Cardinal Daniel N. DiNardo of Galveston-Houston, President of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and Bishop Frank Dewane of Venice, Florida, Chairman of the USCCB Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, are calling on all people of goodwill to join in prayer and unity today in response to the violent protest and deadly attack in Charlottesville, Virginia. Their statement: "As we learn more about the horrible events ... our prayer turns today ... to the people of Charlottesville who offered a counter example to the hate marching in the streets. Let us unite ourselves in the spirit of hope offered by the clergy, people of faith, and all people of good will who peacefully defended their city and country.

We stand against the evil of racism, white supremacy and neo-nazism. We stand with our sisters and brothers united in the sacrifice of Jesus, by which love’s victory over every form of evil is assured...let us offer a special prayer of gratitude for the brave souls who sought to protect us from the violent ideology displayed. Let us especially remember those who lost their lives. Let us join their witness and stand against every form of oppression."

As Felician-Franciscans, we choose to reject all forms of discrimination and bigotry and join our brothers and sisters in prayer, as well as, in peaceful action.

**Our working definition of Nonviolence (Ahimsa): A powerful method to harmonize relationships among people (and all living things) for the establishment of justice and the ultimate well-being of all parties. It draws its power from awareness of the profound truth to which the wisdom traditions of all cultures, science, and common experience bear witness: that all life is one.

Ahimsa is not only the absence of violence, it is not simply the negation to cause harm, but it is something infinitely more: it is when one’s heart is so full of love, so full of courage, forgiveness, generosity, kindness and compassion, that there is no room for hatred, resentment and violence. It is not a double negative but a SUPERLATIVE POSITIVE!

Items needed for prayer service:

- Paschal candle or large candle in the center of the prayer space
- Individual candles for each person present (optional)
Opening Song: Choose an appropriate song.

Leader: In the name of the God of peace, the nonviolent (Ahimsa) Jesus, and the Holy Spirit of love.

Let us take a minute in silence to give thanks for all the blessings of love and peace that we have received throughout our lives from the God of love and peace. Let us ask God to forgive us for all the ways we have rejected those blessings of love and peace, all the ways we have chosen violence instead of nonviolence, all the ways we have hurt others and supported the culture of violence and war. Let us repent of our violence and ask for the grace to become people of Gospel nonviolence.

(Silence)

Please respond: “God of Peace, have mercy on us.”

Jesus, you renounced violence, loved everyone, practiced nonviolence, embodied peace, resisted injustice, and gave your life in perfect nonviolent love for humanity. God of peace, have mercy on us.

“God of Peace, have mercy on us.”

Jesus, you call us to renounce violence, love everyone, practiced nonviolence, oppose war, dismantle nuclear weapons, resist injustice, embody peace and love our enemies. “God of Peace, have mercy on us.”

“God of Peace, have mercy on us.”

All Recite Prayer: God of peace, be with us now as we repent of our violence and hear your word of peace. Help us to become your holy people of Gospel nonviolence, that we might follow the nonviolent Jesus, love one another, love our enemies, reconcile with everyone, resist injustice and pursue a new world without war, poverty, nuclear weapons, global warming or violence. We ask this in the name of the nonviolent Jesus, our brother and our peace.

At this time, the leader moves to the candle at the center of the prayer space and lights it.

First Reading: A selection from the words of Mahatma Gandhi.

“Nonviolence (Ahimsa) is the greatest force at the disposal of humanity. It is mightier than the mightiest weapon of destruction devised by the ingenuity of humanity. Nonviolence (Ahimsa) is not passivity in any shape or form. It is the most active force in the world. Nonviolence (Ahimsa) is
the supreme law. Just as one must learn the art of killing in the training for violence, so one must learn the art of dying in the training for nonviolence. One person who can express nonviolence (Ahimsa) in life exercises a force superior to all the forces of brutality. We are constantly being astonished these days at the amazing discoveries in the field of violence, but I maintain that far more undreamt of and seemingly impossible discoveries will be made in the field of nonviolence. My optimism rests on my belief in the infinite possibility of the individual to develop nonviolence (Ahimsa). The more you develop it in your own being, the more infectious it becomes till it overwhelms your surroundings and by might over sweep the world. We have to make truth and nonviolence (Ahimsa) not matters for mere individual practice, but for practice by groups and communities and nations. That, at any rate, is my dream. When the practice of nonviolence (Ahimsa) becomes universal, God will reign on earth as God reigns in heaven.” (Mohandas Gandhi: Essential Writings)

Pause for a moment of silent reflection

Reflection: How can you become more nonviolent (Ahimsa) toward yourself? Reflect on your entire life journey within the framework of violence and nonviolence (Ahimsa). What do you learn about yourself?

