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On January 11th of this year, my collaborators and I issued my pastoral letter *Living in the Light of Christ's Peace: A Conversation Toward Nuclear Disarmament*. In that letter, we voiced the fears of many that the brewing war of aggression on the part of Russia against Ukraine would heighten the risk of the use of nuclear weapons being used for the first time since World War II. Sadly, February 24<sup>th</sup> saw the beginning of that war and the rattling of nuclear sabers. Just a few weeks later, on March 7th, 2022, the 61-year-old mayor of Hostomel, Yuri Prylypko, was killed by Russian snipers along with two others as he distributed bread and medicine to the sick of his city. Mr. Prylypko was hailed as a real hero and a servant of his people, and rightly so. He gave his life for his suffering people and exemplified Our Lord's teaching that "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." (John 15:13) Another way of expressing this truth is to say that Yuri was in a "right relationship" with his people. This idea of being in "right relationship" is referred to in scripture as "biblical justice." The whole trajectory of the scriptures, and a constant theme of the Second Vatican Council, sees justice not only from an ethical perspective but more, from the perspective of being in right relationship, a covenant relationship, with God, with our fellow human beings and with all of creation. The late Father Walter Burghardt puts it well:

Those who read in the sacred text a sheerly personal, individualistic morality have not understood the Torah, have not sung the Psalms, have not been burned

by the prophets, have not perceived the implications and the very burden of Jesus' message, and must inevitably play fast and loose with St. Paul. The social focus of God's Book is evident on the first page; the song of creation is its overture. Our incredibly imaginative God did not have in mind isolated units, autonomous entities...God had in mind a people, a human family, a community of persons, a body genuinely one."

I believe that the United Nations organization promotes this scriptural ideal of right relationships, as evidenced in its beautiful "Golden Rule" mosaic, displayed at its headquarters. Based on a Norman Rockwell painting, this beautiful work of art fittingly captures the mission of the United Nations as it seeks to bring peoples of all races, creeds, nationalities and ethnic backgrounds together through peaceful and productive dialogue. It is not surprising that all major religions contain a version of this golden rule. In Judaism: "What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow man. That is the entire law; all the rest is commentary." (Talmud) In Islam: "No one of you is a believer until he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself." (Sunan) In Buddhism: "Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful." (Udanavarga) In Hinduism: "This is the sum of duty: do naught unto others which would cause you pain if done to you." (Mahabharata) In Christianity: "Do to others whatever you would have them do to you. This is the law and the prophets." (Matthew 7:12)

Living out the Golden Rule, that is, living in right relationship with God, with others and with our common home, is what my pastoral letter seeks to promote. It highlights the urgent need to begin, rejuvenate and sustain a conversation that leads to right relationships and to peace in our world. In particular, my pastoral letter raises the urgent question of nuclear disarmament since nuclear weapons pose the ultimate, and indeed, permanent destruction of any kind of relationships at all, not to mention right relationships. For many of us, myself included, the last five decades or so have lulled us

into a false sense of security relative to the clear and present danger posed by nuclear weapons. This all changed for me five years ago this month.

In September 2017, I traveled to Japan and visited Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It was a somber, sobering experience as I realized that on August 6, 1945, humanity crossed the line into the darkness of the nuclear age. We can now kill billions of people instantly and even destroy the world in a flash. The reality of this evil becomes very real as you walk through Hiroshima and Nagasaki today.

In one exhibit, I read about school children in Hiroshima who on that fateful morning in August of 1945 ran to the windows, attracted by a bright light. Little did they know that they were running to their deaths, either instantaneously incinerated or dying later in agonizing pain. Normally, light brings new life and clearer vision. Not that day. Sadly, the light generated by the first nuclear explosion used in war brought only destruction and death.

Then I remembered when I was a schoolboy in October 1962 during the Cuban Missile Crisis. I recall looking up at the sky on my way home from school to see if any Russian planes were about to drop atomic bombs on me. I became so frightened that I ran all the way home. Those Japanese school children had no time to be afraid. They had no time to run and there was no home left to run to. Later, when I walked through the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park and stood before the incinerated Genbaku Dome, it dawned on me that I had not really thought about the possibility of nuclear war since then or felt fear over the nuclear threat. Those childhood days when we practiced for nuclear war by hiding under our desks or locating the nearest bomb shelter are dim memories. But Hiroshima and Nagasaki brought them all back vividly.

