Opinion

Guest Voices



A protester confronts a counter-protester as a large crowd gathers outside the courthouse in Prescott, Ariz., April 5, 2025, to protest against U.S. President Donald Trump's administration. Opponents of Trump and billionaire Elon Musk rallied across the U.S. to protest the administration’s actions on government downsizing, the economy, human rights and other issues. (OSV News/Bob Roller)



by John Dear

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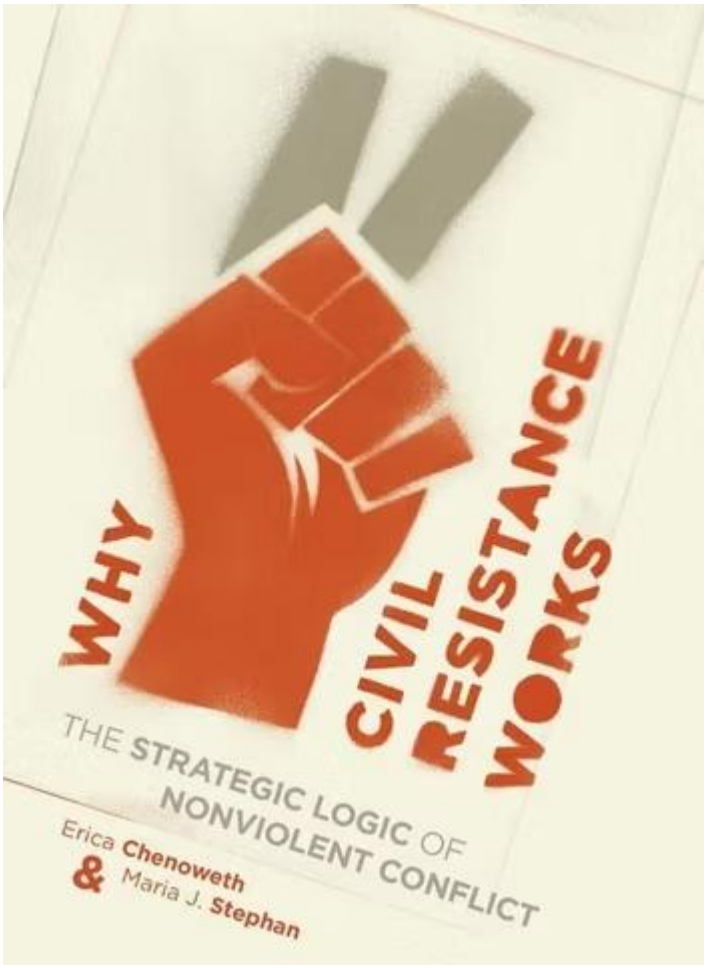
In this week's episode of "The Nonviolent Jesus Podcast," John Dear hosts Maria Stephan, a teacher, advocate and organizer who has dedicated her life to the proposition that ordinary people, when organized and inspired, can bring about extraordinary change.

"On the one hand, we have more regimes taking away rights and abusing power, but on the other, there's an explosion of nonviolent campaigns and mass mobilizations of ordinary people around the world," Stephan said.

Stephan is co-author, with Erica Chenoweth, of Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict, which documents how nonviolent resistance campaigns over the last century have been twice as effective as armed struggles, and have been major drivers of democratization and civil peace.

"The resistance is alive and well across the United States today, with over 1,300 protests with 3.5 million participants at the recent 'Hands Off Day of Action,' "

Stephan said. "… Faith communities are a glue that give people hope, and promote unity throughout these protests."



Stephan works with Horizons Project focusing on the role of nonviolent action and peacebuilding in advancing human rights, democracy, and sustainable peace in the U.S. and globally. Before joining Horizons Project, Stephan founded and directed the Program on Nonviolent Action at the U.S. Institute of Peace, overseeing global programming, applied research and policy engagement.

She was the lead foreign affairs officer in the U.S. State Department's Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations, and also worked at the International Center on Nonviolent Conflict. She has taught at Georgetown University and American University.

"Nonviolent resistance is a skill based activity; you can learn how to do better and how to build broad-based coalitions," Stephan said. "… We need to think big, both globally and locally. We need a more interconnected 'movement of movements.' We need to change the popular consciousness so that movements and campaigns are

seen as a cool form of activity."

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