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# What's So Funny 'Bout Peace, Love, and Understanding

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# What's So Funny 'Bout Peace, Love, and Understanding

## **Abstract**

Last Saturday I stood on Stine Lake with a group of friends to pray and spread a message of “Peace for Syria.” This event was sponsored by the [Newman Association](#) in response to Pope Francis’s [request](#) that “Christians, and our brothers and sisters of other religions and every man and woman of good will, cry out forcefully: Violence and war are never the way to peace!” Students of all religions and backgrounds came to support us, and it was a very rewarding day for me as a Catholic and as a human longing for world peace and understanding. [*excerpt*]

## **Keywords**

Surge, Surge Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Center for Public Service, religion, peaceful protest, Peace for Syria

## **Disciplines**

Civic and Community Engagement | Peace and Conflict Studies | Race and Ethnicity | Religion

## **Comments**

Surge is a student blog at [Gettysburg College](#) where systemic issues of justice matter. Posts are originally published at [surgegettysburg.wordpress.com](#) Through stories and reflection, these blog entries relate personal experiences to larger issues of equity, demonstrating that –isms are structural problems, not actions defined by individual prejudice. We intend to popularize justice, helping each other to recognize our biases and unlearn the untruths.

# SURGE

[ VERB ] : to move suddenly or powerfully forward or upward

## WHAT'S SO FUNNY 'BOUT PEACE, LOVE, AND UNDERSTANDING

September 18, 2013

Last Saturday I stood on Stine Lake with a group of friends to pray and spread a message of "Peace for Syria." This event was sponsored by the [Newman Association](#) in response to Pope Francis's [request](#) that "Christians, and our brothers and sisters of other religions and every man and woman of good will, cry out forcefully: Violence and war are never the way to peace!" Students of all religions and backgrounds came to support us, and it was a very rewarding day for me as a Catholic and as a human longing for world peace and understanding.



While some of us prayed the rosary and some held cardboard signs in silent prayer, a student approached our vigil with a cynical look. After reading our posters, he walked into our group with a smirk and asked loud enough for all to hear, "What do you think you're doing? You guys aren't doing anything by sitting here. Your prayers mean nothing." Everyone stopped what they were doing out of shock. Many remained silent; others refuted his hurtful comments with rebuttals. Almost instantaneously our vigil for peace turned into a defense of our faith. The insulting comments were aimed at the method we chose to express our message: prayer. Prayer is the way that I speak to my God. I didn't understand how someone could so boldly tell me that something I hold so sacred was worthless.

This was not the first time I had been ridiculed for being Catholic on this campus, and I'm sure it will not be the last. I have heard jokes about the Pope, priests, and even the Eucharist. I have plenty of friends who I know have been deeply depressed by attacks on their faith at Gettysburg. Too often, our responses to these attacks lead to guilt and regret when we choose to use insults to defend our principles of peace.

I walked over just in time to hear the instigator say, "You guys should be hanging signs all over campus," implying that praying was a less valuable use of time. At that, I took a moment to collect myself and responded, "Would you like to help us?" He walked over to me, and we started to make signs to hang in Servo together. We continued with small talk, and I felt as though my prayers for peace may have served me in a way that I never expected.

In our conversation, I realized that he too desired peace, but that he believed praying was not active enough. So while his negative response to our praying was belittling, it was not that he disagreed with our desire, but with our method of execution.

For those of us there that day, prayer is not a hollow activity. As a Christian, prayer is the way that I feed my faith. Prayer, for me, is not a passive form of action, but is an actual conversation between a human and the invisible world: God, the angels, the saints. That is not to say that prayer is not self-fulfilling and able to have meditative benefits, but prayer provides a real response. As the Prayer of St. Francis reads, "Make me a channel of your peace." When I pray, I plea that God use me to fulfill His will. Last Saturday on Stine Lake, I was praying that God might grant me the strength to spread His peace, and that His light might shine on Syria so that they might know the same peace. I was not requesting that God do anything in particular but rather reveal to me through the conversation of prayer His will so that I might try to help in the quest for love and peace.

In the famous words of Mahatma Gandhi, "An-eye-for-an-eye-for-an-eye-for-an-eye ... ends in making everybody blind." Violence does not end violence. But responding with forgiveness and patience to social injustice is easier said than done. I know that I often struggle with this concept. When faced with conflict, I hear murmurs of my faith bouncing around in my head, and sometimes it is more difficult to tune into these murmurs than taking the easy way out and fighting fire with fire. Last Saturday, I believe it was the very prayers that were being criticized that gave me the ability to respond to insults with forgiveness.

I encourage you to stand strong in your faith, whatever it may be. Do not abandon the principles that you hold dear when fighting injustice. Forgive your oppressor even before they offend you. You will never know his or her past, and really don't need to, but you may just be surprised at how transformative a little forgiveness can be.

When I prayed for peace, an opportunity to extend the hand of friendship was presented to me. The person who initially disrupted our gathering ended up making posters with us, and after hanging them in Servo, departed with a smile on his face, feeling that his actions had benefited society. Perhaps we both learned something about tolerance and diversity as well. At the end of the day, it was understanding that brought peace and social justice.

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<http://surgegettyburg.wordpress.com/2013/09/18/whats-so-funny-bout-peace-love-and-understanding/>