

The Catholic Peacebuilding Network

The Catholic Peacebuilding Network (CPN) is a voluntary network of practitioners and academics, clergy and laity, which seeks to enhance the study and practice of Catholic peacebuilding in areas torn by conflict. It began in 2004 through a cooperative effort by Catholic Relief Services and the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame. Initially it was made up of seven affiliated partners, but that number has grown to 22, with the network served by a secretariat at the Kroc Institute. Affiliates include bishops' conferences, academic institutions, development agencies, and Catholic associations.

CPN believes that the Catholic Church, through its theological tradition, its institutions, and the Catholic faithful, offers distinctive assets that contribute to the peacebuilding efforts of the wider community. From Sierra Leone and South Sudan to Colombia and the Congo, Catholic actors have been longstanding and leading advocates for peace. This combination of theological resources and historical presence allow the Catholic Church to be a powerful force for peace, reconciliation, justice, and development.

Deepening engagement and understanding “best practices”

Through its international convenings, CPN has sought to deepen engagement among Catholic leaders, scholars, and peacebuilding specialists, and improve our understanding of “best practices.” Since 2004, CPN has sponsored ten major convenings, bringing together peacebuilders from some thirty countries, mostly those suffering from violence. These convenings have been held in Mindanao in the southern Philippines, Burundi, Colombia, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the Vatican.

Accompaniment and capacity-building

In part based on a need identified through these convenings, a primary focus has been to accompany the Church, particularly in Colombia, Mindanao, and the Great Lakes region of Africa, as it seeks to strengthen its peacebuilding capacity. CPN does this through trainings, strategic advising, and sharing of best practices. An example of this accompaniment was CPN's collaboration with the six national and two regional episcopal conferences in the Great Lakes Region of Africa to develop a major regional plan for peacebuilding. The plan was developed by the principals of the episcopal conferences in Burundi in 2010 and subsequently approved by each of those conferences.

Since then, CPN has given special attention to one element of the strategic plan: strengthening peace studies from a Catholic perspective at Catholic universities in the region. In 2012, CPN led a two-day program on peace studies and Catholic Social Teaching for the Association of Catholic Universities/ Institutes of Africa and Madagascar (ACUIAM).

Subsequently, ACUIAM approved a major proposal, submitted by an association committee with support from Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and CPN, on strengthening and establishing peace studies programs at African universities. In follow up to that proposal, CPN will join ACUIAM, Hekima College, the Catholic University of Eastern Africa, and a half-dozen other universities and development agencies in North America and Europe to co-sponsor an institute

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on peace studies and Catholic Social Teaching for faculty from African universities. This institute will take place from November 7-9, 2017 at Hekima College in Nairobi, Kenya.

A theology of peace

In addition to accompaniment and capacity building, CPN has taken up the challenge of further developing a conceptually coherent, theologically accurate, spiritually enlivening, and practically effective approach to the theology, ethics and practice of peacebuilding. It has done so through a dialogic engagement of Catholic scholarship with Church praxis. One concrete result of such efforts is *Peacebuilding: Catholic Theology, Ethics, and Practice*, edited by Robert J. Schreiter, R. Scott Appleby, and Gerard F. Powers (Orbis, 2010). This book considers lessons learned from specific cases of Catholic peacebuilding and how this peacebuilding experience can inform and be enriched by the peacebuilding dimensions of various aspects of the Catholic theological tradition, such as social teachings, systematic theology, sacraments, and spirituality.

Another way in which CPN supports scholarship on the theology, ethics, and praxis of peacebuilding is by partnering with CRS on a fellowship program for peacebuilding specialists from CRS and other Catholic institutions hosted by Notre Dame's Kroc Institute. John Ashworth's *The Voice of the Voiceless: the Role of the Church in the Sudanese Civil War* (Paulines Africa, 2014) is one fruit of those fellowships. This book details the role the Church played in peacebuilding in Sudan between 1983 and 2005.

CPN is currently working on three research projects:

- The variety of charisms associated with the Christian vocation of peacebuilding;
- Natural resource extraction through the lens of a theology and ethics of peacebuilding.
- The ethical and practical challenges of nuclear disarmament (part of a broader Project on Revitalizing Catholic Engagement on Nuclear Disarmament that seeks to empower a new group of Catholic bishops, ethicists, and young professionals to contribute to the current ethical and policy debate on nuclear disarmament, particularly in the United States.)

Too often, religion is implicated in the violence and conflict that remain distressingly pervasive problems in many areas of the world. CPN seeks to address that negative role of religion while also telling a different story of the mostly unheralded and unanalyzed positive peacebuilding role of one religious body, the Catholic Church. In the coming years, CPN will continue to adapt to address different facets of that effort, responding to local areas of need and working with the capacity and resources afforded by the Catholic Church. Learn more about CPN and its initiatives and partners at CPN.nd.edu.