

VIOLENCE AND EFFORTS TO BRING ABOUT PEACE

By Doris Regan, OP (San Pedro Sula, Honduras)

Writing a reflection on efforts to bring about peace in Honduras seems more dream than reality given the events of the past year. On June 28, 2009, a democratically elected President was captured at gun point by his generals and flown out of the country. A virtual martial law existed for almost seven months until the election of a new President, and it continues to exist in subtle ways even now.

It is not civil war with battlefields and casualties resulting from armed conflicts. Instead, polarizing ideologies carry on a war of words and deeds that continues to cause deep political, social, and economic wounds. Increased violence, impunity for organized crime, an economic downward spiral, and a generalized feeling of fear prevail.

Yet, the headline displayed the day after the January elections spoke of “reconciliation without dialogue” – that is, “let’s move on and forget the past.” Everyone prefers a semblance of peace and no one really likes conflict.

So, what does or what can one do in this atmosphere? According to Thomas Merton, non-violence is the “art of the possible” and here would be a place to start. Ghandi always said that “Our task is not to think about the world but to want to change it.” From the very day of the coup, a part of the population never before heard from, began to speak. They called themselves a peaceful resistance group and for months held daily non-violent marches calling for the restoration of constitutional order, and true to Ghandi’s comments that “non-violence will inevitably bring about suffering.” This group has been persecuted. Many leaders have disappeared; others have been tortured and imprisoned. Human Rights groups have consistently called for investigations of the abuses that still occur routinely.

Jesus (no stranger to conflict in his own day) challenges us to alternative ways of dealing with personal conflict and/or social violence. We are asked to “love our enemy” (and that includes ourselves!). Watching the end of a World Cup Soccer match where handshakes replace hard-fought battles between opposing countries, is an emotional “visual” for the world. Here in San Pedro, a small Peace and Justice Circle of committed lay Dominicans meet from time to time. We study, reflect and plan visits to rural communities where we use “See-Judge-Act” methods with small and large groups. The first session on “Dignity of the Human Person” drew more than 60 persons. Many spoke of experiences where they were treated with dignity or with violence and moments when they had not recognized the dignity of another person. Follow-up sessions deal with “Dignity of the Community,” and “Dignity of a People.” Our aim is to animate the communities toward building better futures for themselves.

The country is still as divided as before the coup, perhaps even more so. Little by little perhaps, eyes can be opened and hearts changed. As Merton says: “Christian non-violence is not built on a presupposed division but on the basic unity of humankind.”