of a life lived in imitation of Jesus. Besides, they are neither needed nor effective, even as deterrence. !

David Cortright, director of policy studies at Notre Dame's Kroc Institute for International Studies, recently wrote: "Over the decades more than two dozen countries have considered but then decided not to develop or maintain nuclear weapons capability. In almost every instance, *countries were persuaded to give up the bomb because of improved political and* *economic conditions or in response to security assurances and financial incentives.* . . The art of diplomacy . . . requires cooperating with countries, however unpalatable that may be . . . ." (emphasis added). We might say: solving tensions harmoniously! How does this compare with today's "common wisdom" about weapons!

A hydrogen bomb (today's nuclear weapon) is thousands of times deadlier than an atomic bomb (20,000 tons of TNT vs. 10,000,000 tons of TNT). Gasp! Of course, no one expects these weapons to be used, and if one country used them, it's unlikely that another could. Countries spend astonishing amounts of money for things they expect never to use! The United States possesses about 8500 nuclear weapons, and plans to build more of them. !!

**Nuclear weaponry finance facts**

A 1998 study by the Brookings Institution found that the U.S. spent c. **$5.5 trillion** dollars on nuclear weapons **from 1940–1996**. Nuclear weapons spending during this period*exceeded the combined total federal spending* for education; training, employment, and socialservices; agriculture; natural resources and the environment; general science, space, andtechnology; community and regional development, including disaster relief; law enforcement;and energy production and regulation (emphasis added). !

A report in **May 2010** called for **$80 billion** to sustain and modernize the United States’ nuclear weapons complex…. And wel**l over $100 billion** in nuclear delivery systems to sustain existing capabilities and modernize some strategic systems by the year 2020. (White House Fact Sheet)!

In 2013 the DoD budget included funds for three new nuclear weapons production plants: a new plutonium manufacturing facility at the Los Alamos Lab, NM; the Uranium Processing Facility at the Oak Ridge National Lab, TN; and a replacement for the Kansas City Plant, MO. The U.S. Department of Defense's budget request for 2015-2024 will total $348 billion, close to 10% of the DoD budget that decade.

(See: <http://ecospiritualityresources.com/2015/02/18/nuclear-weapons-and-our-future/>)

In a time of unprecedented global economic, environmental, and political upheaval and

resulting increases in poverty, climate/war refugees, and deterioration of life systems (water, air, soil) from weapons use and war, and in light of the Cortright quote on p. 9, can we afford this expense in money, morale, and relations with other countries? How else might those funds be used? What jobs that contribute to the common good could be created to employ former military industry workers?

Check out www.franciscanaction.org/pledge.

**Jesus the Peacemaker**

A focus on Jesus the Peacemaker will help us penetrate specious arguments like, e.g., we

need jobs in the military-industrial complex. Pope Benedict XVI stated in his 2010 World Day of

Peace Message, "I firmly hope that … concrete decisions will be made towards progressive

disarmament, with a view to freeing our planet from nuclear arms." !

So, this Advent and beyond: *What am I doing for peacemaking?* !

**To learn more:**

- International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons: http://www.icanw.org

- <http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org>!

**Week Four: December 20, 2015: Mary, who believed!**

**I. Introduction**

Settle into your centered place of shalom and remember your interconnectedness with all creation. Listen to "Consciousness Waking." Convener prays aloud that all will be attentive to the Spirit within all creation. Someone read the Scripture excerpts:!

***His family tree is ancient and distinguished . . . and the people will have a good and safe home, for the whole world will hold him in respect — Peacemaker of the world!*** (Mic. 5: 3-4)

***Mary didn't waste a minute. She got up and traveled . . . . Blessed woman, who believed what God said.*** (Luke 1: 39, 45)!

Share your feelings about Mary's inner peace. How do you picture it!

**II. Input**

We usually think of Jesus' family tree as reaching back through humanity. That's true, but humanity, too, has an ancient and distinguished lineage. No one knew it 2000 years ago, but we now know that Earth dates to the flaring forth 13.8 billion years ago. Thanks to the destruction of stars (supernovas) in the Milky Way Galaxy, our star/sun was born from these explosions about 4.5 billion years ago. Earth formed, followed by atmosphere, oceans, and continents. Everything we now know started then and is interconnected. We usually think of "home" as where we live, or lived, with our family. That is true, but we are increasingly aware that Earth is our home because everything is our family. How might realizing these truths increase peace/ right relationships/ justice this Christmas? How might it affect nationalism, racism, sexism, etc.? !

Mary had to believe that the child within her possessed the very Spirit of Yahweh and that questions would somehow be resolved. Things we think of as obstacles to personal peace — such as disapproval of and possible rejection by family and friends, potentially broken relationships, questions of raising the baby, economic uncertainty — remained for Mary. Once she had an answer to "But how?" her "I'm ready to serve" was given with shalom, a word that would have been familiar to her. !

No one else will ever experience that presence the way Mary did. And yet, we too believe that divine life — Love and Peace incarnate — is within us. Whatever problems face us, we possess the same Mystery and Gift. Unlike the rest of creation, we humans can be *consciously* grateful for the divine presence, rejoice in it, and call upon Incarnate Peace within when we experience inner troubles and/or are distressed by the pains of others and of our world. !

Michael Morwood, having watched a ballet, reflected on the beauty he experienced. He

gives us this insight about art: "[These artists] did not add anything to the universe . . . Rather, the universe found a way through them to give expression to itself." What do you think he meant? How does this apply to Mary, and to us, as we strive to create peace?!

Many things that threaten peace are notably not artful. Climate change results in human

and ecological devastation. Mountaintop mining and drilling for gas and oil destroy the beauty of forests, fields, and water. They pollute water, soil, and air and can be painfully noisy. War creates destruction and leaves not just death but also scars of ugliness for every sense. For those who believe the divine is present everywhere, this ugliness is a desecration. !

Like Mary, we believe the Peacemaker is now present within us, within all creation, and

uniquely within the elements of bread and wine in the Eucharist. "The divine has located itself in a material milieu. This aspect of the sacrament [of Eucharist] might become even more evident by adverting to its indebtedness to soil and grain and wheat and vines and grapes and the labors of bread-and-wine makers. . . ." John Haughey [Hoy], S.J. “[T]he Christian people, in giving thanks to God through the Eucharist, should be conscious that they do so *in the name of all* *creation*, aspiring to the sanctification of the world and working intensely to that end” Pope Benedict XVI*,* The Sacrament of Love. How could we deepen this awareness during Mass?!!

**III. What is God saying to us?**

When we give gifts at Christmas, we hope they will be accepted and cared for. God has given us the gift of scientific and prayerful awareness that we are one and that Incarnate Peace dwells within each of us. Perhaps God wants us to imitate the way Mary "held these things dearly, deep within herself." !!

**IV. For Advent this week**

In the days left of Advent, let's remember that our every effort to develop Jesus' gift of peace within us is like moving one part of a mobile: it affects and transforms others, even the consciousness of creation! !!

**V. Closing**

Share the Peace of Christ with one another, remembering its presence in one’s self, recognizing it in one another, and consciously wishing it to increase in them and everywhere. !

Evaluation:

- Share one word that sums up this four-week experience for you. Why? What memory would you like to retain?

- What do you suggest be modified in these pages for the next time they are used?!

**Socialize.**