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The Catholic Peacebuilding Network: Lessons Learned

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As one of the world's largest transnational institutions, the Catholic Church is deeply engaged in a wide variety of peacebuilding activities at all levels through many different types of institutions and organizations. This essay examines one of these entities, the Catholic Peacebuilding Network (CPN), a network of university institutes, episcopal conferences, development agencies, and independent peace organizations. It considers CPN's mission, activities, contributions to the Catholic community's wider work for peace, and the challenges it faces as it seeks to accompany the Catholic community in areas of conflict. By looking at this one actor, this essay offers insights into Catholic peacebuilding more generally, some of which might be relevant for other religious and secular peacebuilders.

As one of the world's largest transnational institutions, the Catholic Church is deeply engaged in a wide variety of peacebuilding activities at all levels. It is not a single transnational institution but a community of institutions and movements – some, such as episcopal conferences, dioceses, and parishes, are controlled by the hierarchy; others, such as many Catholic universities, peace organizations, and lay movements, operate independently. Together, these diverse institutions and organizations, and the world's billion plus Catholic population, make up the Catholic community.

Since the Catholic Church is both a religious body and a state, and since it includes such a wide variety of institutions and movements, it is valid, to a certain extent, to use standard metrics applied to non-governmental organizations (NGOs), transnational social movements, or political actors to analyze its work for peace. But that cannot be the starting point. Many Catholic entities work on peace, but, unlike secular peacebuilding NGOs like Search for Common Ground, their essential mission and identity are not defined only or primarily in terms of its peacebuilding activities. The Catholic Church consists of more than a billion people but it is not a membership organization like the Alliance for Peacebuilding. It has a rich intellectual tradition, but it is not a think tank like the United States Institute of Peace. Finally, and most importantly, its peacebuilding often involves distinctively religious and spiritual resources that are not part of a secular NGO's peacebuilding portfolio and do not fit well with social science categories.

This essay examines one of the many Catholic entities engaged in peacebuilding, the Catholic Peacebuilding Network (CPN). Founded in 2004, [CPN consists](#) of two dozen university institutes, bishops' conferences, development agencies, and independent peace organizations that collaborate to enhance the study and practice of Catholic peacebuilding.¹ Its secretariat is at the University of Notre Dame's Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies. This essay will consider CPN's mission, activities, contributions to the Catholic community's wider work for peace, and the challenges it faces as a network of institutions. By looking at this one actor, this essay will offer insights into Catholic peacebuilding more generally, some of which might be relevant for other religious and secular peacebuilders.

I. Peacebuilding as vocation

Whether a religious institution or secular NGO, success depends on having a clear mission. While most secular entities do not use the term, in religious (and peace studies) parlance, another word for mission is vocation. Vocation is about a sense of being called to respond to a need. In Catholic teaching, peacebuilding is integral to the life to which Christians are called and, therefore, central to the mission of the church. In many respects, Catholic approaches to peacebuilding are much like secular approaches. They include the fundamentals of understanding the dynamics of conflict, training in conflict transformation skills, educating to change attitudes, and developing strategies of social change. But a sense of vocation can give peacebuilding a depth and texture that is distinct from many secular approaches. As Colombia implements the 2016 peace accord, a parish in Colombia that includes right-wing paramilitaries, leftist guerrillas, soldiers and victims of all three will go beyond secular approaches and ground its efforts in the sacrament of reconciliation, and an understanding of a united and reconciled church as the Body of Christ. What motivates and sustains Catholic peacebuilders, at their best, is the conviction that peacebuilding is a way of life that is central to their Catholic Christian identity. When that conviction is taken seriously, the Church's teachings and practices, from sacraments and systematic theology to human rights and development, are enriched and gain new meaning.

In many conflicts, Catholic priests or bishops are involved in mediating between armed actors, but they do not see themselves as mediators or even peacebuilders. Rather, they see mediation as pastoral work: responding to the needs of their people, whether they are victims of war, perpetrators of violence, or both (Lederach, 2010, pp. 52-53; Ashworth, et al., pp. 2014, pp. 241). Similarly, lay Catholics involved in facilitating peace processes might see their work, not as professional mediators, but as a way to fulfill their principal responsibility for transforming the social order in light of the Gospel. CPN's vocation, in the broadest sense, is to respond to the world's need for peace and, more specifically, to help the church fulfill its Christian mission of peacebuilding by finding ways in which diverse Catholic peacebuilders can work together to better fulfill their distinctive understandings of their particular vocations.

Responding to a need

CPN was the brainchild of Scott Appleby, then director of Notre Dame's Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies; Fr. Bill Headley, vice president at Catholic Relief Services (CRS); and Tom Bamat, head of research for Maryknoll, a religious order. They saw a need for a more nuanced and complete understanding of the role of religion in peacebuilding at a time when much attention was being given to the negative role of religion in religious-ethnic-nationalist conflicts and global terrorist networks. They sought to broaden the focus to include an understanding of the positive role of religion in promoting peace, justice, and reconciliation. The challenge, they understood, was not just to understand the role of religion, in general, but to develop a thick, fine-grained understanding of the peacebuilding efforts of particular faith communities, on their own terms and in all their multi-faceted dimensions. The peacebuilding of the world's largest religious institution seemed a good place to start.

