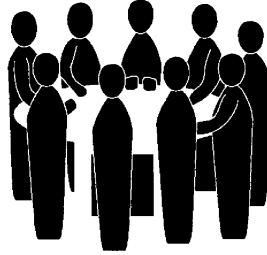


Pax Christi Metro New York (PCMNY) Fall Assembly, October 22nd, 2023



For the first time in three years, PCMNY's Fall Assembly returned to an in-person event. Once again, Dr. Kevin Ahern, welcomed us back to Manhattan College where we have had several informative and inspiring gatherings. In that way, this one was no different.

Following a familiar pattern, the morning began with prayer and then reports from various PCMNY committees. There was also a report from Pax Christi New York State (PCNYS). We learned that PCMNY is holding its own financially, that the Witness Committee has already begun planning the 2023 Good Friday Way of the Cross, that the Development Committee is looking ahead to PCMNY's 40th anniversary in 2023 and soliciting nominations for new Peacemaker Honorees while the Education Committee is doing its share by seeking a 2023 Young Peacebuilder. PCNYS had its own first gathering at the St. Kateri Tekakwitha National Shrine in beautiful Fonda, upstate NY. There the theme was the Doctrine of Discovery, and the keynote speaker was Syracuse Bishop Douglas Lucia. PCNYS also hosted an Interfaith Prayer Service near the UN in observance of the UN International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons. Only a year and a half old, it is pleased to offer a website and Facebook page of its own, has its own logo and banner, and is working on developing a PCNYS Council to include PCMNY, as well as Long Island, Upstate NY, and Western NY. A few people who had attended the Pax Christi USA 50th Anniversary Conference and Celebration added some very positive notes about that festive event. Later in the afternoon, we were able to hear a bit about the good work of the Pax Christi International NGO at the UN, as well.

Lunch was an opportunity for attendees to meet and re-connect after three years of mostly missing each other or seeing each other only on Zoom. We were very pleased to have a few Manhattan College students join us.

The bulk of the afternoon was dedicated to the crucial topic of *Countering Violent Authoritarianism In The U.S. And Abroad*. Maria Stephan, co-author of *Why Civil Resistance Works* and current Co-lead and Chief Organizer of the Horizons Project, addressed the theme with depth and eloquence what would be hard to excel. What follows are notes from Maria's presentation as recorded by Frank Breen, MM, and Rosemarie Pace, Ed.D.

When Maria Stephan was in Europe studying she watched a film about the effectiveness of nonviolent actions and became convinced of this method of proceeding. More recently she has become concerned about the growth of anti-democracy in the U.S. Freedom House has reported that this is now the 16th consecutive year of declining freedom around the world. Using PowerPoint, Maria outlined what is happening, why, and what we can do about it.

Resurgent Global Authoritarianism—Causes:

- Concentration of wealth and power in fewer hands
- Politicization of identities (us vs. them)
- Rapid spread of mis/disinformation
- Loneliness and alienation
- Unresolved conflicts and divisions (e.g. U.S racial hierarchies)
- Authoritarian learning and transnational alliances; i.e. autocratic and authoritarian leaders are talking with one another and sharing information on how to make authoritarian rule more effective

In the U.S. there are 291 GOP candidates who deny the 2020 election and most of these are expected to win. They are using democracy to subvert democracy. This is not totally new. Jim Crow – from the 1890s through the 1930s and beyond – was in fact a U.S. form of Fascism. The Nazi regime looked to the U.S. for ideological rationale and support.

Current anti-democracy actions in the U.S.:

- Anti-protest bills in state legislatures
- Censoring books in schools and libraries (Pen-America is tracking censorship.)
- Viktor Orbán of Hungary being interviewed on Fox News
- Numerous far-right marches
- Use of religion and religious iconography to buttress far-right ideology
- Pushing the so-called “Replacement Theory”
- Christian nationalism

The Authoritarian Playbook (systemic and multi-faceted):

- Divide and conquer
- Reject democracy
- Deny legitimacy of opponents
- Use legal and pseudo-legal practices to gut institutions and to weaken opposition
- Undermine the public’s belief in truth
- Demonize opponents and unfriendly media
- Blame minorities and immigrants
- Pay off supporters and punish defectors (e.g. those Republicans who have lost in primary elections for not supporting Trump’s lies about the 2020 election)
- Encourage or condone violence
- Indicate a willingness to curtail civil liberties (speech, protest, media)
- Make people feel powerless to change things

Hope through Civil Resistance, which is:

- A nonviolent way to wage struggle for ordinary people, i.e. active
- Uses tactics like protest, persuasion, non-cooperation, and nonviolent intervention
- Most prevalent globally, more effective, a major driver of democratization and peace
- Statistically evidenced

Unfortunately, the success rate of nonviolent strategies is declining, though not as far as violent strategies. This decline is probably due to the alliances sharing authoritarian learning. They've learned how to counter nonviolence.

Attributes of Success:

- A large and diverse participation; cf the 3.5% rule. If 3.5% of the American population got directly involved in nonviolent direct action to confront the growing anti-democracy movement in the U.S. it would have a great impact.
- Tactical innovation (needs discussion and discernment)
- Nonviolent discipline, because the violent regime uses violence 90% of the time. They also bring in what are called "agents provocateur," i.e. paid people to engage in violence during a nonviolent demonstration to try to cast blame on the nonviolent people.
- Defections of key pillars of support
- Organized resilience in the face of repression

Examples Today:

- Nonviolent efforts in Ukraine
- The nonviolent protests by Iranian women and their supporters
- Climate Crisis activists, especially the young
- The Black Lives Matter Movement
- Student Strikes

Things to do:

- Get involved locally, e.g. with Pax Christi, the Poor People's Campaign, Showing Up for Racial Injustice, Indivisible
- Sharpen skills, e.g. with Pace e Bene and the U.S. Institute for Peace
- Seek out alternative viewpoints
- Watch "Loretta Ross TED talk." She said: "Don't call people out; Call them in."

Resources:

- Horizons Project @ www.horizonsproject.us
- Waging Nonviolence
- International Center on Nonviolent Conflict
- Global Nonviolent Action Database

Maria's exceptional presentation ended with a generous Q & A period. We are most grateful to the Education Committee, Dr. Ahern, and, especially Maria Stephan, for this

wonderful return to an in-person Assembly at Manhattan College. (And thanks to Judy Coode of the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative for putting us in touch with Maria.)