Within a day or two of my return to New Mexico, some friends came to visit me in Santa Fe. I took them to the New Mexico History Museum. There I saw a different exhibit with a different story. With Hiroshima and Nagasaki still fresh in my mind, I read

about the Manhattan Project, the development of the Los Alamos and Sandia National Laboratories, and the creation of the nuclear bombs that were eventually dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. I viewed these displays much differently than I had on a previous visit before I had been to Japan. It was eerie to see photos of Little Boy and Fat Man, the nicknames given to the actual Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs, when I had just been in those very places only weeks before. I knew now what those bombs did to our Japanese brothers and sisters.

When my friends and I stepped outside into our beautiful city, I noticed how peaceful it was. Santa Fe—the City of the Holy Faith of St. Francis of Assisi, a faith which inspired him to be an instrument of Christ’s peace to the world—is home to Nuestra Senora de la Paz, Our Lady of Peace. I felt disturbed by our history, the long, dark legacy of building the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs, and many thousands of nuclear weapons since then. We are the people who designed and built these weapons of mass destruction. We were the first to use them. We must be the people to dismantle them and make sure they are never used again.

That day in Santa Fe, it seemed blasphemous to me that we could create a weapon with the potential to destroy our entire planet, our common home, given to us by a loving God to be cared for and nurtured so that all might live in God’s peace. It became clear to me that the Archdiocese of Santa Fe must be part of a strong peace initiative, one that would help make sure that these weapons would never be used again, that we would never destroy our planet or one another, that instead we would clean up our poisoned land and fund global institutions that resolve all international conflicts through nonviolent means such as dialogue and negotiation.

Historically, the Archdiocese of Santa Fe has been part of a peace initiative, especially given our role in the creation and manufacture of nuclear weapons. I believe that it is time to rejuvenate that peace work. I think we need to sustain a serious

conversation in New Mexico and across the nation about nuclear disarmament. We can no longer deny or ignore the dangerous predicament we have created for ourselves. We need to start talking about it with one another, all of us, and figure out concrete steps toward abolishing nuclear weapons and ending the nuclear threat. If we care about humanity, if we care about our planet, if we care about the God of peace and human conscience, then we must start a public conversation on these urgent questions and find a new path toward nuclear disarmament.

Our Gospel this evening points to a “conversation” that God entered into with all of humanity. By becoming one of us, God engages us in a divine conversation that if we enter into would ultimately free us from sin and death, a conversation consummated on the cross and brought to fruition in the Resurrection. A conversation that leads to right relationships. It is in the light of the Resurrection that we are called to live in peace with one another, freed from hatred, jealousy, lust for power, greed and all those evils that cause wars and prevent right relationships. It is a conversation that the United Nations organization initiates, rejuvenates and sustains on the geopolitical level.

The United Nations is a model for all countries, organizations, communities and individuals who seek to live in harmony and in right relationship with each other. The UN demonstrates that the first step to a productive conversation is to listen. Pope Francis has mentioned more than once to us bishops that while we are teachers of the faith, a good teacher listens first. We must listen to the poor, the disenfranchised, and those on the periphery. We must listen to the often-forgotten victims of wars, famine and persecution in such places as Syria, Sudan, South Sudan, Nigeria, Yemen, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Somalia, Myanmar, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, as well as to those suffering in Ukraine; we must listen to those being trafficked and to those dying from preventable illnesses; we must listen to forced immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers fleeing gang violence, persecution, political and economic hardship; and we

must listen to those at home enduring domestic violence, addiction and extreme poverty. And we are called to listen to those voices calling for nuclear disarmament since the current stockpile of over 13,000 weapons in the world today poses the real risk, intentional or accidental, of destroying our planet and most likely all of human life. The way of the cross calls us to humble ourselves, to rid ourselves of pride and selfishness and to give of ourselves freely to others, as Yuri Prylypko did last March as we engage the process of dialogue on the global level.