In addition to that general need, CPN identified several more specific needs of the Catholic community. First, the Catholic Church has a rich tradition of reflection on war and peace issues, but much of the scholarly work focused on the ethics of the use of force. The Catholic vision of a

just peace had been articulated in Pope John XXII's 1963 encyclical, *Pacem in terris*, and many church statements and theological treatises, but a problem Joseph Gremillion identified in the mid-1970s remained. Gremillion argued that *Pacem in terris* had "launched worldwide the new Catholic peace movement," but the movement was "woefully simplified" because, among other things, it "lacked a grasp of society's complexity, the time required for non-violent change, and the danger inherent in revolutionary upheaval" (Gremillion, 1976, p. 79). Twenty-five years later, that peace movement had matured and professionalized – through the work of groups like Sant'Egidio, CRS, and Pax Christi International, as well as various programs of episcopal conferences and dioceses. CPN saw a need to build on this work and reflect much more systematically on a theology and ethic of peacebuilding.

If CPN was to contribute to a theology and ethics of peacebuilding, it had to overcome the neuralgic challenge of connecting theory and practice. While theologians and ethicists wrote about peace from a mostly theoretical viewpoint, relatively little had been done to map and analyze lived Catholic peacebuilding: the mostly unknown and unheralded work of Catholic artisans of peace around the world. What was needed was a practical theology of peacebuilding: an understanding of Catholic peacebuilding as a living tradition, in which church teaching is expressed through and is enriched by the work of countless Catholic institutions and individuals (Schreiter, 2010, p. 366).

A third need that CPN sought to address was institutional: how to enhance the enormous peacebuilding potential of the church, one of the world's largest and most complex transnational institutions. The Catholic peacebuilding infrastructure includes the Holy See's foreign service and Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development; staffed peace and justice offices at over 100 regional and national bishops' conferences, and thousands of dioceses and many parishes; peace and justice programs of the 164 national Catholic charitable agencies, with Catholic Relief Services being the largest and most extensive; a multiplicity of lay movements, such as Focolare, and independent organizations, such as the Sant'Egidio Community and Pax Christi International, which have affiliates in dozens of countries; and more than 1300 Catholic universities that teach, research, and provide expertise to the Church and the wider public on matters of peace and justice.

Unlike many other institutions with global reach, the Catholic Church is an indigenous institution deeply rooted in local communities. John Paul Lederach (2010, p. 50) has observed that in war-torn areas like South Sudan, Uganda, Congo, the southern Philippines, and Colombia, the church's "ubiquitous presence" gives it a "unique if not unprecedented presence in the landscape of the conflict." It has relationships with every level and nearly every area of conflict, creating a depth and breadth of access that few religious or secular institutions enjoy, and aligns, in ways few actors do, with the multilevel and multifaceted demands of peacebuilding (pp. 50-51).

Through this extensive institutional infrastructure, the Church has an enormous capacity for peacebuilding. It is the most vertically-integrated religious institution, with a hierarchical structure with clearly-defined leaders and institutions at all levels, and clear lines of teaching and organizational authority (though it is quite decentralized in its operations). Its vertical integration is complemented by a capacity for horizontal integration, the ecclesial bonds of solidarity that unite the Catholic community across geographical, cultural, national, and economic divides.

But having capacity for vertical and horizontal integration is not the same as utilizing it effectively for peacebuilding. Like large institutions of all kinds, the Catholic Church suffers from siloing: too much of the peacebuilding work is done by relatively few scholars, church leaders, and activists; among peacebuilders, there is relatively limited engagement across issues; and, oftentimes, there is relatively little vertical and horizontal cross-fertilization across levels and geographical divides. CPN saw a need to convene the church's diverse institutional actors in ways that could help overcome this siloing.

CPN's specific mission

Addressing these needs is a whole-of-church project. Before launching CPN, the founders spent two years holding a series of consultations with Catholic organizations involved in peacebuilding to confirm the need for a network and to identify how a network might fit into the larger Catholic peacebuilding puzzle. Put another way, the network, like any effective NGO, needed a clear sense of its comparative advantage so that it would complement, not duplicate or compete with, existing efforts. One key to CPN's success is that it has been clear about what it is and is not.

First, since most of the seven institutions that founded CPN were based in the United States, CPN considered itself a U.S.-centered network that would accompany the church in key areas of conflict outside the United States. As interest in CPN's work has grown, it has become less U.S.-centric, adding as affiliated institutions episcopal conferences in Colombia, Burundi, the Philippines, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as the Vatican agency, Caritas Internationalis, and the International Federation of Catholic Universities.

Second, CPN decided it would not advocate on policy issues so as to avoid duplicating the work of its member institutions and many other Catholic organizations.

Third, it would not become a stand-alone NGO that might compete with existing institutions, nor would it be just a program of Notre Dame's Kroc Institute. Instead, its distinctiveness would lie in the fact that it was a loose network with a lean organizational structure that would evolve as needed to undertake initiatives its affiliates could not do on their own, and that would facilitate cross-fertilization and collaboration among a diverse set of actors that have complementary roles in the complex task of peacebuilding.

Finally, CPN decided it would be a network of institutions, not individuals. The Catholic peace tradition is a living tradition because it shapes the minds, hearts and souls of people. But the way the Church reaches people and mobilizes them to act in effective, sustained ways that can engage the multiple factors, actors, and levels of conflict is through its remarkable institutional presence as a global institution that is deeply rooted in the local.

With these parameters in mind, CPN defined its mission as: (1) deepening engagement among scholars and practitioners, (2) improving understanding of good practices in peacebuilding, (3) further developing a theology and ethics of peace, and (4) accompanying the church's peacebuilding work in a select number of conflict areas.

