

Peace

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LOVE

John Dear Highlights a Force More Powerful: ACTIVE NONVIOLENCE

By Jim Hannah, *Independence, Missouri, USA*



"Today I'm your coach for nonviolence."

With these words, renowned peace activist John Dear launched a weekend of nonviolent awareness and education. Nearly 100 people joined in a daylong Saturday workshop at Kansas City's Avila University, and some 200 attended a Sunday-afternoon session of worship and dialogue at Community of Christ's Temple in Independence, Missouri.

The March 7–8 event was sponsored by the Greater Kansas City Justice and Peace Action Team of the Central USA and Midlands USA mission centers and the Buchanan Initiative for Peace and Nonviolence.

For the last four decades Dear has outspokenly advocated for nonviolence as an activist, global speaker, and author of more than 30 books. One title, *The Nonviolent Life*, formed his workshop topic.

Nonviolence today, he stressed, requires three components: total nonviolence to self; total nonviolence to others, all creatures, and Mother Earth; and joining the global grassroots movement for transforming the world into a culture of justice and peace.

It's not enough just to pursue one component, he insisted. Peacebuilders need to engage concurrently in all three to grow in practicing and promoting nonviolence. He emphasized the need to organize, and to act, on behalf of nonviolence, urging:

We are called not just to be good, but to organize goodness.

Unless we are training in nonviolence, we will never be nonviolent.

You cannot say you are for peace and justice unless you are actively opposing systemic violence.

Throughout the weekend, Dear stressed that "you and I live and breathe violence," infected by a "pandemic of violence." This culture of death, he said, "wants us to fear, to feel helpless." But, he insisted,

"nonviolence is much more contagious than a viral infection," and "when we go deep into it, nonviolence has tremendous power for positive change"—much more than violence.

Grassroots civil action, Dear stressed, is the way social change happens. Citing the abolitionist and suffragette movements, he encouraged "people power" and initiatives "from the bottom up" as the way toward a more just and peaceful world. In all these efforts, he said, the mandate is to become a people of total nonviolence. This is daunting, he said, noting that "for the last 40 years, every day I've been challenged to be violent." His nonviolent resistance has resulted in 88 arrests and a year of imprisonment.

During his Sunday presentation on "The Nonviolent Path as Illuminated by Jesus," Dear stressed that in our violent time "we have to create the greatest movement of nonviolence ever seen in church history." Repeating Mahatma Gandhi's assertion that "nonviolence is the kingdom of God," Dear urged, "keep your eyes, heart, and soul on the God who is totally nonviolent. You are apostles of nonviolence. Now get out there!"

His promptings were in harmony with a resolution on nonviolence passed by delegates to the 2019 World Conference, urging Community of Christ to consider the contribution nonviolence might make to "peace on and for the Earth."

President Steve Veazey, who brought the opening welcome and remarks, and Apostle Janné Grover, who brought the closing challenge, reflected many of Dear's concerns. These were underscored through worship elements of scripture, prayer, and music. The Center Place Singers, directed by Paulette Votava-Resch; vocalists Amy Jeffers and Anna Rider Gard; and accompanists Pam Robison and Phyllis Gregg all brought ministry.

Dear's opening challenge was reiterated in Apostle Grover's closing challenge—to grow in the nonviolent life through inner work, granting yourself mercy and amnesty as a beloved child of God. The call: "To give the God of peace a peaceful place to live," in your heart and in your life."

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