

Massaro text (628 words) for June 20, 2022 conference session on peacebuilding

We at Fordham are especially pleased to be sponsoring this event so early in this important international gathering. When we planned out the themes, we had very much at the front of mind the three assumptions behind this conference 1) that a theology of hope matters, 2) that peacebuilding matters, 3) and specifically that Catholic peacebuilding matters.

We are very impressed by those parts of the conference program that so evidently tap the abundant expertise of world-class experts in such topics as the institutional networks to enhance global security and practical strategies for disarmament and peacebuilding. We look forward to those sessions where such brass-tacks considerations will shed abundant light on the paths forward. But we are also eager to highlight the value of some perhaps “softer” themes and topics that felicitously complement those “harder” or practical considerations. In this session, which we have framed as a “discussion forum” by way of format, we seek simply to provide space to invite wide-ranging conversations regarding the personal and cultural task of “disarming hearts.”

As you may have seen in the session description, we are convinced that only a genuine conversion of individual hearts, and writ larger, a conversion of entire cultures, will provide a stable basis for lasting peace. Such high-minded aspirations remain mere idle dreams in the absence of some tangible resources that establish the basis for our hopes for peacebuilding. Fortunately, the Catholic tradition features rich spiritual and cultural resources to nourish these hopes. The sub-title of our session captures these insights in a nutshell: “Shaping a Culture of Peacebuilding through Spirituality in the Catholic Tradition.” We would love to hear from all our participants what you understand to be promising elements of Roman Catholicism, past and present, that support these purposes.

Definitions of culture can be maddeningly vague, but the best ones refer to an ensemble of beliefs and practices that express key dimensions of the life of a people. Can you identify any particularly decisive doctrinal affirmations or tenets of the Catholic faith that support peace and the strenuous efforts at peacebuilding that are required to make effective our aspirations to reduce conflict in the world?

Just as important as religious doctrines are practices that enact our faith, and we would love to hear from some of you about how you view the role of prayer, in all its wondrous variety, as sustaining and inspiring efforts to advance peace. Have you witnessed specific practices of prayer, public or private in nature, that seem to succeed in forming more peaceful people and communities? Besides prayer, are there any spiritual practices that you would recommend for developing interior dispositions favoring peace and that express the priority (indeed urgency) of peacebuilding? Not to be overlooked is the role of the arts in advancing a peaceful perspective on our suffering world. The visual, graphic and performing arts (including film, literature and poetry) are critical elements of any culture, and especially a culture open to peacebuilding. In your eyes, what works in sparking the collective human imagination to support peace? What artistic contributions have perhaps “moved the needle” to change cultures in the past? What aesthetic initiatives hold promise to foster bold and constructive transformations in the future, as we face new challenges to peace?

As a Jesuit university, we Fordham folks are deliberately invoking that motif of transformation, of a conversion of hearts and cultures, that is so thoroughly Ignatian in its spiritual foundation. We are keenly interested in identifying and promoting a wide range of spiritual elements and practices that might

enhance the kind of conversions that might transform the world into a place of enhanced peaceableness. We don't fully understand how to pull this off, but perhaps you kind participants can provide some guidance, as we stoke our imaginations together. All insights, no matter how modest-sounding, are most welcome today!