II. CPN's structure and work

The Kroc Institute serves as CPN's secretariat, which currently consists of a half-time faculty coordinator, a full-time assistant director, a part-time adjunct professor, and a part-time staff person. With the exception of a grant-funded part-time staff person, the Kroc Institute has paid for staffing the secretariat and a modest program budget. Affiliated institutions do not pay annual dues, but instead contribute to specific initiatives on a case-by-case basis based on whether it aligns with their own institutional priorities. While the Kroc Institute has been the driving force behind CPN through its sustained support of the secretariat, affiliated institutions contribute by hosting, staffing and co-sponsoring conferences or major initiatives, and paying travel expenses for their specialists to attend an event or do a workshop. CPN has received significant funding from the Nuclear Threat Initiative for its Project on Revitalizing Catholic Engagement on Nuclear Disarmament, and from Foundations and Donors Interested in Catholic Activities (FADICA) for a new fellowship program with the Holy See's Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, and smaller grants for specific initiatives. Overall, however, foundation funding for Catholic peacebuilding has been scarce.

CPN is governed by a Steering Committee of representatives of affiliated institutions. The committee meets virtually twice per year and in-person every several years, usually in connection with a CPN event. In keeping with the intentionally organic nature of the network, institutions affiliate with CPN based on some experience of fruitful collaboration on peacebuilding and a mutual decision that affiliation would enhance further collaboration.

CPN's activities fall into two broad categories: accompanying the church in three key areas and developing scholarly and educational resources on several thematic issues.

Accompaniment

In order to ensure a sustained and focused effort over many years, CPN has limited its accompaniment efforts to three areas suffering from intractable conflicts where the Catholic Church plays a prominent role in peacebuilding but which receive relatively little attention: Colombia, the Great Lakes Region of Africa, and Mindanao, in the southern Philippines. It has considered but decided against other areas, such as the Middle East, where a bevy of Catholic organizations are already deeply involved and it has not been obvious how CPN could add value to their work.

What do local churches ask of CPN? Training is an ongoing need, since many bishops, priests, women religious, and lay people do not have a strong formation in Catholic social teaching, and even fewer understand principles of peacebuilding. Those who are already well-trained and might be leading peacebuilders in their country want to engage with peacebuilders in other countries or scholars who do comparative work to share lessons learned about common challenges and good practices. CPN has also been invited to facilitate pastoral or strategic planning on peacebuilding. In each of these forms of accompaniment, CPN can draw from a diverse array of Catholic institutions and individuals to assist with training, sharing of good practices, pastoral planning, and other needs of the local church. CPN gives priority to initiatives that have the potential for long-term institutional change over one-off trainings and workshops.

Three examples of accompaniment give a sense of CPN's contribution. [CPN's engagement in Mindanao](#) has been especially comprehensive, largely due to the priority that CRS in Mindanao has given Catholic peacebuilding. Since 2005, CPN and CRS have co-sponsored three multi-day conferences in Mindanao, one on Catholic peacebuilding, one on interreligious peacebuilding, and one on peace education for teachers, most from madrassas (Islamic schools).. They also collaborated on a four-year saturation strategy of workshops that reached virtually all of the relevant Catholic actors in Mindanao and included two workshops and pastoral planning sessions for bishops from Mindanao and one for bishops from throughout the Philippines. CRS and CPN have arranged fellowships at the Kroc Institute for one bishop and three senior CRS staff. And CRS and CPN are currently co-sponsoring a series of virtual workshops for leaders of the Christians for Peace Movement, which was formed to support implementation of the peace agreement between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front.

[In Colombia](#), CPN and the bishops' conference have co-sponsored a major international conference on Catholic peacebuilding, with a second planned for 2022. CPN's strategic planning session for Colombian bishops involved in the peace process led to the creation of the bishops' peacebuilding secretariat, which enhanced its ability to engage the peace process in a more coordinated manner. CPN has enhanced the understanding of the church's work by sponsoring a half-dozen events in the United States. CPN participated in the launch of the *Red católica nacional de reconciliación* (National Catholic Network of Reconciliation) (2014), which was modeled on CPN, as well as the Colombian bishops' *Congreso de la Reconciliación* (National Congress on Reconciliation) (2011, 2013, 2017). CPN is working with Caritas Colombia on aspects of a major project to help establish local peace councils in the former FARC-held territories. Finally, the Kroc Institute is the official body tasked with monitoring implementation of the 2016 peace accord. In part due to CPN's engagement with the church, the Kroc Institute's implementation office is hosted by the bishops' conference.

A third example of accompaniment is [in the Great Lakes Region of Africa](#). In 2006, CPN joined the papal nuncio, the Burundi episcopal conference, CRS and others in co-sponsoring a major international conference on Catholic peacebuilding in Burundi. That conference led to a three-year strategic planning process to enhance the church's ability to address the interconnected conflicts in the region in a more coordinated fashion. That process culminated in a convening of more than one hundred church leaders from six national and two regional episcopal conferences in 2010 in Burundi. At the meeting, the bishops revised and approved a pastoral plan for regional peacebuilding. The plan was then approved over the next two years by each of the national and regional conferences.

One direct result of the pastoral plan was that ACEAC (episcopal conference for the DRC, Burundi, and Rwanda) established a new [Higher Institute for Peace and Reconciliation in Bukavu](#), in conflict-prone eastern DRC. Another was that, with CPN and CRS support and advice, the Association of Catholic Universities and Higher Institutes of Africa and Madagascar began to consider ways to expand peace studies programs and incorporate peace studies across the curriculum. In 2017, [Uganda Martyrs University hosted a convening](#) sponsored by CPN, ACUHIAM, and 9 other institutions for faculty from 18 universities in 16 countries. This convening, the first of its kind, has led to greater collaboration among universities on peace studies, with CPN asked to facilitate the process.

