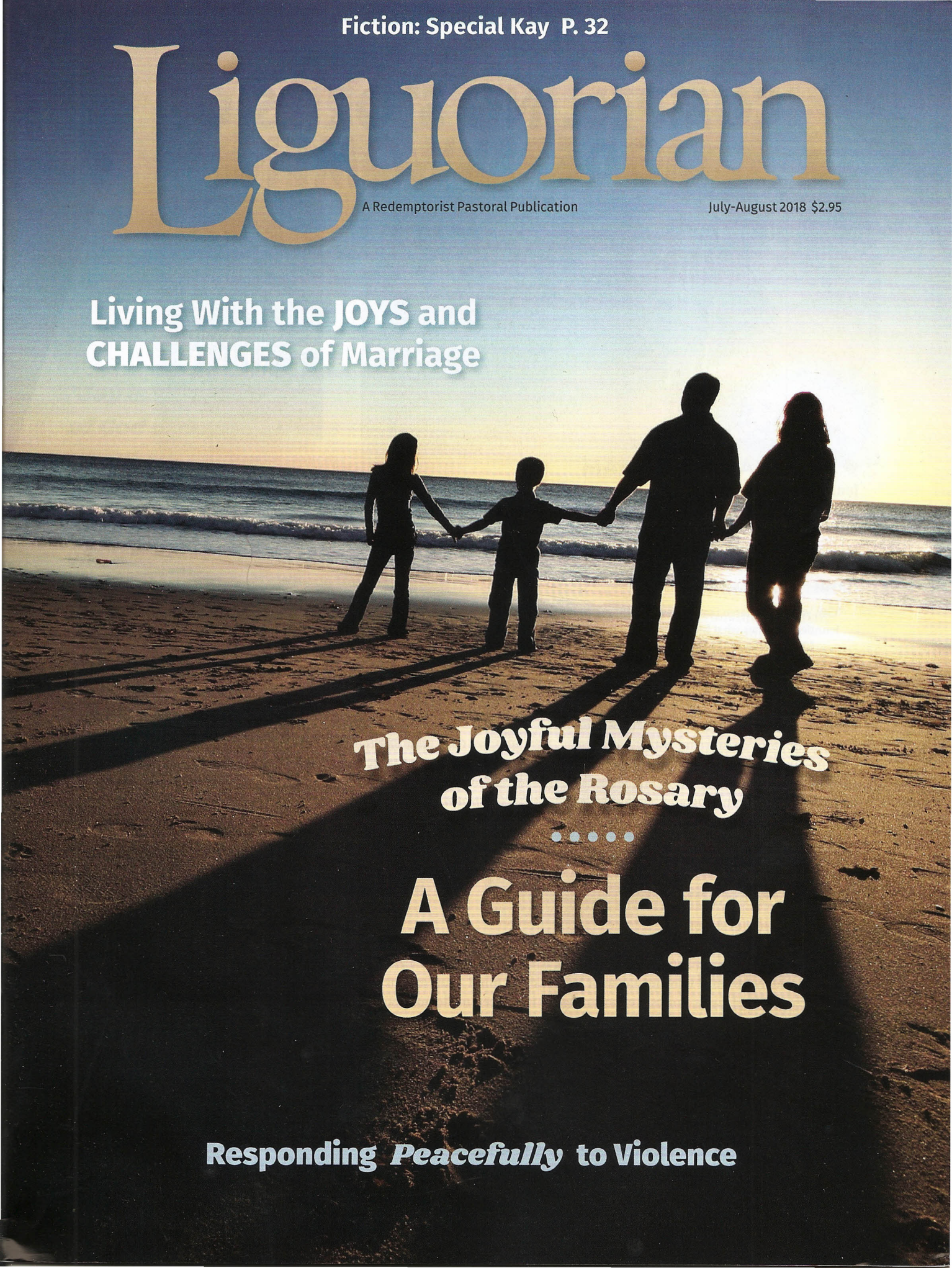


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**Living With the JOYS and
CHALLENGES of Marriage**



