

# Stirrings



A Basilian Peace & Justice Newsletter

Winter 2019

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## The bishops' letter fails to recognize that racism is a white problem

by Daniel P. Horan  
edited from the National Catholic Reporter  
Feb 20, 2019

It is the first major text issued by the American bishops on racism in 40 years. The last one was the abysmally titled "Brothers and Sisters to Us: U.S.

Catholic Bishops Pastoral Letter on Racism." Its title reveals the perception of people of color by many in the Catholic Church in the United States, especially by its predominantly white leadership (presumably the "us" of the title). Such language implies that people of color are effectively outside the community, which is understood to be, as a rule, white . . . an ecclesiastical Freudian slip.

Like so many other people, I had been eagerly awaiting the new text. The rise in explicit racist behavior and hate crimes since the election of President Donald Trump, the overt support of his administration's policies by white supremacists and extremist groups, the anti-migrant rhetoric associated with the building of a southern border wall, and the unabashed refusal to condemn Nazi and white supremacist groups after the 2017 incidents in Charlottesville have only heightened the sense of urgency that the American bishops needed to exercise their teaching authority on this topic.

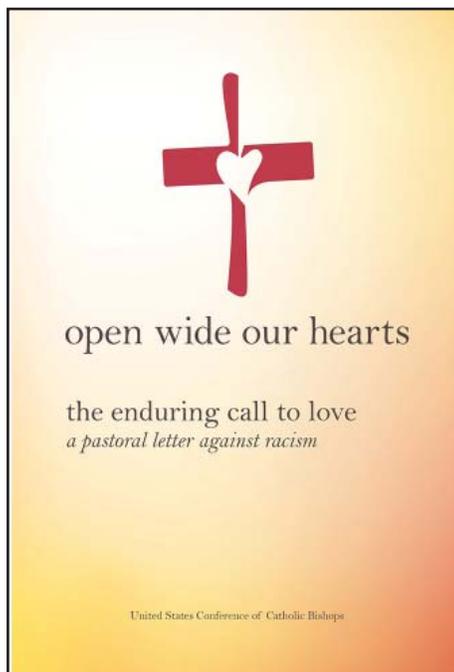
Last November the bishops overwhelmingly approved the new document. When I first read it, I was struck immediately by both what was said and not said; what the bishops did and failed to do. In general, much of what was said is good, if expressed too timidly.

While the new document does attempt to expand the horizon of those who are burdened, oppressed or otherwise harmed by racism with three short sections dedicated to Native American, African American and Hispanic experiences, the terms selected and language used here raise some serious questions. In the section on Native Americans, for instance, European colonizers are only referred to as "explorers, then pioneers" and later as "white European immigrants and pioneers." These descriptions recast colonizers as neutral or even heroic figures without

sufficient attention to the imperial and ecclesial motivations, practices or legacies once these whites arrived across the Atlantic.

Furthermore, the sentence construction in these sections is notably passive: "African Americans have been branded," "African Americans were disadvantaged," "Hispanics have been referred to by countless derogatory names," and so on. This raises the most glaring issue I

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We can take much hope these days in the youth who are demanding to have their voices heard.

The voice of students from Parkland, Florida, who suffered a gun massacre, killing seventeen in their school, have galvanized high school students across the country to join in a “March for Our Lives” demanding that politicians protect them by enacting meaningful gun laws.

A Swedish sixteen year-old started a lonely school strike demanding that politicians act on Climate Change. She has galvanized youth across Europe and the Americas. They will have their voices heard.

The death of seven young indigenous students in Thunder Bay, Ontario, has galvanized a public demand for an investigation of the racism against First Nation youths and women in Canada.

And the U S Bishops have spoken out on racism in the United States against Blacks, Hispanics, Muslims and Immigrants. Daniel Horan calls upon them to take their next step and name it as a “white” problem.

Richrad Rohr reflects on Atonement Theology and what kind of justice this attributes to God.

And Kathy Kelly will be the keynote voice in this Year’s “Voices for Peace Conference” at the Basilian Centre for Peace and Justice in Toronto in April.

Bob Holmes CSB

## Stirrings

A Peace & Justice Newsletter  
A project of the Basilian Centre for Peace & Justice

## The bishops’ letter

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have with the new document. It elicits an uncomfortable question: Who exactly is responsible for the problem of racism? The authors of the document seem to go to great lengths to avoid addressing this head on. Readers of the text are led to believe that oppression, subjugation, genocide, chattel slavery, racist violence, unjust legislation, and so on, merely befell people of color as if by chance.

