

The DuPage Glocal AIDS Action Network (DGAAN) and The Practice of Integrity for Nonviolence By Sr. Sheila Kinsey, OSF, D.Min.

INSIGHTS FROM FRANCISCAN SPIRITUALITY

Purpose: This reflection paper shows how I, as a Franciscan, consciously practice nonviolence in my role as one of the co-chairs of DGAAN.

I am mindful of how my Franciscan heritage, influences my ideas and practices of nonviolence. Francis was characterized and recognized as a peacemaker when he brought his message in areas of deep conflict, hatred, injury, doubt and despair because he responded with love, pardon, faith and hope. Francis readily countered difficult situations from the deep well of his reflective spirit, from his integrity that was rooted in God.

There are numerous similarities between Francis' day and our day. We see people grasping for power who engage in war to protect their rights and property. We know that poverty creates a chasm between the rich and the poor. We are aware of people who are marginalized and stigmatized in our society and they are the ones Francis would reach out to today.

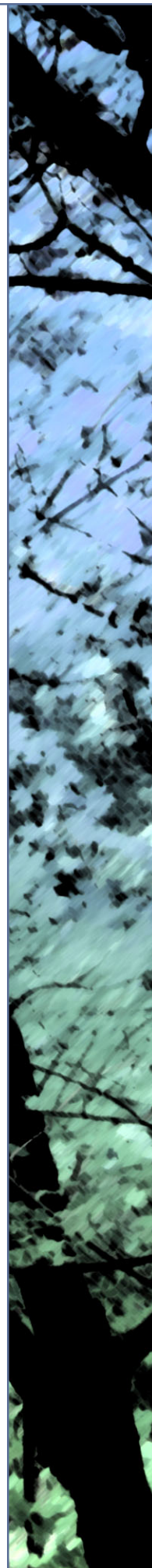
Francis knew the importance of personal contacts. While he honored places for prayer and reflection, he also related authentically with St. Clare and the brothers. The Franciscan friars were sent out to be in the midst of conflict and to bring about social change by creating a more just society through peaceful means. St. Clare lived her life within a cloister and thus came to understand in deeper ways what it meant to establish a community within a particular context. For her, community was built through a shared vision and through specific day-to-day actions.

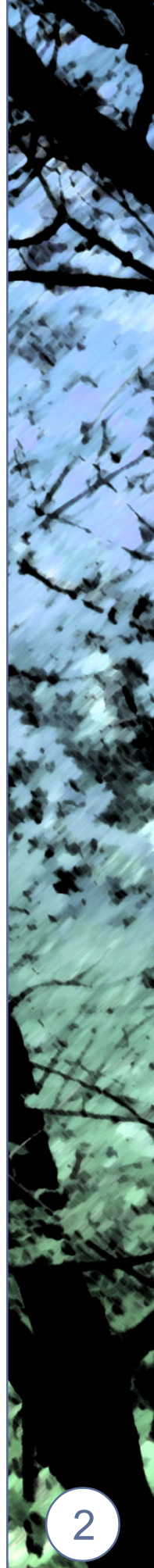
Francis recognized the struggle in realizing peace in his own heart and responded to God's grace in the process of his change and transformation. *One day he was riding his horse near Assisi, when he met a leper. And, even though he usually shuddered at lepers, he made himself dismount, and gave him a coin, kissing his hand as he did so. After he accepted a kiss of peace from him, Francis remounted and continued on his way. He then began to consider himself less and less, until, by God's grace, he came to complete victory over himself.*²

Much work still needs to be done in the United States to prevent the transmission of HIV/AIDS and to reach out to persons with HIV/AIDS, particularly the poor who are in great need of services. Not everyone has access to health care and medication and people are still suffering from the marginalizing effects of the disease. HIV medications are prohibitively expensive for people who are poor or do not have health insurance. People with HIV are still ostracized by their

Francis understood the power of words to help create the peace desired. *As he later testified, he learned a greeting of this sort by the Lord's revelation: "May the Lord give you peace!" Therefore, in all his preaching he greeted the people at the beginning of his sermon with a proclamation of peace.*¹

Peacemaking is at the heart of my facilitation as a co-chair of the DuPage Glocal AIDS Action Network (DGAAN). This advocacy network joins both local and global efforts to eliminate the scourge of AIDS with a particular focus on AIDS in Africa. My practice of nonviolence strengthens my ability to consciously combat the AIDS pandemic that threatens the stability of African countries. I recognize that poverty becomes further entrenched as families and the work force are decimated by AIDS.





family and can face discrimination in the workplace. To their credit, it is the local AIDS activists who have pushed for advances in the U.S. Working to overcome the violence of AIDS can only be done with a global stance of nonviolence.