Group Sharing: (Groups of three of four can be created to reflect and share around the reflection questions)


“But to you who hear I say, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. To the person who strikes you on one cheek, offer the other one as well, and from the person who takes your cloak, do not withhold even your tunic. Give to everyone who asks of you, and from the one who takes what is yours do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you. For if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do the same. If you lend money to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, and get back the same amount. But rather, love your enemies and do good to them, and lend expecting nothing back; then your reward will be great and you will be children of the Most High, for he himself is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as also your Father is merciful.”
Pause for a moment of silent reflection

Reflection: (Reader can choose any grouping of questions or all questions as time permits. Feel free to edit questions as needed).

What has been your experience of the God of love and peace? When did you hear God call you, “My beloved daughter” or “My beloved son”? What does it mean for you to be a peacemaker, to be the beloved daughter or son of the God of love and peace, and to see every human being alive as a beloved sister or brother?

or

Who challenges our nonviolence (Ahimsa) most? How do we practice nonviolence (Ahimsa) to those who are violent toward us?

How can small, ordinary, day-to-day encounters, either at home or in the ministry (say ministry name here) help us strengthen our resolve towards nonviolence (Ahimsa) so that we will be better able to practice nonviolence (Ahimsa) in our public work, demonstrations, and movements?

Group Sharing: (Groups of three of four can be created to reflect and share around the reflection questions)

All Recite: The Lord’s Prayer

Leader: Today, let us pledge our commitment to our stand against violence.

Reader 1: We, the people of (Ministry name) affirm that

- Nonviolence is constitutive of the message of Jesus,
- Nonviolence is intrinsic to right relationship with all creation, and
- Nonviolent systematic change requires innovative, creative responses to social problems and conflicts.

Therefore, we reject violence in multiple forms.

All: We pledge our affirmation.

Reader 2: We support actions and policies that

- Promote nonviolent (Ahimsa) means of conflict resolution,
- Disallow discrimination of any kind,
- Generate an equitable economic system for all,
- Foster a culture of solidarity and peace, and
- Protect the Earth and Life in all its diversity.
All: We pledge our support.

Reader 3: We oppose actions and policies that legitimate
- Violent responses to conflicts, particularly war and terrorism,
- Denial of human and civil rights,
- Economic and military policies that exacerbate poverty and inequality, and
- Degradation and destruction of natural resources and ecosystems.

All: We pledge our opposition to violence in all its forms.

Reader 4: We acknowledge that the nonviolent way of Jesus challenges us to
- Examine the quality of our interpersonal relationships,
- Own the complexity inherent in our struggle to live without violence,
- Embrace diversity, and
- Espouse the common good.

All: We pledge our willingness to live the Gospel challenge.

The four readers move toward the candle in the center of the prayer space. They light their individual candles from the flame, and then move out to share this fire with all present. Adapt as appropriate in each local ministry.

Leader: Receive this holy fire as a symbol of your commitment to nonviolence at (name your ministry), in your lives, and in all your actions. Make your lives like this fire:

Holy lives, peace-filled lives that are seen by and shared with all. Lives centered in God’s justice and peace. Lives that the darkness of violence does not overcome. May this light of God’s peace grow within you. Share this fire for peace with one another and with all you meet, today and always. Amen.

-Based on a prayer from Masai people of Tanzania from Heart of Prayer by Anthony Gittins, CSSp

Closing Song: Choose an appropriate song.

Leader: Please extinguish your candles and offer one another a sign of peace.
Suggested songs:

“Bearers of peace” by Bernadette Farrell

“Let there be peace on earth” by Jill Jackson Miller and Sy Miller

“Canticle of the turning” by Rory Cooney

“Make me a channel of your peace” by Sebastian Temple

“Christ be our light” by Bernadette Farrell

“On this Holy mountain” by Joe Mattingly

“Finlandia” by Llyod Stone and Georgia Harkness

“World peace prayer” by Marty Haugen