But the truth is that racism is a white problem because in this society whites hold the power, establish the institutions and set the social norms. And the new document does not come anywhere close to acknowledging or clearly stating this fact.

While the document states “some have called” racism in the United States “our country’s original sin,” it nevertheless fails to name the sinner. Whether intended or not, this document does not challenge white Catholics to consider their role in a systemically racist society and church, it lets whites too easily off the hook by failing to name the other side of the coin of racist oppression: white privilege.

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The specter that haunts the new document is the unacknowledged reality that racism is a white problem and that while systemic racism does affects everybody, it benefits white folk to the disadvantage of people of color. Most people know that overt racial oppression and discrete racist acts are wrong. Another pastoral document to reiterate this point is not needed. Instead, what is needed – but wasn’t delivered – is a strong statement with a clear message exhorting those in the position of social and cultural dominance that they must change if there is any hope of a different future.

What is needed is a strong pastoral statement that encourages frank conversation about the reality of systemic racism and its long, complex, painful and ongoing history in this country. Pastors must be exhorted to preach about this difficult topic that will certainly make white people uncomfortable. However, avoiding the discomfort required to seriously consider social injustice is an abdication of pastoral responsibility. It is not enough for the American church to decry the sin of racism; we must dare to name the sinner too.

*Daniel P. Horan is a Franciscan friar and assistant professor of systematic theology and spirituality at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago.*

## Substitutionary Atonement

By Richard Rohr



*A God of Retributive Justice  
or Transformative Justice?*

For most of church history, no single consensus prevailed on what Christians mean when we say, “Jesus died for our sins.” But in recent centuries, one theory did become mainstream. It is often referred to as the “penal substitutionary atonement theory,” especially once it was further developed during the Reformation. Substitutionary atonement is the theory that Christ, by his own sacrificial choice, was punished in the place of humans, thus satisfying the “demands of justice” so that God could forgive our sins.

This theory of atonement ultimately relies on another commonly accepted notion—the “original sin” of Adam and Eve, which, we were told, taints all human beings. But much like original sin (a concept not found in the Bible but developed by Augustine in the fifth century), most Christians have never been told how recent and regional this explanation is or that it relies upon a retributive notion of justice. Nor are they told that it was honest enough to call itself a “theory,” even though some groups take it as long-standing dogma.

Unfortunately, this theory has held captive our vision of Jesus, making our view very limited and punitive. The commonly accepted atonement theory led to some serious misunderstandings of Jesus’ role and Christ’s eternal purpose, reaffirmed our narrow notion of retributive justice, and legiti-

mated a notion of “good and necessary violence.” It implied that God the Father was petty, offended in the way that humans are, and unfree to love and forgive of God’s own volition. This is a very untrustworthy image of God which undercuts everything else.

I take up this subject with both excitement and trepidation because I know that substitutionary atonement is central to many Christians’ faith. But the questions of why Jesus died and what is the meaning and message of his death have dominated the Christian narrative, often much more than his life and teaching. As some have said, if this theory is true, all we needed were the last three days or even three hours of Jesus’ life. In my opinion, this interpretation has kept us from a deep and truly transformative understanding of both Jesus and Christ.

Salvation became a one-time transactional affair between Jesus and his Father, instead of an ongoing transformational lesson for the human soul and for all of history. I believe that Jesus’ death on the cross is a revelation of the infinite and participatory love of God, not some bloody payment required by God’s offended justice to rectify the problem of sin. Such a story line is way too small and problem-oriented.

*Richard Rohr’s Daily Meditation for  
Sunday, February 3, 2019*

## Basilian Peace & Justice Pilgrimage to the Holy Land

We have been brought not only to the Holy Land but also to meet the Holy People and hear their stories.

We return home to the comfort and relative safety of our North American homes, but we return changed.

We return enraged by the injustices that we have seen with our own eyes and heard about through their stories.

