

## Education – Christopher’s Story



I am Principal of Trinity Catholic School. I made the decision to become a Pax Christi School in September 2012.

I strongly believe people of any faith can engage with Christ’s message if they rightly view him as a revolutionary who preached peace, love and acceptance in a time that was violent, divided and intolerant. Fewer than 40% of students our students are Catholic and we have a small number students who follow other faith traditions. I therefore felt this was the best way to lead all of my school to a place where nonviolence is at the centre of every interaction we have.

More importantly, a Pax Christi message enables me as a school leader to set a very high standard regarding all interaction, behaviour and expectations of everyone in my school. For example, we highlight that Christ called us to be peacemakers, and we explain that we do this via justice, reconciliation and nonviolence. This enables me to set expectations of all in the community: teachers, students, and parents. We speak about equality, kindness, love and respect and we do so through the prism of Christ's message of peace.

This does reflect personal beliefs for me. I am a Catholic and I strongly believe in principles of nonviolence. However, people of faith are not the only ones attracted by the message of peacemaking, and these principles enable people from all backgrounds to embrace the core message and mission of my school.

So, even though we have policies on things like behaviour and anti-bullying, these are all under the umbrella of the Pax Christi message. In that sense, the Catholic mission of the school is embedded in what we do, and all of our students, teachers and other community members have the opportunity to embrace it.

## Campaigning – Chris’s Story



For more than 25 years I have been involved in campaigning for peace. I strongly believe that using violence can never resolve the problems that we face either at the personal level or in the national and international sphere. My campaigning work involves trying to persuade both the public and politicians that our peace and security is best solved through political and diplomatic work rather than through use of military force.

Much of my campaigning has concentrated on challenging the arms trade, through which billions of pounds of weapons are sold around the world. Currently I am very involved in campaigning to stop the growing use of remote controlled armed drones. While much of my work involves researching the issues and writing and speaking with politicians and the public I also see the need to publicly demonstrate opposition to war and the war industry.

While most protests and demonstrations involve public witness I have also been involved in civil disobedience – breaking the law in protest against injustice – to directly and concretely try to disrupt the business of war. As with Rosa Parks’ protest in 1955 - when she refused to give up her bus seat to a white man and ended up being arrested and being taken to court - civil disobedience is about making visible the everyday choices that we are making which supports injustice. Rosa Parks’ action and the bus boycott that followed meant people had to make the concrete choice of being on the side of institutional racism or to be actively for equality. My actions too are about making visible the choices that we are making in regard to war and violence.

Through our acceptance and support of the arms trade I believe that we are supporting and encouraging warfare around the globe, much of it unseen. So I sometimes engage in nonviolent direct action to make this visible. For example I have taken part in blockading and disrupting arms trade fairs, I have trespassed on military drone bases to disrupt bombing operations and I have protested at the Ministry of Defence building and at Downing Street. This has sometimes led to my being arrested and put on trial. I often argue in court that my actions were reasonable in the circumstances to prevent greater harm. Sometimes I have been found ‘not guilty’ but sometimes I have been convicted and fined, and occasionally I have been sent to prison. Two years ago the police tried to obtain an Anti-Social Behaviour Order (ASBO) to prevent me taking part in protests in central London but a judge decided that was not appropriate as my actions were always nonviolent.

Nonviolent direct action is one way of confronting our society with the often unseen choices that we are making that lead to injustice.

## Prayer - Kate's Story



I am 76, a member of a religious congregation (Holy Child) and now live in a care home along with about 30 other Sisters and a dozen other residents. I used to love campaigning: “going to things”, belonging to Justice and Peace groups, Interfaith Network, Fairtrade ... and demonstrating – for Amnesty, for refugees, against the arms trade, against war. Now, I don't get out much but still click on online petitions, write to my MP, and write sometimes to or about people detained for defending human rights or protesting about nuclear weapons. I also write poetry to fundraise for worthwhile causes.