Thematic issues

CPN's accompaniment work has led it to focus on a number of issues common to each of these areas: the theology and ethics of peacebuilding, transitional justice and reconciliation, and mining.

Theology and ethics of peacebuilding. One of CPN's priorities has been, in Appleby's (2003, p. 12) words, "to contribute to the development of a conceptually coherent, theologically accurate, spiritually enlivening and practically effective approach to Catholic peacebuilding that can begin to match the sophistication of Catholic thinking on the ethics of war and peace." That involves serving as a clearinghouse for information about the church's peacebuilding around the world and scholarly work on the subject through CPN's monthly [e-newsletter](#), [a substantive website](#), and [social media](#). It also has involved numerous workshops around the world and an on-line university-level course on Catholic peacebuilding for CRS' Faculty Learning Commons.

Perhaps most important, it involves sponsoring serious scholarship on Catholic peacebuilding. With the Kroc Institute and the Bernardin Center for Theology and Ministry at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago taking the lead, CPN undertook an intensive four-year project, whose design reflected the thick engagement among scholars, church leaders, and peacebuilding specialists that is a hallmark of CPN's approach. The project's working group met four times for one- or two-day colloquia to design the project and discuss drafts of papers. In addition, members of the group engaged with peacebuilding practitioners by participating in CPN's week-long international conferences in the [Philippines](#) (2005), [Burundi](#) (2006), and [Colombia](#) (2007), and the United States (2004, 2008). These events provided an unusual opportunity for the authors to gain first-hand, in-depth exposure to Catholic peacebuilding in three areas of conflict, as well as to discuss good practices with hundreds of scholars, church leaders, and peacebuilding specialists from some thirty countries. The resulting book, *Peacebuilding: Catholic Theology, Ethics, and Praxis* (2010), has become an influential reference point on the topic.

Contributing to the development of practice-informed and practice-relevant scholarship on Catholic peacebuilding requires combining such broad, comprehensive approaches to the topic with in-depth consideration of specific cases (e.g., Ashworth, et al., 2014) and topics, especially topics not addressed fully by Catholic social teaching and scholarship (e.g., Montevecchio & Powers, forthcoming).

Transitional justice and reconciliation became a priority because it was a major concern of the church in the areas where CPN was engaged and many of those active in CPN were leaders in the field. Much of CPN's accompaniment work has been on this issue. It has included sending specialists to address the parliament in South Sudan, assisting in the development of [a pastoral plan on reconciliation](#) for the bishops of Uganda, doing workshops for diocesan social action staff in the DRC and bishops in Burundi, and joining with CRS and Caritas Internationalis in publishing a pastoral planning tool, "[Catholic Approaches to Transitional Justice and Reconciliation Processes: Guidelines for Reflection and Planning](#)" (2018).

Mining is another issue common to the areas in which CPN is engaged. Catholic actors have taken a wide variety of approaches to the issue without a solid foundation in Catholic teaching or scholarship. In order to help fill this gap in theology and ethics, CPN has convened three colloquia

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for scholars and practitioners to explore the state of the question, hosted an interest group on mining and peace under the auspices of the Catholic Theological Society of America, and held [a colloquium for authors of a book](#), *Catholic Peacebuilding and Extractives: Integral Peace, Development, and Ecology* (2022). CPN also collaborated with Caritas Colombia on [an extensive database](#) on Catholic engagement on extractives. In addition to these efforts to improve understanding of the issue, CPN has served on the conflict resources and peacebuilding working group of Caritas Internationalis, and has participated in several of [the Holy See's meetings with mining executives and Catholic actors](#). CPN will make this work more accessible by publishing a pastoral planning tool that will offer guidance on promising practices for Church peacebuilders engaging with extractives.

Nuclear disarmament is a topic that does not arise from CPN's accompaniment work but reflects its origins as a U.S.-centric network. In 2014, CPN launched the [Project on Revitalizing Catholic Engagement on Nuclear Disarmament](#). The project is led by the Kroc Institute in collaboration with the U.S. bishops' Office of International Justice and Peace, Georgetown's Berkley Center, The Catholic University of America's Institute for Policy Research, and the International Federation of Catholic Universities, with the support of the Nuclear Threat Initiative.

The project sought to help fill a gap in Catholic engagement on nuclear issues. In the 1980s, the Catholic Church in the United States, along with many other religious leaders around the world, played a major role in bringing morality into the nuclear policy debate. In their pastoral letter of 1983, *The Challenge of Peace*, the U.S. bishops were far ahead of the policy debate in concluding that nuclear deterrence is ethically permissible only as a step toward progressive disarmament. Three decades later, nuclear disarmament had gone mainstream. The moral imperative for disarmament identified by the bishops, other religious leaders, and anti-nuclear activists was endorsed as a policy goal by the U.S. and Russian governments and prominent military and political figures, notably George Shultz, Henry Kissinger, William Perry, and Sam Nunn. Global Zero and other campaigns gained new momentum, and the process that led to the nuclear ban treaty was underway. Meanwhile, Pope Francis had made nuclear disarmament a priority.

In considering these and other developments, CPN concluded that the ethical debate was behind the policy debate on nuclear disarmament. Although the Holy See and the U.S., Japanese, and a few European bishops' conferences regularly addressed nuclear policy issues, relatively few bishops were engaged. And only a few Catholic scholars had continued to address the evolving ethical issues since the 1980s, especially new ethical challenges posed by prospects of moving toward nuclear disarmament.