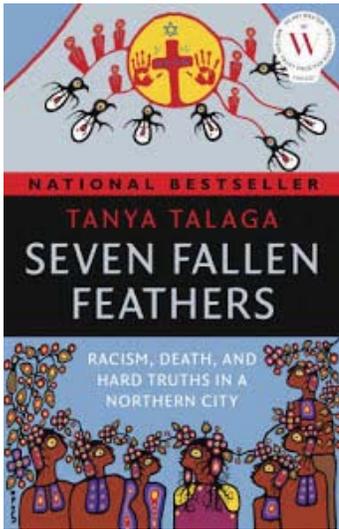
We return humbled by their ability to live with dignity in the face of a bureaucratic nightmare designed to frustrate and humiliate.

We return inspired by their passion in resistance and their *sumud* (steadfastness).

a Previous Pilgrim



24 Sept. - 8 Oct. 2019  
contact:  
[mrestivo@basilian.org](mailto:mrestivo@basilian.org)



## SEVEN FALLEN FEATHERS

Racism, Death  
and Hard Truths  
in a  
Northern City

By *Tanya Talaga*

Reviewed by  
*Sarah DeVillano*

Seven Fallen Feathers, winner of the Indigenous Literature Award this year, is a powerful account of the deaths of seven Indigenous youths in Thunder Bay. It shines a light on each individual story behind the seven fallen feathers of the Nishnawbe Aski Nation.

Each of the fallen feathers represents young Indigenous students, forced to leave home to pursue education, away from their families – families plagued by the intergenerational trauma resulting from residential schools. Many of these youth were found in rivers, despite being strong swimmers and having lived by the water their whole lives. And all their deaths were deemed accidental by local authorities.

For many settler Canadians, it is very easy to put the legacy of colonialism and the genocidal policy of residential schools behind us, believing these events to be a part of a shameful past in our successful road to reconciliation. The wealth of information presented in this book makes it impossible to deny that systemic and institutional violence, as it relates to colonialism in Canada, are alive and well today. The stories behind each of the seven fallen feathers pick apart these beliefs, slowly but surely, and expose them for what they are. Each child has a family that was failed by the system both before, and after, their passing.

Talaga ends the book with a look at present-day relations. Her work deconstructs the belief that Indigenous peoples and First Nation communities are passive victims of this violence. It is a powerful testament to the resilience of these youth, and a troubling indictment of continued colonial violence in Canada.

*Tanya is a lecturer, a prize winning author, and a a journalist at the Toronto Star.*

*Sarah is a Peer Outreach Worker at Ottawa Inner City Health and also a JD candidate at the University of Ottawa Faculty of Law.*

## Young Voice for Climate Action



On 20 August 2018, **Greta Thunberg**, then in ninth grade, decided to not attend school until the 2018 Sweden general election on 9 September after heat waves and wildfires in Sweden. Her demands were that the Swedish government reduce carbon emissions as per the Paris Agreement, and she protested via sitting outside the *Riksdag* every day during school hours with the sign *Skolstrejk för klimatet* (school strike for the climate). After the general elections, she continued to strike only on Fridays, which gained worldwide attention. She inspired school students across the globe to take part in student strikes.

*As of December 2018, more than 20,000 students held strikes in at least 270 cities. Thunberg credits the teen activists at Parkland school in Florida, who organized the March for Our Lives, as the inspiration to begin her school climate strike.*

Greta Thunberg participated in the Rise for Climate demonstration outside the European Parliament in Brussels. In October 2018, addressed the ‘Declaration of Rebellion’ organized by Extinction Rebellion opposite the Houses of Parliament in London.

On 24 November 2018, she spoke at TEDXStockholm. She spoke about realizing, when she was eight-years-old, that climate change existed and wondering why it was not headline news on every channel. Speculating that her children and grandchildren would ask her why they had not taken action in 2018 when there was still time.

Thunberg addressed the COP24 United Nations climate change summit on December 4, 2018 and also spoke before the UN plenary assembly on December 12, 2018.

On 23 January 2019, Thunberg arrived in Davos and told a Davos panel “Some people, some companies, some decision makers in particular have known exactly what priceless values they have been sacrificing to continue making unimaginable amounts of money. I think many of you here today belong to that group of people.”

*Excerpted from Wikipedia*

# First Strike

*Drawing on the successes and failures of the past, we must help young climate strikers to win their existential struggle*

By George Monbiot  
(the Guardian, 20th February 2019)

This one has to succeed. It is not just that the youth climate strike, now building worldwide with tremendous speed, is our best (and possibly our last) hope of avoiding catastrophe. It is also that the impacts on the young people themselves, if their mobilization and hopes collapse so early in their lives, could be devastating.