**The Joyful Mysteries
of the Rosary**

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**A Guide for
Our Families**

Responding *Peacefully* to Violence

Living in God's State of Peace

**RESPONDING PEACEFULLY TO
VIOLENCE TAKES A LOT OF WORK,
IT'S THE WAY OF CHRIST—
AND IT'S WORTH THE EFFORT**

Carole St. Laurent

Part 3
OF A
FOUR-PART
SERIES

On March 7, 1965, peaceful protestors stood on one side of the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, AL, armed only with Christian love. They had been humiliated and mistreated, and they couldn't take it anymore. So they prepared to take a stand. They knew it would be a hard and long fight, so they prepared themselves mentally, spiritually, and physically.

When this day came for their protest, every hour of training paid off.

State troopers stood opposite them, armed with billy clubs, riot gear, tear gas and vile words of hate to fuel their weapons under the guise of enforcing the law on these peaceful men, women and children. Although they were shouted at, pushed, spat upon, and beaten, the brave protestors resisted retaliating with angry words or fists. The mostly black group demanded equality for African Americans. They insisted that the Declaration's "all men are created

equal" applies to all of God's children.

The films and photos of the civil rights movement sit-ins and marches clearly reveal who won the moral victory and at what cost. Although 50,000 people were jailed, countless beaten, and almost 100 killed, the participants protested peacefully, faithfully following Jesus' example. "Though harshly treated, he submitted and did not open his mouth; like a lamb led to slaughter or a sheep silent before

shearers, he did not open his mouth. Seized and condemned, he was taken away" (Isaiah 53:7–8). The patient, persistent protests of these civil rights activists helped desegregate the United States of America. Peace won. Peacefully.

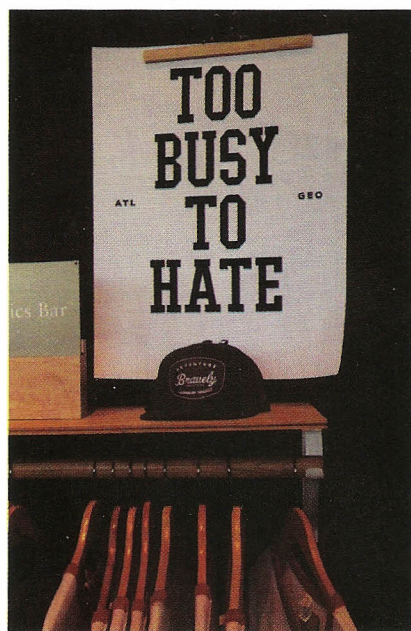
Responding peacefully to violence is a choice, a grace, and a state of being. It takes diligent effort to do so because our culture glorifies competitiveness, self-defense, and violent entertainment. But with prayer, God's word, and committed action, peace can become our natural state. Violence is not God's path. On the contrary, God admonishes us to "love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father" (Matthew 5:44–45). When the Church follows this teaching, its light shines brightly. On the flip side, the shadows that form when it sways away from this teaching can never be forgotten.

Across the Atlantic from the 1960s to the 1990s, Catholics and Protestants were killing each other over political differences. After three of her sister's children fell victim to the troubles in Northern Ireland, Mairead Corrigan Maguire, a young housewife during those turbulent times, cofounded the Peace People movement in 1976. The organization facilitated a number of grass-roots peace teams and peace marches that drew more than 500,000 participants. The Peace People worked diligently for justice and pacifism—dual sources of peace. An immediate, rapid decline in deaths followed. As Mairead says, "Jesus' strategy is to 'love your neighbor as yourself' and 'love your enemies.' This means we overcome evil through active nonviolence....Our strategy is dialogue....It is up to everyone to make dialogue possible."