Practice of Integrity for Nonviolence

Violence as a corrective to injustice can only have short-term results. Ultimately, violence breeds only more violence. Violence intimidates and forces people to act in unhealthy ways. There are obvious ramifications of physical violence, but non-physical and verbal violence, while more subtle and less noticeable, is equally destructive. Violence is at the heart of injustices.

Violence can take place within groups, even when the cause is just. Some people may vie for control of the meetings and clamor for turf rights. Truth can be shaded when trying to engage people to support a cause. Someone's right to speak can be ignored. In the name of a just cause, people might not assume responsibility for negotiating fairly. Necessary information may not be provided, yet trust and support is assumed and expected. Personal agendas can be so overwhelming that they can be destructive of the spirit of the group. With our DGAAN meetings and follow-up actions, I believe we must actively nurture a culture of nonviolence while we are engaged in countering the violence of injustices, home and abroad.

The practice of nonviolence enables me to act from a sound personal basis and an effective organizational framework. Responding from my integrity creates meaningful actions and effective results. Integrity requires that I set aside reflection time for discernment, speak from my convictions, and determine how to act. Through this process, I gain a quiet sense of knowing what is mine to do from a nonjudgmental compassionate stance.

Francis valued personal integrity. *He used to tell them: "As you announce peace with your mouth, make sure that you have greater peace in your hearts,"*³

Meetings and Advocacy

The Franciscan values of community and relatedness lead me to address the area of social change and advocacy through group meetings. In the Gospel, Jesus spoke about the importance of meetings when he promised: "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Matthew 18:20. Meetings provide a dynamic opportunity to attend to moments of grace. Adhering to a schedule or routine defines space for a free flow of ideas so that depth of sharing happens. Providing a welcoming space is conducive to the sharing that takes place with the following format:

- introductions,
- prayer,
- sharing advocacy efforts and receiving ongoing support,
- new learnings,
- future directions and
- a sending forth with a sense of actions to do.

Celebrations of successes are important for the common good. True unity is possible in honoring the diversity of the group and in acknowledging member's actions. We are challenged to go deep into the issues to find common ground where questions are welcomed to clarify understanding, to develop meaning, and to challenge our thinking. People are energized to act and are invited to share the fruits of their actions at the next meeting. The group becomes more cohesive and powerful as more participants collectively identify with the spirit and thrust for the common good in which all can have a significant part.

My experience working with the oppressed has led me to develop **Integrity for Nonviolence (IFN)**, which is an integrative process that promotes the spiritual practice of nonviolence. In my role as a co-chair within DGAAN, a nonviolent stance is demonstrated by these values: creating respect, practicing honesty, promoting justice and nurturing wholesome relationships. By consciously attending to these values, I can facilitate the creation of a culture of nonviolence. How the group participants are able to interact with one another has a significant impact on what the network can do. In my mind, these meetings provide an avenue for the spiritual practice of nonviolence.

Creating Respect

Francis realized that body language and tone carried communications. *By a joyful face he understood the fervor and solicitude, the disposition and readiness of a mind and body to willingly undertake every good work; because through this kind of fervor and disposition others are at times more motivated than through the good deed itself.*⁴

To create respect, I consciously honor the dignity of each person by initiating simple courtesies. Network participants are welcomed into a carefully prepared, and inviting meeting space. At the meeting each person is given an opportunity to share information. Value is given to each person's right to speak, even if not everyone is in agreement with what is said. The overlying message is that the person speaking is important. When there are times for personal sharing, people are encouraged to share what is comfortable for them. People are not encouraged to pry into delicate or sensitive areas. Good communication methods are developed for a common understanding with periodic check-ins with the group for needed clarifications.