To help this movement win, we should ask why others lost. We should ask, for example, why Occupy, despite the energy and sacrifices of so many, came to an end, while the institutions it confronted remain intact. We should wonder why the global justice movement of the late 1990s and early 2000s, despite the numbers involved, their courage and determination, has not changed the world.

Those of us who witnessed these disappointments have, I feel, a painful duty to be as honest about them as possible, to help ensure their failures are not repeated. Much of what I propose here is controversial, and I can't promise I've got it right. So my first advice is this: don't listen only to me.

I believe a central task for any campaign is to *develop a narrative*: a short, simple story explaining where we are, how we got here and where we need to go. Using the narrative structure that is common to almost all successful political and religious transformations, the Restoration Story, it might go something like this. "The world has been thrown into climate chaos, caused by fossil fuel companies, the billionaires who profit from them, and the politicians they have bought. But we, the young heroes, will

confront these oligarchs, using our moral authority to create a movement so big and politically dangerous that our governments are forced to shut down the fossil economy and restore the benign conditions in which humans and other species can thrive."

This restoration narrative, I think, could be greatly strengthened by recent findings suggesting that ecological recovery – restoring forests, salt marshes, peat bogs, the seabed and other crucial ecosystems – could, by drawing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, make a massive contribution towards preventing climate breakdown.

I believe a successful movement should also *define a clear and tangible objective*, perhaps a date by which nations achieve a zero carbon economy. It could recommend a pathway, such as a ramped-up version of



the Green New Deal proposed by the most progressive Democrats. If so, it will need to set a series of waymarks, by which it can judge whether or not governments are on track. This ensures that the activists, rather than the government, keep setting the agenda.

This objective should be supported by *a set of irreducible principles* that can be explained and spread with pride and conviction. Here are a couple of possible examples. "Human life is not negotiable; it cannot be exchanged for money." "The generations which have yet to be born have the same rights as those already alive." Clear principles appear to be essential to the long-running success of a campaign.

This suggests another crucial element: a protest community strong

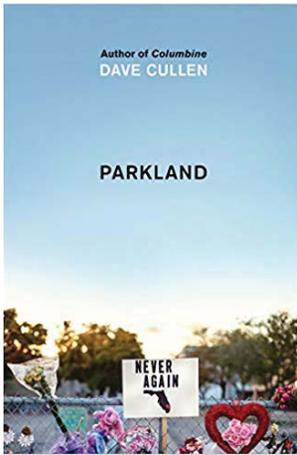
enough to *resist all attempts at division and co-option*. Such communities do not arise by accident, but are consciously and carefully constructed, often with the help of training, ceremonies, music and fun. They must be strong enough to catch and defend people threatened by despair, burnout or breakdown, especially when the response gets nasty. Already, conspiracy theories are being spread by politicians and the media, suggesting that the young people have been organized by unknown sinister forces: after all, how could children possibly organize themselves?

Greta Thunberg, whose school strike sparked this movement, has written a response far more dignified and mature than the articles attacking her. But the nastiness has only just begun. As some of us can testify, the viciousness of the lobby groups funded by the fossil fuel industry, and the publications that amplify their message, knows no limits. As we have already seen, they treat even children as fair game.

I would suggest that the climate strikers develop *clear rules of engagement*, in order to give their opponents no ammunition.

Successful movements also need an *organizational model that allows them to keep growing*. One promising approach is Big Organising, that helped Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez take her seat in the US Congress. They need clever, funny and innovative tactics that take opponents by surprise and create a sense of forward momentum. Designing such tactics, narratives and principles is, I believe, best done by a small number of people, then put to the wider group for approval.

All this is a lot to dump on young people. But ... any support must come on the young strikers' terms: they lead, we follow. But they carry a terrible burden: this is a struggle they cannot afford to lose. We will help them lift it, if they wish.



# PARKLAND

## Birth of a Movement

by *Dave Cullen*

Reviewed by author  
*Jill Filipovic*

Here is a sentence you would not expect in a review of a book on one of the country's most notorious school shootings: *Parkland* by Dave Cullen is one of the most uplifting books you will read all year. The United States is a nation pocked daily by gun violence; we are a nation desensitized by the magnitude of our national bloodshed, a place where there are people – multiple people – who are survivors of multiple mass shootings.

In an era of Donald Trump and social media, we are also meaner, reactionary, deeply cynical, depressingly divided. At a time of such national exhaustion, a book about a school shooting may not be the one you're inclined to pick up off the shelf. Do it anyway. *Parkland* is a balm.