How can we enable productive dialogue when confronted with violent words or actions? In Proverbs 15, King Solomon offers examples of how to use words as blessings: with gentleness, knowledge, soothing

words, instruction, prayer, reproof, patience, counsel, timeliness, graciousness, thoughtful responses, and good news. When St. Paul was imprisoned for Christ, he prayed for his persecutors, seeking to win them for Christ. He admonished the church, "Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you know how you should respond to each one" (Colossians 4:5–6).

Mairead Maguire is still working for peace. I had the pleasure of meeting this gentle peace builder at a Nobel Women's Initiative conference in 2011. Knowing firsthand the futility of armed resistance, she also challenges its legitimacy. "The day the churches blessed war, they denied Christ, because Christ told us to love our enemies and not to be afraid... Christ was a pacifist," Mairead says.



"For the first 300 years after Christ, the early Christian communities lived a total commitment to Jesus' way of nonviolence. What is needed in Ireland—and the Christian world—is for all church leaders and Christians to renounce the lie of the just war theory....[W]e need a new theology of nonviolence and peace."

As a peace builder, I have wrestled with how the world could have resisted Hitler with less violence. Certainly his brutality demanded forceful resistance, but about sev-

enty million lives were lost in World War II. Could there have been a better way to resist hate? Suppose we, unarmed, laid down our lives to defend the Jews and the occupied countries. Certainly lives would have been lost, but perhaps not nearly as many, and our souls would have been spared. Could it have also prevented the atrocities committed against Nagasaki and Hiroshima, the nuclear arms race, or rewrote the history of future wars?

While we can't change the past, we can impact the future. We should ask ourselves: *What is the path of peace before us now? And what does the Bible teach?*

Although we can clearly see that God used war and capital punishment as disciplinary tools in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 20, Habakkuk 1–2, Exodus 21–22), there is a marked decline in the use of violence in the New Testament. Jesus suffered capital punishment to establish peace and protected a victim of capital punishment (John 8:1–11). Jesus established peace between the people and God (Ephesians 2:1–10), and harmony between people in conflict (Ephesians 2:11–22, Galatians 3:26–28). Furthermore, Jesus taught, "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, offer no resistance to one who is evil. When someone strikes you on your right cheek, turn the other one to him as well. If anyone wants to go to law with you over your tunic, hand him your cloak as well. Should anyone press you into service for one mile go with him for two miles. Give to the one who asks of you, and do not turn your back on one who wants to borrow" (Matthew 5:38–42). Early Christians understood this to be a shift in biblical teachings on violence.

Theologian Walter Wink uncovered the historical significance of this passage through textual analysis and re-enacting the scenes. The Greek word *antistênai*, translated "resistance," doesn't mean resistance in general but armed resistance. Therefore Jesus was not saying, "Do

not resist evil,” but “do not resist evil with violence.” Using this passage in Matthew, we can glean three biblical illustrations through which Jesus provides brilliant examples of how to resist evil nonviolently.

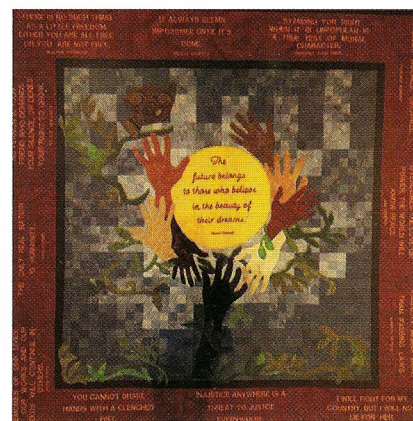
1. In first-century Palestine, those in power could backhand those under them without censure, but to backhand an equal resulted in a 400-zuz (Jewish coin) fine—100 times the fine for striking him with your fist. Thus a backhanded blow was a demeaning insult. However, turning the other cheek exposed it for a second slap with the palm of the hand—the sign of a fight between equals. This subtle detail transforms this sign of apparent submission into a demand to be treated as an equal—a potent demonstration of nonviolent resistance.

