

'Preach as if you had a million voices' -- a Protestant's encounter with Catherine of Siena

Sharon Abercrombie | Aug. 15, 2001 Eco Catholic

Preach the truth as if you had a million voices. It is silence that kills the world. Catherine of Siena spoke these words of advice to her 14th century contemporaries who were weary of the violence and cruelty going on around them. Hundreds of years later, the "bad times" scenario continues on every front. But environmentalists, peacemakers and social justice advocates cannot afford to cave in to despair, as tempting as that might be. We need to be those millions of voices now more than ever.

One of those voices is Tim Ahrens. This past week, Ahrens, a Protestant minister from Columbus, Ohio, reminded us of Catherine's timeless words in an article he wrote on the Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good's web site. Ahrens, senior minister at the First Congregational Church here, and an active member of BREAD, a social justice advocacy group made up of 52 local churches, synagogues and mosques, recently made a two-year commitment as a Dominican Associate with the Dominican Sisters of Peace. The sisters' motherhouse is located in Columbus.

As a Protestant pastor, I feel that the divisions in the church hurt Christians everywhere. Moreover, our divisions have hurt the human community. Becoming a Dominican Associate of Peace is one small step to healing the divide.

Ahrens spoke of the visit he made last year to Catherine's birth place. At one of the entrances of Siena stands a life-size sculpture (of her). In one hand, she holds a cross. In the other hand, she holds an olive branch. Perhaps we could learn a thing or two on peacemaking and faith-making from the first woman named a doctor of the church.

The minister draws on information about the saint from Dominican Sister Mary Driscoll, who lifts up six guidelines for peace that Catherine embodied in her life and teachings as a doctor of the Church. They can be used on Capitol Hill, in resolving international conflicts and in settling family squabbles. I dare say they may be used in parish Council meetings, within the Church and between all Christians and religions when dissensions and disagreements ensue.

Catherine's guidelines are:

- Come out of your woods and do not hide behind your gender, your level of education or anything else.
- Build bridges.
- Be open to both sides.
- Speak the truth in love.

- Act peacefully.
- Go down the ladder of your humanity and meet people exactly where they are and help them with what they need.

To read Ahrens? complete article, go to: www.catholicsinalliance.org/cgf81011_ahrens.php
[1]

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[1] <http://www.catholicsinalliance.org/cgf81011ahrens.php>