Traveling to Italy some years ago, there was one place that my wife, Jane and I wanted to go: the little hill-top village of Assisi. There in the early 13th century a rich, pleasure-seeking young man named Francis underwent an ecstatic spiritual transformation from self-indulgence to simplicity, voluntary poverty, earth-centeredness, and loving peace. Francis wanted to live as he understood Jesus had done long before.

What happened to cause this radical transformation? The answer emerged as we traveled with a Franciscan monk in simple style under “Brother Sun” and “Sister Moon”.

War seemed to be a key to the young man’s conversion. In 1202, Francis joined the military expedition against the neighboring city of Perugia. There he experienced the horror of lives...
destroyed—many of them young men whom he knew personally. Eventually Francis was captured and spent a desolate, but introspective, year in prison.

After returning home, his former hedonistic life-style seemed hollow, wasteful, and un-Christian. Francis astounded his family and friends when he abandoned his luxurious life and wealth and began wandering with beggars.

In the little forsaken country chapel of San Damiano, just outside of Assisi, Francis had a vision of Jesus: “Francis go and repair my house…” At first, he took this message literally and began re-building the crumbling walls by hand.

But later he interpreted this message more broadly. Francis felt called to reform the Church according to Jesus’ teachings of love, peace, sacrifice, and voluntary poverty.

Other young men, drawn to the charisma of Francis, also forsook their families and riches to follow him. Together they lived and walked in nature as Jesus had done, singing joyful praises to God and God’s natural world. They begged for food and did voluntary labor.

Francis began to preach exuberantly outdoors, in meadows and roadways, amid the birds and wildlife. He exhorted the people to penance, to the love of each other, to revel in the gift of nature, and to follow the teachings of Jesus in peace and nonviolence.

But his message went far beyond Assisi. In 1219, Francis went to Egypt during the Fifth Crusade to meet Egypt’s sultan, seeking peace in the midst of that war. Francis met the sultan in his tent for days and discussed the holiness of peace and compassion, tenets in both Islam and Christianity.

After a week of intense dialogue with the sultan, Francis carried their Peace Agreement to the Crusaders, but tragically they refused to accept it. Despite this failure, this was probably the world’s first international, interfaith peace-making mission, transcending what were then the barriers of culture and religion.

Francis risked his life for the sake of peace. In a very violent time not unlike our own, he reached out to the enemy, Sultan Malik al Kamil, who welcomed him with grace. Their common quest for peace made them brothers. This passion for peace, together with his deep love for “Mother Earth” and the poor make Francis an inspiring example for anyone who wants to follow in Jesus’ footsteps today.

Vincent Kavaloski is an author and Professor of Philosophy emeritus at Edgewood College, Madison.

Editor’s Note: October 4 is St. Francis of Assisi Day in the church year, a day on which to remember St. Francis and his example of Christian discipleship.
Going as far back as St. Augustine in the 4th century C.E., Christianity has espoused the concept and practice of waging “just war” in complete opposition to its founder, Jesus, the nonviolent peacemaker, who neither lived by violence nor condoned it in any form.

The legacy of both Church teaching and Christian practice has laid down five principles by which a war can be considered “just” and thus one is which Christians can, in good conscience, participate. A Just War must be:

• waged for the purpose of peace?
• authorized by right authority?
• have a good chance of being successful?
• proportional to the evil being fought against?
• the last possible option for resolving the conflict?

Many scripture scholars and theologians have criticized continued use of the “just war” theory in the nuclear age because of the indiscriminate and total destruction modern nuclear weapons can inflict on the world and because of the dramatic 20th century successes of nonviolent direct action in addressing and resolving conflicts fairly and with far less suffering than war. Examples of such successful nonviolent revolutions include:

• the struggle against British rule in India, led by Mohandas Gandhi
• the civil rights movement in the U.S. under the leadership of Loretta Scott and Martin Luther King, Jr.
• the struggle against apartheid in South Africa, led by Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu
• the overthrow of Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines

Leading in this new direction are theologians, peace practitioners, grassroots activists, bishops, women religious and others, who crafted a document that emerged from a Vatican/Pax Christi International conference this past April 4-5. This document seeks to advance the study, discussion, and understanding of nonviolent direct action as an effective force in the struggle for justice and peace and to make it rather than Just War, the central Christian response to conflict. To advance this cause, Conference leaders have called on Pope Francis to issue an encyclical on nonviolence. They believe an encyclical, the most authoritative form of papal teaching, would move nonviolence from the periphery of Christian thought on war and peace to the center and energize the Roman Catholic Church to help lead the world away from perpetual violence and war. They are hopeful the Pope will heed this call, since as Emmanuel Katongale, an Ugandan theologian teaching at Notre Dame University and a Conference participant says, “Pope Francis is already ahead of us in this call to nonviolence.”

Maureen McDonnell, O.P. is Sinsinawa Dominican and an experienced spiritual director. She served in various capacities at Edgewood College. Maureen lives in Madison.
The U.S. Air Force is considering deploying F-35 jet fighter planes at Truax Airbase in Madison, and numerous groups in the Madison area are opposing this deployment. Opponents point out that F-35s will increase air pollution by releasing carbon monoxide, nitrous oxide, sulfur dioxide, carbon dioxide, lead and large and small particulates into the atmosphere. They will also increase noise pollution. F-35s are expected to generate up to 115 decibels of noise. Noise at this level is harmful to everyone exposed to it, but especially to children. Studies show that repeated, direct blasting of children with aircraft noise degrades reading attention, problem solving, and memory. There are five schools on the periphery of Truax Airforce Base, which will be subjected to this blasting.

Many of the neighborhoods that will be most impacted by the deployment of F-35s at Truax suffer from high levels of poverty, and some have large minority populations. Deploying F-35s at Truax will perpetuate the unjust practice of ignoring the well-being of the most vulnerable and disadvantage among us.

All F-35s can be equipped to carry nuclear weapons. If the F-35s deployed at Truax carry nuclear weapons, Madison and the surrounding area could become ground zero in a nuclear war.

As the most expensive weapon in the U.S. arsenal, production of the F-35 fighter jet will contribute greatly to the expansion of what President Eisenhower called the Military-Industrial Complex. Sixty years ago, he warned us of the dangers of this Complex, but it continues to grow by leaps and bounds. Fifty-four percent of the Federal Government's 2019 discretionary funds are appropriated for defense—an amount equal to the next seven highest military budgets combined. This enormous investment in defense deprives the nation of the resources required to address our nation's and the world's urgent needs in areas such as health care, social security, education, and the environment.

Supporters of the F-35's deployment at Truax argue that it will create jobs, which, of course, is true. But numerous studies have shown that investment in military-related projects is a very expensive way to create jobs. In an article published by the Watson Institute for International Studies at Brown University, Heidi Garret-Peltier shows that one billion dollars of federal funds invested in the military or military-related projects creates 11,200 jobs. That same billion dollars would create 16,600 jobs in the clean energy industry, 17,200 in health care, and 26,700 in education. If job creation is the goal, it would be better to invest in projects that address the needs of civil society rather than in military projects.

Jerry Folk is a retired Lutheran pastor (ELCA) and former Executive Director of the Wisconsin Council of Churches.
Back from the Brink
by Paula Rogge

Back from the Brink is a national grassroots initiative seeking to lead the world away from the dangerous path toward nuclear war by calling on the United States to take the following five steps:

1. Renounce the option of using nuclear weapons first
2. End the sole, unchecked authority of any U.S. president to launch a nuclear attack
3. Take U.S. nuclear weapons off hair-trigger alert
4. Cancel the plan to replace its entire nuclear arsenal with enhanced weapons
5. Actively pursue a verifiable agreement among nuclear-armed states to eliminate their nuclear arsenals

Groups throughout the country are working to promote the Back from the Brink movement by urging local governments and faith communities to pass resolutions that support it. The Madison Back from the Brink group is presenting such a resolution to the Madison Common Council and has gained the support of seven Madison Alders, most of them from East and Central Madison. We need the support of at least four more to make sure the Resolution passes. Anyone who wants to help with this effort can do so by contacting their alderperson and expressing their support.