2. In the second example, Jesus tells penniless debtors being sued for the literal shirt off their backs to give their undergarment, too! To walk in

public in your cloak humiliated you, but to give it to the plaintiff dramatically exposes his greed, humiliating him. Furthermore, it exposes the false justice that let creditors grind people into landless, jobless poverty, then call them criminals for not paying their debts. Jesus’ brilliant strategy opens blind eyes to see that the system, not the debtor, requires judgment. We still need this clarity of vision today.

3. In the third example, Jesus tells his followers to go two miles when someone forced them to go one. A Roman soldier could command an Israelite to carry his pack one mile, which proved to be humiliating and a source of economic hardship, since it removed him from productive labor. However, to voluntarily carry the pack a second mile turned the tables, indebting the soldier to the Jew. Regardless of the outcome, the Jew won his agency.

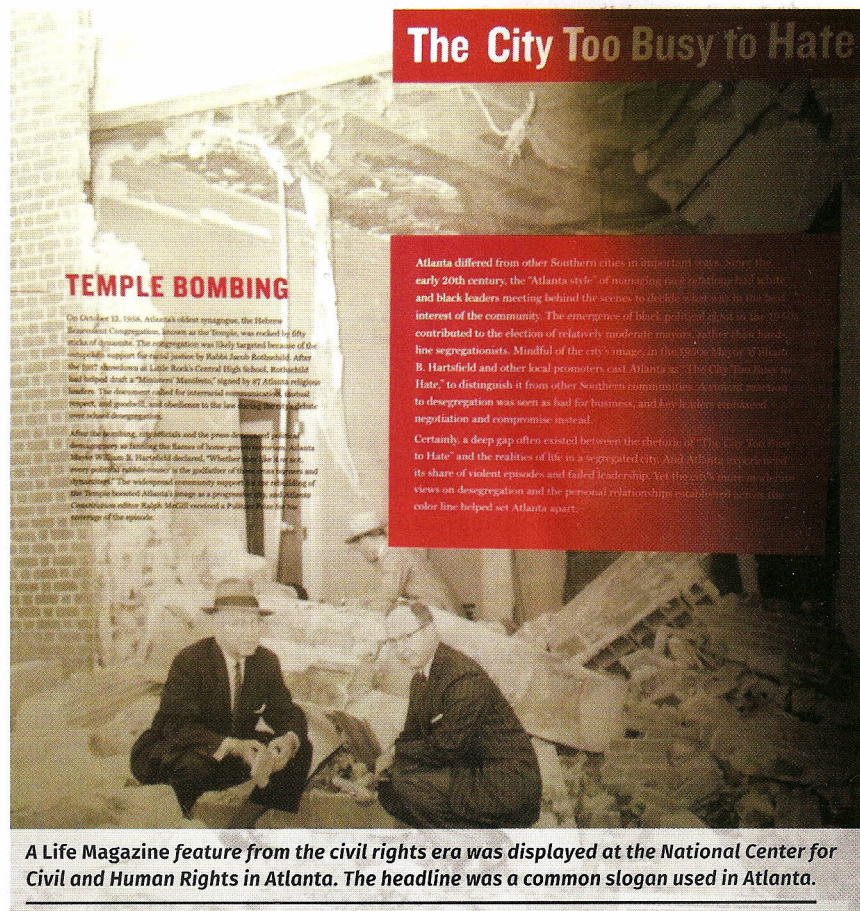
Jesus’ teaching was not one of



Justice We Shall Pursue (2010-2013) is a quilt depicting a tree of life and includes patches representing forty-two countries. Displayed at the Center for Civil and Human Rights in Atlanta, the art was donated by the Peach State Stitches.

passivity that let unjust oppressors off the hook; rather, Jesus taught passive resistance that called for systemic change. Unfortunately, we still need such strategies today to affirm that all are equal. Jesus instructs us to fight for justice justly and creatively.