The project seeks to revitalize Catholic engagement on nuclear disarmament by empowering a new generation of Catholics – Church leaders, scholars, and students – to contribute to wider efforts to reduce and ultimately eliminate nuclear weapons. While focused primarily on the United States, this project is also working closely with the Holy See, and scholars and episcopal conferences in Europe, Japan, and elsewhere.

The project has included major convenings of U.S. bishops, scholars, and policymakers [at Stanford](#) (2014) and of U.S. and European bishops, scholars, and policymakers [at the House of Lords in London](#) (2016). It has also involved collaborating with the Holy See on a workshop of the

Pontifical Academy of Sciences (2014), a major international conference [at the Vatican](#), which included the pope and eleven Nobel Peace Prize Laureates (2017), and major virtual events in [2020](#) and [2021](#). These have been complemented by a series of other public events and conferences, including a major convening [at Georgetown's Berkley Center](#) (2020), [a joint commemoration](#) by the Japanese and U.S. bishops for the 75th anniversary of the atomic bombings (2020), and [a Catholic-Evangelical dialogue](#) on renewing the New START Treaty (2020).

In order to develop [a new generation of Catholics](#) engaged on the nuclear issue, this project has sponsored institutes for students (2019, 2021, 2022), monthly webinars for students and faculty, student internships, and student-led podcasts.

These activities have led to numerous publications, including a book on the proceedings of the 2017 Vatican conference (Christiansen & Sargent, 2021), *Beyond Deterrence* (Christiansen, forthcoming), and *God and the Bomb* (Cusimano Love, forthcoming).

III. The contributions and challenges of the network

What are some lessons learned from CPN's accompaniment of Catholic peacebuilding in Colombia, the Great Lakes Region, and Mindanao, and its efforts to contribute to further development of a Catholic theology, ethics, and praxis of peacebuilding, reconciliation, mining, and nuclear disarmament? Four lessons stand out: (1) cultivating the vocation of peacebuilding should be the starting point; (2) integration of issues and diverse actors at different levels and across borders is crucial; (3) solidarity requires an accompaniment model that can overcome disparities in resources and differences in national identity, culture, language, and ideology; and (4) broadening the Catholic peace constituency requires being more inclusive of the laity, especially women, and engaging with other religious and secular actors while being clear about what is distinctive about Catholic peacebuilding.

The centrality of vocation

The first and greatest challenge for CPN has been around the vocation of peacebuilding. Despite the fact that the church teaches that peacebuilding is integral to its mission, peace is often not a priority for many Catholics and Catholic institutions. That is part of a larger problem that Catholic social teaching, in general, is the church's "best kept secret" (Henriot, et al., 1992). But even when institutions and individuals are deeply committed to Catholic social teaching, abortion, immigration, environmental justice, health care, poverty, and other social concerns often take priority. Focusing on specific issues is required for good stewardship and effectiveness. But CPN's experience has confirmed the need for more institutions to prioritize peacebuilding. Even on nuclear weapons and reconciliation (issues where the Catholic contribution is well recognized) and even in places like Colombia and the DRC (two of the best examples of Catholic peacebuilding), only a relatively small segment of the Catholic community is engaged and, too often, many Catholics do not support the church's peacebuilding efforts.

As CPN has encouraged more Catholics and Catholic institutions to prioritize peacebuilding, it has faced two challenges. First, Catholic peacebuilders must ensure that they do not inadvertently instrumentalize faith in the name of peacebuilding. Yes, the Catholic community has a tremendous capacity for peacebuilding, but peacebuilding efforts are most helpful when they are, and are seen

to be, an authentic means to fulfill the Catholic community's Christian mission, not simply a means to pursue particular peacebuilding ends. In a number of cases, church leaders were invited to facilitate official peace processes but declined because it would inappropriately politicize and divide the church.

The second and related challenge is to continually return to the challenge of formation in the faith, the challenge of reminding Catholic faithful – clergy, religious, and laity – and Catholic institutions that peacebuilding is not an optional commitment but is integral to their Christian vocation and mission. Rooting peacebuilding in mission has practical consequences. Among other things, it requires dedicating staff and resources to peacebuilding initiatives. A major impediment to effective Catholic peacebuilding in many countries is that it is ad hoc or limited because the local church does not consider it a mission priority, or, in countries with few resources, Catholic donors or aid agencies do not consider peacebuilding to be a priority. In some cases, such as Sant'Egidio's current efforts to facilitate the South Sudan peace process, more priority needs to be given to stand-alone peacebuilding programs. But the bigger challenge is to complement these stand-alone initiatives with efforts to make peacebuilding a more integral part of the ordinary life of the church, from religious education and the sacraments to service and advocacy programs. That integration is easier said than done.

The many facets of integration

Since conflicts are complex and require complex responses, the Church can best play an effective role when all its peacebuilding resources are put to work in an integrated way. This "saturation model" or strategic peacebuilding approach requires taking the time to do a careful audit of the church's resources – its beliefs and teachings; how they are lived out through its institutions and people power – to see how they serve its peacebuilding mission (Appleby, 2000, 2003). Three types of integration are necessary: substantive or inter-disciplinary integration; integration of theory and practice; and integration among different actors at different levels.