We particularly need help in the Common Council districts of Alders Harrington-McKinney, Heck, Lemmer, Verveer, Moreland, Reddy, Skidmore, Henak, Martin, Tierney, Furman and Albouras. 35 US cities have already passed Back from the Brink Resolutions. If it passes in Madison, we will be the first city in the Midwest to do so.

Readers in other Wisconsin towns and cities can support this movement by urging their own local Governments and/or faith groups to adopt resolutions of support for the Back from the Brink initiative. If you are interested in doing this and need help contact:

PSR Wisconsin
info@psrwisconsin.org
608-232-9945
608-577-1721

Paula Rogge is a member of the Madison Quaker Meeting, a physician, and a leader in the Madison chapter of Physicians for Social Responsibility.
In August of 2018, after a heat wave and wildfires in Sweden, the ninth-grader, Greta Thunberg, started striking from school in front of the Swedish parliament to get her country to meet the demands of the Paris Climate Accord. She states that she was inspired by the students of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, who organized the March for Our Lives. In less than a year, Ms. Thunberg's efforts gave birth to a worldwide movement calling for global action. This month’s Global Climate Strike, whose organizers are asking us to strike from school, work, and life as usual, is one response to this call. The goal is to wake up the world to the fact that the climate crisis is real, that it threatens our survival, and that our window of opportunity is closing quickly, though it might not yet be too late.

When I heard about this at the beginning of summer, I reached out to all the climate justice groups and leaders that I could think of and began to hold regular meetings. Youth Climate Action Team, the group that had organized a large school walk-out, march and rally at the State Capitol on March 15th, was ready to take the lead. Throughout the summer, youth leaders and adults of all ages from at least 5 other groups met to plan a day of activities.

These activities included a 6:30AM gathering led by Kristin, a yoga instructor and lover of nature and poetry. We began the day by sharing awareness, poetry, and movement as we watched the sun rise over Lake Monona. At 7:30, as the morning rush hour began, we held ups signs announcing where and when the main climate strike activities of the day would take place.

At 10:30 am people from the faith community gathered in four different houses of worship around the Capitol Square to share their concern about climate change. Many related this concern to their faith. At the end of the gatherings, participants marched to the Capitol for the Concert for Climate Change, featuring Eric de los Santos on the Marimba. Marchers carried beautiful signs with a picture of earth and the words “Love the World” and “Love the Children” on one side and, on the other, “United in Love”. 

Area Young People Strike Against Climate Change
by Tim Cordon
Following the concert, everyone paraded to the MG&E building to meet the children who had marched there from their schools. Surrounded by a giant inflatable coal plant, solar panels, a 6-foot Earth ball and over 120 bed sheets painted with the amount of carbon in the atmosphere each month for the last 10 years, amazing young people led group activities and inspired the crowd with their vision and passion for the environment.

By 4:00 pm we were back at the Capitol, where Youth Climate Action Team leaders gave brilliant speeches and led chants. We watched Greta Thunberg address the UN Climate Talks, moved the 6-foot inflatable Earth above the crowd, and had a very large pizza party with pizza from Sal's. Finally, we entered the State Capitol. The day ended with an act of civil disobedience as nine people, including this author, refused to leave the Capitol at closing time. The Capitol police treated us with great kindness but, doing their duty, they arrested us, put us in handcuffs, processed us on site, and then one by one, released us outside the building.

If you would like to know more about our efforts and how you can get involved, please call me at 608-630-3633.

Tim Cordon is Peace and Justice Coordinator of James Reeb Unitarian Universalist Church in Madison.

“Assist your brother whether he be an oppressor or an oppressed. ‘But how shall we do it when he is an oppressor?’ Prophet Muhammad said: ‘Assisting an oppressor is by forbidding and withholding him from oppression.’”

— Thus Spake Prophet Muhammad
From daily mailing of Pace e Bene, Saturday, July 27, 2019

Connect With Us

If you have questions, comments, or concerns you would like to share with IPWG, or information about a peace-related group or event in your area, please contact us at Interfaithpeacewg@gmail.com, by calling (608) 514-2811, or by mail at 1433 Wyldewood Drive, Madison, WI 53704.

Anyone wishing to support our work can sending a donation to:

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