Leaders with peace-filled motives like Martin Luther King, Jr., Mairead Maguire, Nelson Mandela, and Mohandas Gandhi proved that pacifist resistance is potent and effective. But is Mairead Maguire right? Is it time for Christians to fully renounce war? In my opinion, yes. The “just” war just doesn’t work. Two-thirds of those killed in the last 500 years were European Christians killed by other Europeans. How can God be on both sides? Furthermore, violent uprisings are much less successful at leading to democracy than nonviolent protests and result in countless deaths. And what is the purpose of a just war: democracy, justice, and freedom? Can we strive for the same nonviolently? Suppose we invested as much in peace as we invest in war, with money, armies of peace builders on the ground and at the ready, a virtuous industry supplying the needs of the people we were defending? Defense budgets divert billions of dollars each year, which would preclude the need



A Life Magazine feature from the civil rights era was displayed at the National Center for Civil and Human Rights in Atlanta. The headline was a common slogan used in Atlanta.

for war if we invested them in education, social services, and the environment instead. The idea is that if every human being had equal access to life, liberty, and the means to pursue happiness, peace could be given the nutrients to thrive on earth.

What about self defense? Is it legitimate to use violence to thwart violence? According to examples set forth in the Bible by Christ and his disciples, there's no room for Christians to put the Second Amendment over the Fifth Commandment (Exodus 20:13). Saint Paul defended himself with politically savvy arguments, appeals, and words, but not force. "For our struggle is not with flesh and blood but with the principalities, with the powers, with the world rulers of this present darkness, with the evil spirits in the heavens" (Ephesians 6:12). In other words, the fight is not against people. We're fighting spiritual blindness and evil forces while seeking to win everyone to Christ. Our armor is truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, salvation, the word of God, and prayer (Ephesians 6:13-18). While war is the most destructive violence people face, the most prevalent is violence in our personal lives, including harsh words, arguments, or physical violence. When anger rises within us and makes us want to raise our voices and fists against injustice, remember we're in a spiritual battle. We have to channel our anger into responses that are peaceful, even passionate. Let's raise our voices in cries for justice and peace, not accusations and slurs. Let's raise our hands to nonviolent protests, not violent responses. May we strive to be tireless in doing good (Galatians 6:9), and may we do it peacefully. #



Carole St. Laurent is an award-winning specialist in information and communication technologies. Her organization, CryPeace.org, nurtures empathy and peace by sharing stories from around the world, including Rwanda, Uganda, Israel, Cyprus and Turkey.



Listen to others respectfully.

"Know this, my dear brothers: everyone should be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath, for the wrath of a man does not accomplish the righteousness of God" (James 1:19-20).

Control your anger. "Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun set on your anger, and do not leave room for the devil" (Ephesians 4:26-27).

Be truthful, forgiving, and kind.

"Therefore, putting away falsehood, speak the truth, each one to his neighbor, for we are members one of another....All bitterness, fury, anger, shouting, and reviling must be removed from you, along with all malice. [And] be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving one another as God has forgiven you in Christ" (Ephesians 4:25, 31-32).

Use words for good, not evil

(Proverbs 15). For "if anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, his religion is vain" (James 1:26). It's not easy to hold one's tongue, but the consequences of neglecting to do so can be devastating (James 3).

To Learn More, Check Out These Resources:

Walter Wink has written a number of books and articles: *Jesus and Nonviolence: A Third Way*; "How Turning the Other Cheek Defies Oppression"; "Beyond Just War and Pacifism: Jesus' Nonviolent Way, Facing the Myth of Redemptive Violence."

Mairead Corrigan Maguire wrote *The Vision of Peace: Faith and Hope in Northern Ireland*.

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story*.

George Lakey, a civil rights activist cofounded Earth Quaker Action Team and spoke on the King Center's Racism, Poverty and Militarism panel.

Watch inspiring videos on Narrative4.org, designed to build empathy across divides through dialogue.

Find more resources on pacifism and nonviolent resistance at CryPeace.org.