Here, my life is quieter. I spend time with the elders who are suffering, preparing for death, some bewildered by dementia. I am trying to learn the big lessons of listening, patience and availability on their own terms – not according to my hopeful planning. It is most enriching. I am convinced that people are the priority. Writing cards to old friends, including some of other faiths, also seems to go down well.

What about prayer? Belonging to a religious congregation is a huge help. We pray together, sing a lot and use *Magnificat* [a prayer book published weekly] with its excellent, topical bidding prayers. We also organise our own prayer, for instance, for world leaders “That they may receive the Spirit of the Lord” (Isaiah 11). We refer to Pope Francis' readable and inspiring message *Laudato Si' - Care for our Common Home*: “Peace, justice and the preservation of creation are three absolutely interconnected themes which cannot be separated.”

And my personal prayer? It is sometimes before the Blessed Sacrament, or walking in the garden, or enjoying my prayer corner ... or in bed! ... relaxed, unhurried, thoughtful conversations with the Lord. Sleepless nights with endless decades of the rosary for individuals, groups, countries ... are great occasions for trying to hand things over to God. I do believe in the value of fasting (as Pax Christi sometimes recommends), in solidarity with Jesus in his Passion and his suffering brothers and sisters. I only make very small “food efforts” but can “fast” from reading or listening to music.

Pope Francis, in another letter (*Evangelii Gaudium*) sums up well what I, what we as members of a religious congregation really are about: “An authentic faith which is never comfortable or completely personal ... always involves a deep desire to change the world, to transmit values, to leave this earth somehow better than we found it ...” We want to make a contribution, however small, step by step ...

## Solidarity – Ann’s Story



Looking back, I can see that both my parents and our Catholic schools made us aware of how unfair life can be for others both at home and overseas. I was seventeen when I became an activist – working in various ways, to try to make a difference because I hate to see people suffering. Being part of a Justice and Peace group and a member of Pax Christi, and other organisations, meant that I learnt about homelessness, debt, unfair trade, poverty, lack of water, racism,

landlessness, modern slavery, sexism, the arms trade and so on. And I met people who spoke out and took action on behalf of others, often endangering their own lives.

I learnt that we cannot just feel sorry for people; we need to listen to them, to work alongside them to overturn injustices.

In 1988 I was privileged to spend time in South Africa. I met amazing people and it was a life changing experience. Often feeling helpless in the face of the appalling inhumanity of the apartheid regime, I would wonder what I could possibly do about it when everything seemed so overwhelming. They said to me, “Tell people at home what is happening to us”.

On my return, I told their stories to anyone who would listen to me! I felt a huge sense of solidarity with those who had shared their homes, food and lives with me. I also felt responsible for ensuring that others knew about them and hoped that they too would then work to end apartheid.

Other challenging visits have been with Pax Christi, to occupied Palestine. Staying with Muslim and Christian families and hearing the stories of daily life under occupation, I was again shocked at the inhumanity and the violence they suffered.

I wanted to do more, so I applied to serve as an Ecumenical Accompanier, a human rights observer, in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI). We work alongside Palestinian and Israeli peacemakers and for three months I lived with the families in Yanoun, a tiny village in the north of the West Bank. We provided a nonviolent presence in a place where people have suffered extreme violence, had their lands stolen and live surrounded by illegal Israeli settlers who are armed and can be violent. We reported violations of human rights against Palestinians in the area: the demolition of homes, the forced removal of families, the destruction of water supplies and the denial of access to health care, education and worship.

So often, after telling their stories, people asked: “Does anyone in the rest of the world know what is happening to us?” We tell them: “They will know because we will tell them”.

It is often painful to hear people’s stories and to see them suffering injustice; but by listening I come to know them better and it breaks down my own fears and prejudices. I want to do something to make their lives better and more just.

As Christians we are called to work for justice and to be peacemakers wherever we are. This is not easy, and often we fail, but it is something to work at throughout our lives. Jesus said: “I have come to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, recovery of sight to the blind and to set free the oppressed ....” This is our life’s work too because, as with Jesus, the Spirit is also with us.