Cullen, also the author of “Columbine,” has with “Parkland” carved out a macabre niche as the country's premier chronicler of mass school shootings. But *Parkland* is anything but dark.

Very little of the book focuses on the six minutes and 20 seconds on Feb. 14, 2018, when a gunman walked into Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Fla., and killed 17 innocent souls. Instead, Cullen tells us what came next.

You know this story, but you don't. You have probably heard of the main players or seen their faces on television or read their missives on Twitter: Emma González with her big eyes and shaved head first calling BS on the many enablers of gun violence. David Hogg, a quick wit in 140

characters, taking on Laura Ingraham and the right-wing news machine. Cameron Kasky sending Marco Rubio stammering and stumbling over National Rifle Association money. The March for Our Lives, one of the biggest rallies in American history, when González gave a brief speech and then stared down the camera, tears streaming down her face, for four excruciating minutes — Was she breaking down? Cracking up? — before finally saying: “Since the time that I came out here, it has been six minutes and 20 seconds. . . . Fight for your lives before it's someone else's job.”

Cullen was there for these moments, but he also describes the before, when Hogg, after surviving the shooting, rode his bike back to school to document the events as a journalist; when Jaclyn Corin, an organizational mastermind trapped in the body of a petite, soft-spoken high schooler, marshaled buses of students to head to Tallahassee to convince legislators that gun violence was a scourge worth fighting; when a ragtag group of drama nerds and student journalists got together in Kasky's living room, kicked out all the parents and decided something must be done. In Cullen's telling, the uprising was fast, organic and initially diffuse. The genius of the Parkland students came in coalescing around a highly disciplined core group while letting other branches grow where needed.

For a politics-hardened reader, stories of earnest activism and kids changing the world are boring at best, insultingly cliché at worst. Cullen deftly navigates what could have easily been a sentimental and patronizing story (not to mention a tedious one). He takes us shoulder to shoulder with his subjects, through their victories and their errors, drawing out the bits of their personalities that are flattened out on a TV screen — Hogg isn't angry but is a surprisingly good mediator of tense situations; González is both ethereal and tactical, a force Cullen calls “the head and the heart.” Both are just teenagers.



Parents play virtually no role in the Parkland kids' organizing, other than offering role-appropriate demands for chaperones, mental health counseling and sleep. But they do serve as a kind of Greek chorus to Cullen's hero narrative of the students. We see, from his telling, why adults made more risk-averse by experience (and brain



development) could never have built this movement, which required risk-taking as much as naivete and determination. Where the voices of the adults do creep in, they are crucial reminders that this is fundamentally a story about children — brilliant, fabulous, preternaturally mature children, but children nonetheless.

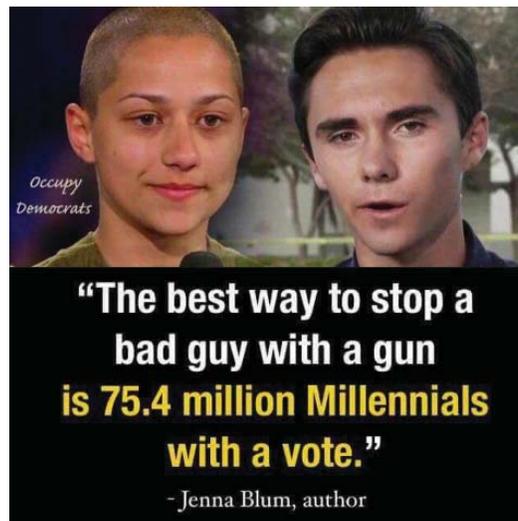
But the real genius of *Parkland* isn't that it's an inspirational tome. Instead, it's practically a how-to guide for grass-roots activism. And most important, Cullen, and the students he writes about, situate this movement as one place on a longer historical arc toward justice. Early on, the Parkland students decide to make their quest about more than the suburban school shootings that dominate the news; they find common cause with teenagers in cities who face endemic violence not inside the classroom but often on their way to it, and whose realities are shrugged off as a predictable outcome of living in "bad" neighborhoods.

The most significant turning point in the story is when the Parkland students meet kids from Chicago who run similar anti-violence organizations, one called BRAVE (Bold Resistance Against Violence Everywhere) and one called Peace Warriors. Peace Warrior Executive Director D'Angelo McDade, then a high school senior in Chicago, introduces the Parkland kids to Martin Luther King Jr.'s principles of nonviolence, a framework that profoundly reshapes and guides their work going forward.

