

Susan Crane writes from the prison on October 11, 2024

While I'm in the prison, I feel wrapped in the kindness, generosity and community of the women in prison with me, and the kindness of guards. And while I'm out in the church and the community, I feel wrapped in kindness and compassion, and a generosity of spirit that continues to humble me.

The support of people in the U.S. and Germany and Amsterdam has been so warm, compassionate, and practical that it would take a book to thank everyone.

When I'm in prayer, I feel wrapped in God's love, and at the same time knowing that God's love includes all those in prison, all those under the bombs and running for their lives, and all those who are caught in the powers and principalities who participate in war and oppression.

Through the ongoing tragedy of the genocide in Gaza and the climate crisis, there is good news. This morning I was excited to hear that the Nobel Peace Prize had been given to Nihon Hidankyo, the Japanese organization of witnesses and survivors of the nuclear weapons that the United States dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The members of Nihon Hidankyo have been advocating with their words, actions, and their lives to prevent nuclear war and to eliminate nuclear weapons.

Their witness and their lives are a warning to all of us, and a reminder of the consequences of these weapons.

The 20 U.S. nuclear weapons are still here in Germany at the Büchel air base. We in Koblenz are 55 km from the nuclear weapons, but in reality, there is no safe distance from the blast, heat and radiation, and we are all at risk.

During a furlough from prison last Sunday, I attended an ordination at the Evangelical Community Church in Cochem. Cochem is the closest large city near the Büchel air base. In the community house of the church, there was a map of the nuclear weapons at the base, with a heading about the need to disarm all nuclear weapons. After the service, I sat down with Rüdiger Lancalle, a lay minister and former vice rector of a public school, who has vigiled at the base for decades and is respected by both Catholic and Evangelical youth and adults in the area. He told me that when he teaching, the prison where I am now was getting rid of their triple bunks, and gave them to the school. They were too uncomfortable to sleep in, and so Rüdiger put them in the basement and the students had a bunk to store their extra books and items that didn't fit so well in their rooms.

One of the church elders started a conversation with me. He had been an officer in the German army, stationed at Büchel and in charge of security. He had to send some of his soldiers to Afghanistan, and when they came back, many were traumatized and needed help. He said that when the men went to Afghanistan, they thought they had a mandate from the German people, but when they got back, there was no help for them. So in thinking further about the NATO war in Afghanistan, the officer said that he felt like a red porcelain cup among all the other black porcelain cups, and he decided to resign his commission rather than have to send another group of soldiers to Afghanistan. He also mentioned to me that he, too, was against nuclear weapons.

When I left, he came up to me and gave me a warm hug, and wished me strength for the rest of my prison sentence.

Back in 2017, '18 and '19, when we had walked onto the base, we brought a statement to give to the soldiers who we met. We never had a chance to have a real conversation with them. So it was a touching moment for me, to hear this officer's stand on conscience, of taking a step out of his comfort zone. I think he told me knowing that I had also taken a step out of my comfort zone, even coming to this gathering. I don't ever know how people will feel about me - the women in JVA Rohrbach told me that the people in Koblenz would not trust me. It's hard to know how people will respond to a prisoner from their local prison.

During the furlough I was also able to have a conversation with one of the German women who has been writing to me, and had published prison letters from me and Susan van der Hijden in the church bulletin. It turns out that she had studied theology, and then decided to live and work with a community of worker priests. They worked in factories, laundries, wherever there were jobs. They brought dignity to the work, and shared their lives, faith and hopes. She had married one of the worker priests, and after their children were older, she started to work again, not falling back on her degrees, but working in a laundry. I shared that during the U.S. war on Vietnam, I had lived in a community of mostly college graduates and post-grad students. We realized that we wanted to stop the war, but we also wanted a world that wasn't divided by class, but where everyone labored and everyone had time for other pursuits. We left our degrees aside and learned plumbing or electrical work.

It is hopeful to realize that we are more alike others than we are different, and that others continue to take one step out of their comfort zone as part of how they live their lives.

In light of the new nuclear weapons the U.S. is developing, the continued folly of fossil fuel use, nuclear power, theft of resources from the poorer countries and deliberate blindness about the military's increased emissions, we struggle to find hope. But until we have a general strike, we can find hope in our solidarity with others, with the Filton 10, the Letzte Generation, and the everyday people I meet who say, "War has no use except to kill people and destroy homes. It is brutal. We need to stop."

Susan began serving a 229 prison sentence in June 2024 for nonviolent actions at Büchel air base in Germany, where U.S. nuclear weapons are stored.

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