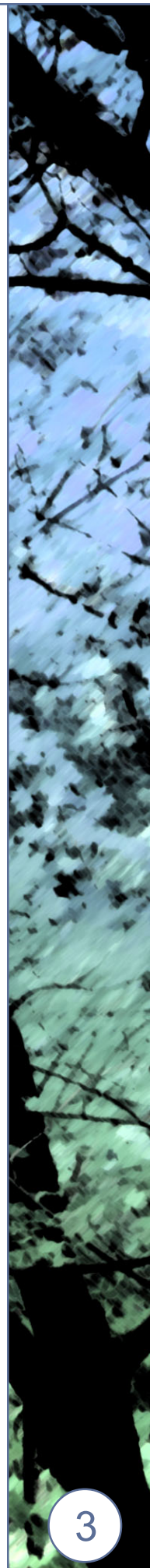
Applications: A receptive and nurturing meeting space enables participants to share what they have done. People readily ask for help with local AIDS projects and legislative issues. For example, High School Students made a quilt commemorating their thoughts and feelings about the AIDS pandemic in Africa, while they fasted and prayed. They presented the quilt at a DGAAN meeting and the quilt has since traveled to a number of places to be displayed along with talks about AIDS. Other people have held fundraising events and sponsored educational opportunities. Communication has been strengthened by e-mails, cards, reminders and handouts.

Francis discerned his actions through the lens of compassion. *For he spoke to them compassionately, not as a judge, but as a father to his children and a doctor to his patient.*⁵

I consciously establish a safe and non-threatening place for the participants. Care is given to see that helpful and productive ideas are surfaced. People are encouraged to share their ideas without feeling intimidated or threatened. Opinions are received as thoughts to consider. Both before and after the meeting, and at other times, participants are available to talk with each other and especially with the co-

chairs. Knowing that we are in it for the long haul, I am sensitive to the process that takes place within individuals and within the political system in which we are advocates for change.

Applications: Strive to establish a mutually receptive spirit with legislators. Be upfront with your agenda when addressing change with legislatures: know what legislators have done, praise their efforts where possible, state the problem, urge the needed change and let them know that you are praying for them. Such a sample letter would be: Dear _____, Thank you for _____. I'm concerned about _____. I urge you to do _____. Know that you and your loved ones are in my prayers.



Practicing Honesty

Francis learned the secret for open and truthful communication. *Out of the purity of his mind he drew his confidence in preaching and, even without preparation, he used to say the most amazing things to everyone.*⁶

In the practice of honesty, I attend to open and truthful communication in various ways. I am watchful that only credible and accurate information is provided for our advocacy purposes. We have a strategic planning process based on reliable contributions from the participants. Realistic plans are clear and concrete. Our vision becomes actualized in this planning process. Participants are affirmed and encouraged to do what they say that they will do.

Applications: It's important to honestly consider the whole picture. It is necessary to determine realistic goals and stay on track. Set forth a plan and provide feedback about the progress. Having a vision allows our sights to stay focused and guards against pettiness. Such phrases that have captured the vision are "Keep America's Promise to Africa" and "Build the Movement."

Francis gained a deep understanding of who he was and what he was to do. *In his passing out of this world to the next, he encouraged his brothers with these words: "I have done what is mine; may Christ teach you what is yours!"*⁷

I need to freely assume meaningful activities in order to express my true self. I am conscious of the fact that I enjoy doing the work that is significant for me and I strive to find ways for this to be meaningful for others. In the network, people are challenged to grow and to use their capabilities wherever possible. Personal values are practiced without being compromised by pressure to promote an issue that someone does not believe in. Participants learn skills and gain expertise through educational and coaching sessions. People

are encouraged to express what is true for them without putting others down.

Applications: It's helpful to provide opportunities for coaching and education through reading material and guest speakers. Go over requirements for meetings with elected officials. If several people are attending a meeting, determine each person's role in the visit beforehand and practice what each person is going to say. It is also helpful to consider the opinions and feelings of the official and to anticipate questions they may have and to try to provide answers to their questions.

Promoting Justice

Francis practices specific social actions as a result of his faith.

*If you bestow your bread on the hungry,
then your light shall break forth like the dawn,
and your justice will go before your face.*⁸

In the area of justice, opportunities to express accountability and responsibility energize the group. Goals are measurable. We have clear expectations about the purposes of DGAAN. In a dependable way the meetings begin with time allotted for informal networking and the meetings always end on time. Ownership for DGAAN grows as members realize that they are a part of creating the image of the network.