When we genuinely listen to these voices, to the cry of the poor, the destitute, and persecuted, we are taking the first steps in a constructive conversation that will find answers and create true change in our world. Sadly, our world too often turns a deaf ear to these problems, preferring to remain safe, isolated and unaware. We Christians believe that the WORD became flesh so that we might be freed from the chains of selfishness to give of ourselves to each other, seeing that we are all children of God.

In particular, I am aware that many would say that to think we can achieve multilateral, verifiable nuclear disarmament is naïve. But who is it that is really naïve? Robert McNamara, Defense Secretary during the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, said that human civilization survived only by luck. Counting on luck is not a winning strategy. The history of nuclear weapons is replete with near misses, miscalculations and accidents. With the war in Ukraine, we are now facing the most serious nuclear threats since the middle 1980's. Isn't it the height of naiveté to think that humanity can survive on into the future as long as nuclear weapons exist? There are those who would say that conversation and dialogue are signs of weakness. However, I subscribe to St. Francis de Sales belief that "Nothing is so strong as gentleness, nothing so gentle as real strength." Is not the gentle persuasion of a productive conversation more effective than all the strong-arm tactics of politics and military might? Real peace making begins only after the fighting ends.

Pope Francis, who strikingly called the mere possession of nuclear weapons immoral, speaks eloquently about the importance of conversation, of dialogue:

The Word became flesh in order to dialogue with us. God does not desire to carry on a monologue, but a dialogue. For God himself, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is dialogue, an eternal and infinite communion of love and life. By the coming of Jesus, the Person of the Word made flesh, into our world, God showed us the way of encounter and dialogue. Indeed, he made that way incarnate in himself, so that we might know it and follow it, in trust and hope.

On the international level too, there is the risk of avoiding dialogue, the risk that this complex crisis will lead to taking shortcuts rather than setting out on the longer paths of dialogue. Yet only those paths can lead to the resolution of conflicts and to lasting benefits for all.

I am convinced that this dialogue that Pope Francis speaks of is what is needed in our world today. The solution to our divisions and controversies is not violence and war but the honest and sincere efforts of human beings to encounter one another in fruitful conversations that lead to peace. And a dialogue about nuclear disarmament is an essential part of this conversation.

When Jesus sent the seventy-two disciples ahead of him, he told them to speak the words of peace to those they met. At his last supper, he spoke again of peace, saying "My peace is my gift to you." When he rose from the dead, his first words to his disciples were words of peace. As followers of Jesus, and in keeping with the beliefs of world religions, I hope we can speak the words of peace with one another, and translate that Gospel conversation into concrete action for nuclear disarmament across the world.

I think again of those young school children in Japan who ran to the window to see the bright light of the Hiroshima bomb just as they were incinerated. That light was not the light of peace but a false light of death and destruction. Those children's voices cry out to us tonight for as T. S. Eliot said in *Little Gidding*, "And what the dead had no speech for, when living, they can tell you, being dead: the communication of the dead is tongued with fire beyond the language of the living."

Jesus came into the world as the true light. He came to lead us out of the darkness of violence, death and destruction. In doing so, he is the "light of the world." His light is the exact opposite of the bright light of a nuclear weapon. His light is the true light of universal love, the light of universal compassion, the light of universal peace. His light is the light of total nonviolence. His light of peace enables us to see a way forward on the path of life toward a new future of peace, a world without nuclear weapons.

The Hiroshima bombing occurred on August 6th, the Feast of the Transfiguration. A few weeks later, in September 1945, Dorothy Day called the U.S. atomic bombing of Hiroshima "the anti-transfiguration."

In the story of the transfiguration (Luke 9:28-36; Matthew 17:1-13), Jesus takes three disciples up the mountain, and there is transfigured into bright, white light. His disciples are terrified, and fall to the ground as if dead, but he touches them and says, "Rise, do not be afraid." These witnesses saw who Jesus really is—the light of the world, and the healing light of peace.