Substantive integration. While a successful peacebuilding network entails effective processes and challenges, the glue that holds a network together is a common vision and a certain degree of consensus on substantive issues. According to Robert Ricigliano (2003, pp. 449-452), successful Networks of Effective Action take an integrated approach based on "partnerships of necessity, not marriages of convenience." Partnerships of necessity involve shared purpose and principles of conduct. Diverse actors with diverse theories of action need to recognize the need for collaboration as integral to ensuring that their particular approaches are part of a broader agenda of building sustainable peace that includes social, structural, and political sectors. That, in turn, requires taking an iterative approach in which "a group of diverse actors ... use their individual expertise in political, social, and/or structural peacebuilding in a mutually reinforcing way" (p. 453).

CPN works because its diverse institutions have the kind of shared purpose Ricigliano says is essential: a common Catholic faith and commitment to Catholic teaching on peace. That teaching emphasizes the kind of integration across issues that is required to build peace amidst complex conflicts. CPN's book on peacebuilding and its forthcoming book on mining brought together a host of different disciplines in an effort to connect integral peace, integral human development, and integral ecology, concepts in Catholic teaching that are often addressed separately. The results

have been mixed, as is typical of inter-or multi-disciplinary projects. It is not easy to marry the legitimate need for specialization and the need for integration across disciplines.

Due to the breadth of their missions, CPN's affiliated institutions that are engaged in the praxis of peacebuilding are inescapably multi-disciplinary. Episcopal conferences sponsor a wide range of service programs through their charitable agencies while also advocating on a wide range of human rights, development, environmental, and peace issues. CRS has important stand-alone peacebuilding initiatives, such as its support for civil society processes that complemented formal peace process in South Sudan. But its core programs are emergency response, health care, and agricultural development. Over the past decade, CRS has deemphasized stand-alone peacebuilding in favour of efforts to integrate peacebuilding into its core programs through conflict-sensitive humanitarian aid and development (e.g., CRS, 2017). Similarly, many Catholic universities with whom CPN has worked are not prioritizing stand-alone peace studies programs, but, instead, are considering how their curricula can be structured so that peacebuilding is a theme across-the-curriculum, not just one (often marginal) area of study.

Integrating peacebuilding into other programs faces challenges similar to those involved in inter-disciplinary scholarly work. The resources, expertise, and time needed to be effective in one area leave little room to try to integrate with other areas. As Ricigliano notes, for example, development specialists can see conflict-sensitive approaches as a distraction and peacebuilding programs are often judged in terms of "deliverables" on discreet projects and short timelines, which force an unhelpful division of labor. Success is not defined according to how well a peacebuilding initiative is integrated into a larger effort to promote peace (Rutigliano, 2003, p. 454). Despite these challenges, CPN has learned that integration across disciplines has to be a priority.

A related challenge is *integrating theory and practice*. CPN's principal contribution has been to connect scholars with Church leaders and peacebuilding specialists working in the midst of some of the world's most violent and intractable conflicts. It has done so through a series of international conferences in Mindanao, Burundi, Colombia, the Vatican, and the United States, through workshops, and through research projects. Church leaders and other peacebuilders benefit from the theoretical and comparative perspective that scholars bring. Scholars value the opportunity to engage church leaders and other peacebuilders in conflict zones because it contributes to their scholarship and teaching. The on-the-ground engagement can give them new insights into the nature of conflict, the complexities of applying peacebuilding theory, and the peacebuilding role of religious institutions and other civil society actors.

CPN's other contribution has been to facilitate *integration among different actors at different levels and from different countries* (i.e., vertical and horizontal integration). CPN has done this mainly through numerous international convenings and other mechanism to share learnings and good practices among church leaders, peacebuilding specialists, and scholars from different countries who might have little opportunity to be in contact with each other. CPN has addressed this third challenge by adopting an accompaniment approach.

The challenge of solidarity through accompaniment

Theologically, the church is one body with many parts; its catholicity calls for a universal church, or ecclesial communion, that unites Catholics across borders and transcends parochial concerns.

So, too, Catholic teaching emphasizes the unity of the human family, and envisions an interdependent world that is united while respecting legitimate national, ethnic, and cultural diversity. Solidarity is the virtue that transforms the fact of interdependence into a genuine commitment to achieve the good of others, especially the poor and marginalized (John Paul II, 1987, no. 39).

Being truly catholic and achieving solidarity around peacebuilding is a challenge in a mammoth Catholic community that includes huge disparities in resources, and a huge diversity of national identities, cultures, languages, and political ideologies. CPN must navigate around three impediments to realizing the church's tremendous potential for catholicity and solidarity. The first is that solidarity is in tension with subsidiarity. The church is a hierarchical institution that is a sign and instrument of unity but its adherence to the principle of subsidiarity – work should be done at the lowest level possible and the highest level necessary – leads it to be highly decentralized in its operations. For example, Pope Francis played an important role at the end of the Colombian peace process, but he did so in consultation with the Colombian bishops. The bishops' conference supported the peace process but left it to individual bishops, clergy, and lay people to decide whether to support the final peace accord. Subsidiarity is consistent with good peacebuilding practice in that it prioritizes the local. But subsidiarity can also contribute to parochialism, leaving a bishop or lay leaders to take a position on the peace accord based on their own local concerns without taking into account national or international dimensions. At the same time, subsidiarity can undermine solidarity if respect for subsidiarity becomes an excuse for indifference or inaction on the part of those who are too ready to let those directly affected by a conflict deal with it themselves.