Later in the story, when the Parkland students are on a national tour, they refuse to be interviewed in Chicago unless a local kid is interviewed with them. And what the Chicago kids want is heartbreakingly simple. "I want to

see happiness in my community," says one Peace Warrior, Alex King. "I want to see the next generation, I want to see them being able to play outside. Being able to sit on the porch and nothing happen to them. Being able to go to their neighborhood park, being able to go to a friend's house. Being able to go to church. Being able to go to school and be safe. I want to see that joy."

These are the most resonant moments of "Parkland": When we hear the students themselves. Luckily, Cullen is an adept storyteller, synthesizing a cacophony of voices and using his own simply to carry a reader cleanly through. He reacts to the story and the characters along with us, at times concerned, often awed, sometimes frustrated — for example, when the Chicago students, who are just as impassioned, bright and organized as the Parkland kids, see their tragedies and demands ignored by media-makers and politicians alike.



This is a story just a year in. For all of their bluster and effectiveness, the children at the core of Parkland are still young people damaged by an act of horrific violence, savaged by an unforgiving and ideological conservative media, and sometimes sniped at and shunned by their peers. How will that change them? Cullen doesn't quite get there, perhaps because the students themselves haven't gotten there yet, and because this is a story about an evolution in progress, not a revolution complete. Cullen's tale, though, makes you hopeful for what might come next.

Optimism about the future: It's a strange feeling.

*Parkland* is a story touched by trauma, but it is not a story of trauma. It is a story born of violence, but it is not a story of violence. Instead, it is something both braver and more precise: It is the story of a carefully planned rebellion.





KATHY  
KELLY



**Basilian Centre for Peace and Justice**  
95 St. Joseph St. Toronto

The 2019 Voices for Peace Conference will be an opportunity to listen to Kathy and other presenters (see below) and share your hopes, ideas and concerns with them and the other participants. Both music and quiet time will be scheduled into the day as well.

**Dee Dee: “A Garden on the Frontlines  
...planting peace in a warzone”**

After 9/11, Dee Dee began horticultural training and the development of a garden sanctuary especially for women providing a safe, enclosed environment where women could enjoy the beauty of nature, learn, grow and be healed from the ravages of war.

**Paul Pynkoski: “Thomas Merton  
...Poetry, and Resistance”**

What role might art play in peacemaking? We will explore this question using Merton’s poetry and writing, and seek echoes of some significant themes in the music of Bruce Cockburn, Jon Brooks, and Shad. Paul facilitates literature and film discussions at the Common Table Drop-In program for those who are homeless or at risk.

**Bob Holmes: “Blessed are the Peacemakers  
...in the Holy Land and Canada”**

Since January 2000 Bob has also been a member of the Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) and has served in Israel/Palestine and in Canada with the First Nations.

Bob is a Roman Catholic, Basilian priest/teacher, who has been active in peace & justice ministry for many years.

**Kathy will speak on  
“Courage for Peace, Not for War”**

Kathy Kelly has traveled to war zones and lived alongside ordinary people in Afghanistan, Iraq, Gaza, Lebanon, Bosnia and Nicaragua. She and her companions in *Voices for Creative Nonviolence* believe the U.S. should end all U.S. military and economic warfare and pay reparations for suffering already caused by U.S. wars.

In the past two years, *Voices* has helped organize demonstrations, fasts, civil resistance actions and forums about conflict-driven near famine conditions in Yemen.

She has joined with activists in various regions of the U.S. to protest drone warfare by holding demonstrations outside of U.S. military bases. In 2015, for carrying a loaf of bread and a letter across the line at Whiteman AFB, she served three months in prison.

From 1996 – 2003, *Voices* activists formed 70 delegations that openly defied economic sanctions by bringing medicines to children and families in Iraq. Kelly traveled to Iraq 27 times, during that period. She and her companions lived in Baghdad throughout the 2003 “Shock and Awe” bombing.

She was sentenced to one year in federal prison for planting corn on nuclear missile silo sites (1988-89) at Whiteman Air Force Base and spent three months in prison, in 2004, for crossing the line at Fort Benning’s military training school. As a war tax refuser, she has refused payment of all forms of U.S. federal income tax since 1980.