Various people are included in news stories. Ongoing feedback is encouraged by an established format that has been embraced by the members. A person tells their name, their organization and their plans for actions and their results. The group is actively involved in developing a glocal community response that includes both local and global responses.

Applications: Provide opportunities for participants to share their actions and to solicit input from others. Wherever possible, capitalize on the work of local AIDS activists since they know what works for them. Encourage local involvement. Very few of the DGAAN persons will be able to travel to Africa, but they can take advantage of local AIDS activities.

Francis negotiates a fair agreement with the violent wolf and the citizens of Gubbio: This scene has implications for personal hunger that each participant in the group has for social issues. If these hungers are not dealt with appropriately, then they can dominate and be destructive of the group and the person.: *“Brother Wolf, since you want to make this pact, I*



promise you that as long as you live I will have your needs constantly provided for by the people of this city, so that you will never again suffer hunger, because I know that, whatever evil you do, you do because of the frenzy of hunger. But, my Brother Wolf, for me to obtain this favor for you, I want you to promise me that you will never harm any animal or person or dare to harm anything. Will you promise me that?” The wolf gave a clear sign by bowing its head that it promised to do what the saint demanded. ⁹

I look for ways that we can negotiate in fairness. When

conflicts arise, the problems are discussed in a way that considers the needs and expected outcomes of all in both the local and global concern. For example, money for AIDS is not taken from allocations for local programs or other global programs in order to fund the newer initiatives. In the spirit of cooperation, problems are resolved on the most effective level possible. Sometimes that involves extra one-on-one interactions to discuss matters privately. Using nonviolent communication skills, situations are resolved without blaming or criticizing on the personal level. Individual rights are safeguarded in a way that promotes a fair and productive network. Conflicts are dealt with in a timely and workable manner.

Applications: Consciously advocate for legislation for the glocal concerns that stipulate that global AIDS funding does not take away from local AIDS programs or other global programs. It is important to stay with the struggle to attend to local concerns even as we attend to global issues.

Nurturing Wholesome Relationships

Francis and the early friars consciously attended to the needs of one another. *They loved one another from the heart and each one served and took care of the other.* ¹⁰

In the area of nurturing wholesome relationships, I strive to provide adequate resources. The necessary equipment, materials and services are available to accomplish the work of the network. As a group, we look for creative ways to address new situations. We endeavor to better our advocacy efforts, to strengthen connections and to utilize a consistent process for the

initiation, follow-through and follow-up for the work to be done. Participants know that we operate as a team in the network. All our participants are encouraged to use their abilities for the good of others and for themselves.

Applications: Endeavor to see that all information is adequate, accurate and timely. With the establishment of clear activities to realize goals, participants have distinct opportunities to become involved. Know the process of the legislation. Brainstorm for what is needed and ask for what is necessary from other organizations. Stay with the plan and educate as needed.

Francis new the importance of a positive attitude in creating trust and support. *In fact, if an act, however good it might be, does not seem to be done willingly and fervently, it brings forth tedium rather than motivating good.* ¹¹

I strive to find ways that demonstrate trust and support. The success of each person is acknowledged. The values of diverse cultures are recognized and appreciated. Persons are able to share their expertise and skills in ways that matter to them and to the network. In developing the network, persons are able to address their own needs in addition to the needs of the network. To sustain the general welfare of the group, I strive to make information available to the membership in a timely manner and encourage each person to do their part to keep informed about the AIDS

pandemic.