A strength of CPN is that it is a network of networks, since it works with institutions that are, themselves, part of networks. CPN, for example, works with the Colombia bishops' conference through its National Social Pastoral/ Caritas Colombia. The bishops' conference consists of the bishops who govern parishes and Caritas agencies in their dioceses. Individual bishops and the bishops' conference relate directly to the Holy See. The Colombia bishops' conference is part of CELAM, the conference of Latin American bishops' conferences, and Caritas Colombia is part of Caritas Latin America, which is part of Caritas Internationalis, which consists of more than one hundred and sixty national Caritas agencies around the world. The Colombian bishops also participate in REPAM, the regional episcopal coalition for defending the Amazon and indigenous peoples. These institutional networks are invaluable in contributing to solidarity around peacebuilding at the leadership level. But focused engagement on peacebuilding is not necessarily a priority given the breadth of concerns these bodies must address. Engagement on peace through these bodies is typically ad hoc and episodic.

The broader Catholic community suffers from another impediment to solidarity. Vincent Miller suggests that the church is a network that aims for unity in Christ and communion among all people. But, in practice, "Christians relate to fellow church members in distant lands primarily through the webs of the market." He calls for strengthening bonds of solidarity among Catholics by forming "synodal relationships that deepen current market relationships into fuller responsibility and allow those affected to become full partners in a dialogue about our shared future in our common home" (Miller, forthcoming).

Perhaps the biggest challenge in accompaniment is to overcome the risk of cultural imperialism, a risk that is particularly sensitive in countries with a history of colonial subjugation. It is not a level playing field, so well-resourced and influential institutions, such as the Kroc Institute or CRS, can have inordinate influence on the priorities of their partners in places like Burundi. Therefore, CPN has focused on accompaniment – walking with – its partners in conflict areas. Accompaniment assumes that those in conflict situations are the best suited to understand and find solutions to those conflicts. Therefore, CPN makes a commitment to engage over the long period of time needed to develop relationships of trust, and adequately understand and contribute to peacebuilding in highly complex and intractable conflicts. It engages the local church in dialogue about its peacebuilding needs and seeks to respond to those needs in a time and manner that the local church deems appropriate and feasible. CPN might propose possibilities for collaboration, but it is extremely careful not to impose programs and timelines on the local church. All of that requires considerable patience and humility. It also requires a spirit of genuine collaboration which enables each institution to enhance its own peacebuilding role and achieve together what none could achieve on its own.

Finally, accompaniment requires recalibrating the metrics of effectiveness. CPN is only effective if collaboration among institutions has a bigger impact than what the institutions could accomplish on their own. Unlike traditional academic research projects, the results of collaboration and accompaniment are inherently difficult to measure, are inevitably long-term, are often intangible, and are largely beyond the control of CPN. Success might depend, in large part, on the capacity of resource-poor local churches to fund and staff peacebuilding initiatives amidst violent conflict and overwhelming humanitarian and other needs. Consequently, accompaniment might mean little more than maintaining relationships until the situation is ripe for collaborative engagement on concrete initiatives.

Being more inclusive while maintaining what is distinctive

CPN's decision to be a network of institutions, not individuals, enhances its credibility, representativeness, resources, and reach. A neuralgic problem faced by many international NGOs is that they choose their partners in conflict zones and often do so based on narrow ideological or other criteria, whether or not they are representative of their communities, thus exacerbating problems of cultural imperialism. CPN avoids picking and choosing among local Catholic peacebuilders by working with official church institutions, especially episcopal conferences. In doing so, CPN ensures that its activities in a particular country will have the legitimacy and reach of the institutional church in that country.

But working with Catholic institutions has its obvious limitations insofar as it can limit the role of women and lay people. While women and lay people hold senior positions in some episcopal conferences and national *caritas* agencies, as well as in CRS, one of CPN's main on-the-ground partners, many senior positions are occupied by priests, and, in any case, the bishops are ultimately in charge.

If the Catholic Church is to develop what Lederach (1997, 94-95) calls a “peace constituency,” it must encompass the wisdom and talents of the whole Catholic community, not just the ordained leaders. Catholic peacebuilding can be effective in the short-term in places where clerics retain a high degree of influence and respect; this might, in part, be a function of the relatively low levels

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of education of ordinary believers as well as the traditional role that religious leaders play in society. But it is not just Catholic leaders or institutions that matter in peacebuilding. In places where the church is most effective across the peacebuilding spectrum, it is partly because the task of peacebuilding is not confined to clerics. Peacebuilding will be more deeply integrated into the whole Catholic community as the peacebuilding role and capacity of lay leaders and ordinary believers becomes more important. This is especially true when peacebuilding involves highly-political dimensions for which church leaders might not be well-suited. Where ordinary Catholics have vigorously embraced their lay vocation of transforming the social order in light of the Gospel, the church's capacity for peacebuilding is vastly enlarged. That is an area where Catholic lay movements play an especially important role.

The role of women is an especially important issue. In her excellent analysis of the role of women in Catholic peacebuilding, Maryann Cusimano Love (2015, 55-60) points out that it is a mistake to focus only on male clerical leaders; influential women peacebuilders are found (and often predominate) in universities, schools, peace and justice offices, health and other charitable agencies, parishes, Catholic NGOs, and women's religious orders. Yet much of this peacebuilding work is unrecognized (42-49). Lisa Cahill (2019, 334) concurs: "there are few globally recognized women peacebuilders, and where religious communities or organizations are active in bringing peace, it is exceedingly rare that women's role is highlighted." Only a few of the bishops' conferences with whom CPN works have women in leadership positions on peace and justice issues. CRS's leading role in CPN has helped insofar as some of its most influential peacebuilding specialists and other leaders are women. The same is true of Pax Christi International, which is also active in CPN. With a few exceptions, CPN has not sought formal affiliations with men's or women's religious orders and lay movements, in part due to the sheer number of them. That remains a significant limitation both in terms of connecting more directly with the peacebuilding work of lay and religious women, as well as in broadening CPN's ties to important Catholic networks involved in peacebuilding. CPN, like the church as a whole, would benefit from finding new ways to act on Cusimano Love's insight that, "Skilled in creating and leveraging decentralized networks, Catholic women peacebuilders are well-positioned to expand peacebuilding participation in an age of global decentralized networks." (Love, 2015, 61-62)