As his followers, we choose not to live in the darkness of violence and in the shadow of the threat of nuclear war anymore. The light of Christ's peace is leading us out of the valley of the shadow of death where we have wandered far too long, building and developing thousands of nuclear weapons in preparation for nuclear war. In the light of Christ's peace, we can see a new promised land of peace, love, and nonviolence. If we dare follow the transfigured risen Christ, we can put aside our fears, and rise and



walk forward into that promised land of peace, into a new world without nuclear weapons.

In the light of Christ's peace, we see one another as brothers and sisters. God did not create us to be enemies of each other but rather as members of one human family, all God's children, sharing this beautiful common home. We need not threaten anyone, anywhere, any longer with nuclear warfare. We must take concrete steps to begin the process of nuclear disarmament, to dismantle our weapons, clean up our land, and spend our enormous resources instead on structures of international, nonviolent, conflict resolution and ending the causes of warfare itself, such as hunger, poverty, racism and greed.

In the light of Christ's peace, we can see a new future for the world, a new nonviolent world, where we do not build and store nuclear weapons but where everyone can live in peace without the threat of nuclear war. In this new world, we spend our resources ending hunger and poverty, improving our schools and healthcare, securing life-giving employment for everyone, and teaching everyone the life of peace and nonviolence. If we pursue this conversation and take up the task of nuclear disarmament, we will not only make our land and our world more peaceful and more secure, but we will also finally learn to live fully in the light of Christ's peace.

In Gerard Manley Hopkins's poem, *The Grandeur of God*, he tells us that the earth is constantly renewed because "the Holy Ghost over the bent world broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings." The light of those bright wings is filled with wisdom, prudence and courage that enable us to sustain a fruitful conversation on peace that will renew, refresh and invigorate our poor world, so often bent by violence and the threat of nuclear war. The light of those bright wings is the light of Christ that "shines in the darkness" (Jn. 1:5). It is Christ, the Morning Star, "who, coming back from death's domain, has shed his peaceful light on humanity" (Easter Exsultet). It is in this

light, the light of Christ's peace, that we undertake this conversation on nuclear disarmament. We pray that we will vanquish the instruments of war by ourselves becoming instruments of Christ's peace.

But it is not enough that we become instruments of peace, as important as that is. No, we must take up the cause of worldwide nuclear disarmament with an urgency that befits the seriousness of this cause and the dangerous threat that looms over all of humanity and the planet. I call on all of us, children of God, to take up the challenge of nuclear disarmament by engaging the vital conversation that will lead to concrete action steps toward this goal. I know I am asking quite a lot but so did Jesus when he sent out the disciples two by two on their mission of peace. And like those disciples, we are missioned by Christ, empowered by Christ and strengthened by Christ for the task at hand.

Mr. Antonio Guterres, the United Nations Secretary General, expressed the disappointment of so many of us that the recent conference on the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons failed to reach a consensus. He was quoted as saying that "the fraught international environment and the heightened risk of nuclear weapons being used, by accident or through miscalculation, demand urgent and resolute action. The Secretary-General appealed to all States to use every avenue of dialogue, diplomacy, and negotiation to ease tensions, reduce nuclear risk and eliminate the nuclear threat once and for all." (Mr. Dujarric) He poignantly stated a few weeks ago that "Geopolitical tensions are reaching new highs. Competition is trumping co-operation and collaboration. Distrust has replaced dialogue and disunity has replaced disarmament. States are seeking false security in stockpiling and spending hundreds of billions of dollars on doomsday weapons that have no place on our planet."

The famous general, Omar Bradley, sadly anticipated the dangerous state of affairs we are now in as a world community. Nuke Watch New Mexico quotes him on

their website: "Ours is a world of nuclear giants and ethical infants. We know more about war than we know about peace, more about killing than we know about living. We have grasped the mystery of the atom and rejected the Sermon on the Mount." It was in that Sermon that Jesus laid out for us the path to peace, the path to seeing God the path to right relationships. We do well to follow Jesus, to be true peace makers, before it is too late.