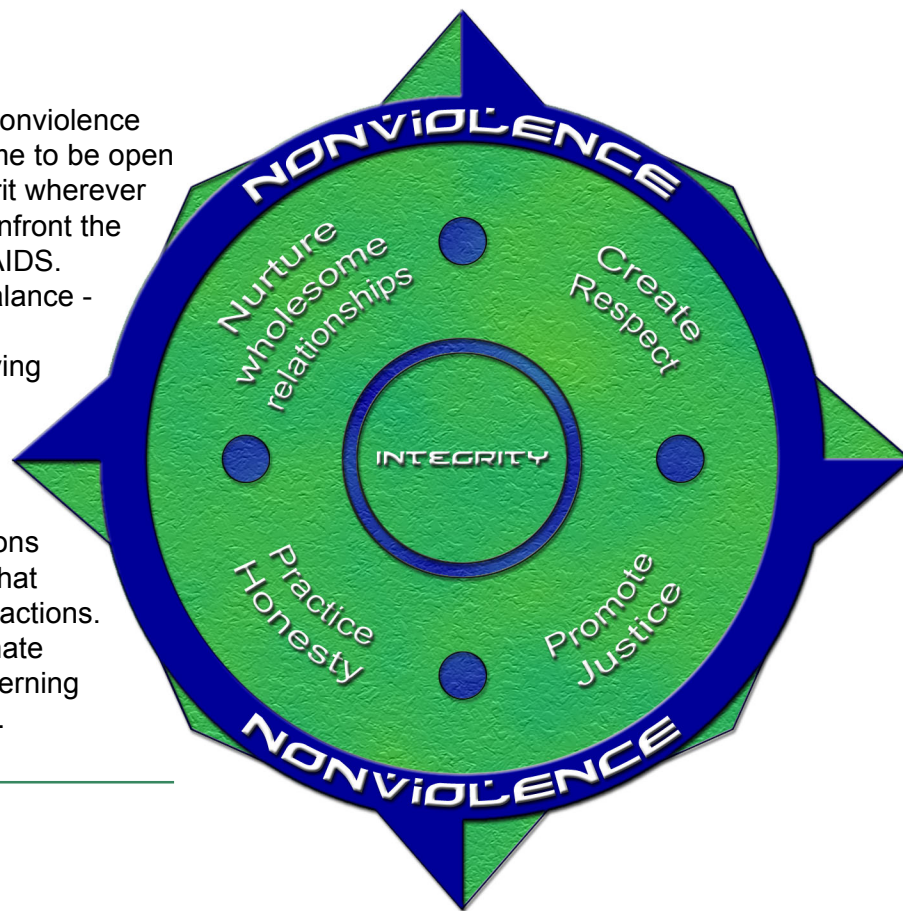
Applications: Seek out ways for all to be considered team players in all the group's actions, such as making calls, sending e-mails, writing letters and making legislative visits. Everyone counts and no one should be left out. There is ownership for the whole group and any success is applauded. Opportunities for press and media coverage are shared. Although individual concerns are raised and honored as much as possible, participants are engaged in promoting the shared goals and common good of the network.

Conclusion

My image of **Integrity for Nonviolence** is a compass. A compass provides the right direction when it is firmly oriented to it's true North which for me means true ethical sensibility. An inner compass helps me reflect on my directions and helps me discern what cause I need to consider. The four values of my **Integrity for Nonviolence** process are my directional points: creating respect, practicing honesty, promoting justice and nurturing wholesome relationships.

The conscious practice of nonviolence through integrity prepares me to be open to the movement of the Spirit wherever I have the opportunity to confront the devastating effects of HIV/AIDS. Such a process provides balance - centering me in prayer and discernment while also moving me to engage others in the long-term work of justice and peace.

I come to social justice actions with a contemplative spirit that nourishes my social justice actions. By attending to compassionate responses, I develop a discerning heart for what is mine to do.



Bibliography

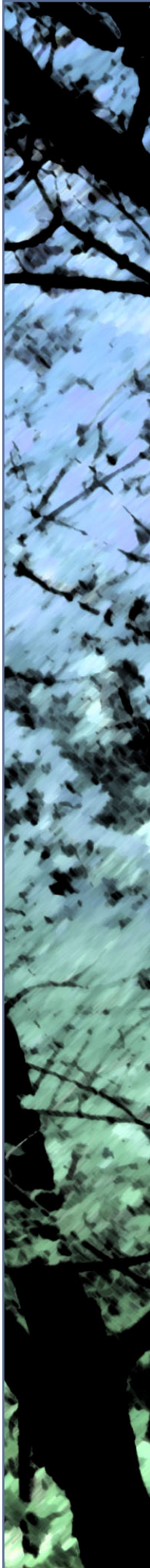
1 - The Legend of the Three Companions as found in Francis of Assisi the Founder Volume II of: Francis of Assisi: Early Documents p. 84. The words we use create the framework for our actions. Words express what is important for us. In many ways the current word use of *nonviolence* strives to capture Francis's understanding of harmony and struggle that he associated with the word *peace*.