A final issue of inclusivity relates to the fact that CPN is a Catholic network. Some are skeptical of single-identity networks because they are seen as exclusivist or triumphalistic, especially in their efforts to discern what is distinctive about Catholic (or Lutheran, or Reformed Jewish) contributions to peacebuilding. The skepticism about single-identity peacebuilding reflects a widely-held view that ecumenical and interreligious peacebuilding should be the priority, in part based on the debatable assumption that religious differences contribute to conflict. This skepticism also reflects a misperception about single-identity peacebuilding. In all of the areas where CPN is engaged, even in predominantly Catholic countries like Colombia, the Catholic community is deeply engaged with other religious entities and civil society actors in peacebuilding. In Mindanao, most Catholic peacebuilding is done under the auspices of the church's national or diocesan inter-religious dialogue commissions, not social concerns commissions. The ecumenical South Sudan Council of Churches and the interreligious Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative are the major platforms for Catholic peacebuilding in those areas. Go-it-alone Catholic peacebuilding is the exception, not the rule.

Interreligious and civil society engagement are indispensable elements of Catholic peacebuilding. Effective peacebuilding is not possible without collaborating with other religious and secular actors (Johnston, forthcoming). Moreover, the Catholic community has much to learn from the peacebuilding experience of other religious actors, especially those, like the Quakers or Mennonites, who have made peacebuilding a priority. It is not surprising that John Paul Lederach, a Mennonite, has trained more Catholic bishops in peacebuilding than almost anyone else. The Catholic community also draws on the expertise of secular peacebuilders. That has been true when Catholics have been asked to play prominent roles in peace processes or formal truth and reconciliation commissions in Colombia, South Sudan, Burundi, Uganda, the DRC, and elsewhere.

Interreligious peacebuilding is indispensable but it should not automatically be the priority in every case. Religious conflict does not derive from religion, in general, but from particular elements of religion. So, too, the peacebuilding power of religion does not come from religion, in general, but from particular elements of religion. Identifying and cultivating that which is distinctive about Catholic peacebuilding is necessary if the Catholic community is to realize its full potential as a peacebuilder – and be aware of its limitations. Effective peacebuilders, whether Catholic, Sunni, or secular, have to be clear about their comparative advantage. They also have to do more to cultivate peacebuilding within their own communities. Too often, CPN has found that the main challenge is not to find common ground with other religious actors but to broaden the peace constituency within the Catholic community and engage those Catholics who are impediments to peace. Catholics need to continue to collaborate with other religious and civil society actors for peace. But the impact of that collaboration ultimately depends on the extent to which the Catholic community as a whole supports peacebuilding. CPN’s work confirms the urgent need to do much more within the Catholic community to broaden and deepen the commitment to peacebuilding as part of the Christian vocation, and that requires cultivating a distinctively Catholic approach to peacebuilding.

Conclusion

James Martin summarized Pope Francis’ two recent encyclicals in a Tweet (2020): “If the message of #LaudatoSi was ‘Everything is connected,’ the message of #FratelliTutti is ‘Everyone is connected.’” CPN is about connecting or integrating: integrating a Catholic theology and ethics of peace, justice, human rights, development, and ecology; connecting ethics, theological reflection, and other scholarly work with church practice in order to strengthen both; and connecting local, national, and international dimensions of Catholic peacebuilding (vertical integration), as well as diverse types of engagement by different sectors and in different places (horizontal integration).

Lederach (2005, 84) contends that “constructing social change is the art of seeing and building webs” or networks. CPN is strengthening webs of relationships by providing “relational centers,” or hubs, that “hold, create, and sustain connections” (85). It can do this because it is a network, not a program of the Kroc Institute or an NGO. Because it brings together a diverse array of Catholic institutions engaged in peacebuilding to further develop a theology and ethics of peacebuilding, and to assist with strategic planning, training, and other needs of the church, CPN has been able to tap into some of the church’s enormous potential for peacebuilding. That engagement has reinforced the importance of (1) cultivating the vocation of peacebuilding; (2) integration of issues and diverse actors at different levels and across borders; (3) an accompaniment model that can overcome disparities in resources and differences in national identity, culture, language, and

ideology; and (4) broadening the Catholic peace constituency by being more inclusive of the laity and especially women, and engaging with other religious and secular actors while being clear about what is distinctive about Catholic peacebuilding.

The Catholic community is blessed with an amazing array of artisans of peace, individuals, groups, and institutions. It is a part of lived Catholicism that needs to be better mapped, analyzed, and, most important, supported and strengthened, so that the Catholic community can become what it is called to be: a peacebuilding church.

Endnotes

¹ Affiliated institutions include relevant commissions or offices of the Burundi, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Philippines, Southern African, and U.S. episcopal conferences; the International Federation of Catholic Universities and 11 university centers or institutes (most from the United States); Catholic Relief Services, Caritas Internationalis, Pax Christi International, Sant'Egidio Community, USA, and Maryknoll Office for Global Concern.

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