2 - The Legend of the Three Companions as found in Francis of Assisi the Founder Volume II of: Francis of Assisi: Early Documents p. 74. The kissing of the leper was a conversion experience for Francis, an event that he frequently reflected upon. This process enabled him to deeply understand the significance of his time. In the same way our reflection on the significance of the local and global aspects of the HIV/AIDS pandemic has created opportunities for who we see as our sister and brother.

3 - The Beginning or Founding of the Order and the Deeds of Those Lesser Brothers Who Were the First Companions of Blessed Francis in Religion by Anonymous of Perugia as found in Francis of Assisi the Founder Volume II of : Francis of Assisi: Early Documents p. 52. It's always important to check periodically to see if we are sharing a message that we authentically embrace and are committed to developing within ourselves.

4 - A Mirror of Perfection The Sabatier Edition as found in Francis of Assisi the Prophet Volume III of: Francis of Assisi: Early Documents p. 343. A courteous and respectful manner does much to develop a welcoming and receptive environment.

5 - The Beginning or Founding of the Order and the Deeds of Those Lesser Brothers Who Were the First Companions of Blessed Francis in Religion by Anonymous of Perugia as



found in Francis of Assisi the Founder Volume II of: Francis of Assisi: Early Documents p. 53. When we find ourselves involved in controversial issues, we need to be guided by our personal spirit of compassion and remain nonjudgmental.

6 - The Life of St. Francis by Thomas Celano The First Book as found in Francis of Assisi the Saint Volume of: Francis of Assisi: Early Documents p. 245. Constant efforts to strive for the truth will enable us to speak an authentic and clear message.

7 - The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul by Thomas of Celano The Second Book as found in Francis of Assisi the Founder Volume II of Francis of Assisi: Early Documents p. 386. It is important to assume the responsibility to determine what is ours to do during our lifetime. God is there to help us do this.

8 - The Beginning or Founding of the Order and the Deeds of Those Lesser Brothers Who Were the First Companions of Blessed Francis in Religion by Anonymous of Perugia as found in Francis of Assisi the Founder Volume II of: Francis of Assisi: Early Documents p. 35. Our faith needs to have good works in order for us to be faith-filled. We are involved in the needs for our times.

9 - The Deeds of Blessed Francis and His Companions by Ugolino Boniscambi of Montegiorgi as found in Francis of Assisi the Prophet Volume III of: Francis of Assisi: Early Documents p 483 Story pp482-485. A similar story is also found in The Little Flowers of Saint Francis pp 601-603 in the same volume. Being involved with injustices can raise up personal issues that have been unconscious for a number of years, which if left unattended, can be acted out in a group. Also, being in the midst of injustices can be destructive if a person is not fortified by a clear way of acting.

10 - The Beginning or Founding of the Order and the Deeds of Those Lesser Brothers Who Were the First Companions of Blessed Francis in Religion by Anonymous of Perugia as found in Francis of Assisi the Founder Volume II of: Francis of Assisi: Early Documents p. 46. Mutuality creates wholesome relationships.

11 - A Mirror of Perfection, the Sabatier Edition, pg 343. Willing and committed people nourish the trust and support necessary for the team to function in a healthy manner.

Sr. Sheila Kinsey, OSF, D.Min., is a Wheaton Franciscan. She has been a teacher, principal and diocesan director of religious education. Sr. Sheila has been involved with counseling and managing domestic violence and sexual abuse programs, and has provided assistance to church groups and civic organizations on these issues. She has pioneered the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) Office and promotes legislative advocacy on social justice issues on behalf of the province.

Sr. Sheila has direct experience with peacemaking efforts in corporate culture and ministry settings, and can speak to the practice of nonviolence in personal and communal contexts. She has developed **Integrity of Nonviolence**, a value centered process dedicated to the promotion of nonviolence by providing strategies and interventions for social change within the workplace and community settings.

Sr. Sheila Kinsey co-chairs the DuPage Glocal AIDS Action Network (DGAAN) along with Ashley Woodiwiss, Ph.D. and Sandra Joireman, Ph.D., both faculty in the Department of Politics and International Relations at Wheaton College. DGAAN was formed in December, 2002, as a result of Bono, of the rock group U2, stopping at Wheaton College for an appearance on the Heart of America Tour to ask America's help in addressing the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Africa.

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