

Pax Christi marks 75th anniversary of the atomic bomb attacks on Japan

PAX CHRISTI

Theresa Alessandro



One reason that I feel so at home in Pax Christi is because of our long-standing campaign against nuclear weapons. My journey to working for peace began when I picked up John Hersey's book, *'Hiroshima'*, in the school library as a teenager. It was a deeply distressing and disturbing read. That we human beings deliberately design nuclear weapons to destroy huge numbers of people – and everything on the earth around them – is a hard lesson to learn. I believe in eliminating these weapons from our common home. It is a great encouragement to me to know that I am one of millions of people around the world who feel the same.

In November last year, Pope Francis visited Japan. He said: "In a world where millions of children and families live in inhumane conditions, the money that is squandered and the fortunes made through the manufacture, upgrading, maintenance and sale of ever more destructive weapons are an affront crying out to Heaven."

During the visit, one of the survivors of the bombings, Koji Hoskawa, shared this testimony with Pope Francis: "I think everyone should realise that the atomic bombs were dropped, not on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but on all humanity."

This year, on 6th and 9th August, people across the world are recalling the atomic bombings of 75 years ago. We want to honour the memory of the tens of thousands who died and the dignity and perseverance of those who survived the atrocities and have dedicated their lives to peace. At Pax Christi, we believe that to truly honour them, and to safeguard all humanity and our planet, we must act to abolish nuclear weapons.

These weapons of mass destruction may seem far removed from the inequalities and injustices in our society which have been uncovered by the current pandemic. However, their possession by a few countries ties up enormous sums of money that could be spent on healthcare and meeting the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. The language of deterrence is one of domination and other-ing. It is not the language of the gospel. The possession of nuclear weapons supports an inequitable, unstable balance of power which does not have people at its centre.

Pax Christi's national president, Archbishop Malcolm McMahon, sent a message this week to Pax Christi International's contacts in Japan. He said: "We echo Pope Francis' words in Hiroshima last year: 'The use of atomic energy for purposes of war is immoral, just as the possessing of nuclear weapons is immoral.' Be assured that we are calling on our Government to sign the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nu-

Use this landmark date to demand end to nuclear weapons



Origami peace cranes on display in the Chapel of Unity in Coventry Cathedral. The 'curtain' of 1,000 cranes were a gift to Pax Christi from school children in Hiroshima

clear Weapons. With you we look forward to a world without nuclear weapons where, as the Psalmist says, 'Justice and peace have embraced.' Pax Christi groups have also sent messages of greeting and solidarity.

The Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, built on 75 years of work by people of peace, gives us a real chance to make the abolition of nuclear weapons a reality. This is not the first time Archbishop McMahon has referred to the nuclear ban treaty. Late last year he said: "Here is an opportunity for the leaders of nuclear weapons-possessing countries such as the United Kingdom to demonstrate creative, moral

courage. We call on our Government to sign the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and be part of a future built on just international relationships and the common good of all humanity."

Our Government has so far dismissed calls to sign the Nobel Prize-winning Treaty. Ratification by 50 countries is needed for it to pass into international law. The number of countries who have already shown 'creative, moral courage' stands at 40 at the time of writing and is expected to reach the threshold soon.

Our campaign work now highlights how the UK must respond

when international law prohibits nuclear weapons. For example, we have worked with interfaith partners to explore the policy and practice of financial institutions in this country regarding investment in the production of nuclear weapons. So far, such practice has been viewed as 'in line with Government policy.' However, in the near future we expect that any veneer of legitimacy will be dissolved. Nuclear weapons will become internationally controversial in the same way that cluster bombs, landmines and biological weapons are. They will rightly be regarded as contrary to humanitarian values and norms; as brutal, immoral, catastrophically irresponsible and sinfully wasteful both of public money and the earth's resources.

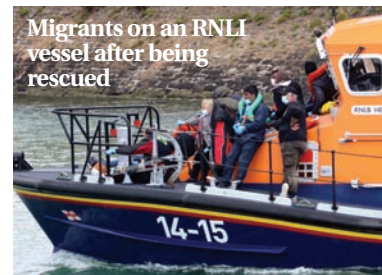
We have invited the Catholic Bishops Conference of England & Wales to update their 2016 statement on nuclear weapons – it predates the nuclear ban treaty and is out-of-step with papal teaching. In fact, Pope Francis has said that the Catechism of the Catholic Church needs updating to include the truth that 'the use of nuclear weapons is immoral...Not only their use, but also possessing them.'

Between 6th and 9th August, Pax Christi members are meeting online at 8am to pray together for peace. Some of us are fasting too. We are witnessing for an end to nuclear weapons in careful, outdoor events, often gathering with like-minded friends and peace partners.

Can you take action? I invite you to engage with your bank or pension provider about investment in nuclear weapons. Information to help you is here: <https://moneyoutofnukes.wordpress.com/>. Open a dialogue with your local council asking them to endorse the nuclear weapons ban treaty as part of the ICAN Cities Appeal. Make sure your MP knows how you feel. Provide a bidding prayer about this issue at Mass or other liturgies you participate in – there are liturgy resources on Pax Christi's website. Raise the topic for discussion in school or sacrament-preparation groups. Pax Christi can help with education materials and session delivery – just contact us.

We echo the prayer of Pope Francis in Hiroshima: Come, Lord, for it is late, and where destruction has abounded, may hope also abound today that we can write and achieve a different future. Come, Lord, Prince of Peace! Make us instruments and reflections of your peace!

You can find us at paxchristi.org.uk. Theresa Alessandro is the director of Pax Christi England & Wales.



Deal failure risks stoking migrant crisis

A failure by the UK to reach a new agreement with France on how to deal with migrant crossings could lead to numbers reaching "crisis" levels, an ex-Border Force chief has warned.

It comes after a record number of crossings to Britain in a single day last week, and follows a Government minister branding the number of incidents "unacceptably high".

Tony Smith, the former head of UK Border Force said the UK and France need to agree a treaty with a joint patrol whereby migrants picked up in the Channel can be returned to France to have asylum claims considered there.

He told the PA news agency: "We need to try as best we can to replicate the juxtaposed controls for legitimate applicants in the same way as for illegitimate applicants."

"If they want to come to the UK they need to make their case on the French side, and if they are found in the waterways or even make it as far as Dover we say 'I'm sorry but you go back there and that's where you will be interviewed and processed, on the French side'."

Last month Home Secretary Priti Patel sought to level blame at her French counterparts, telling the Commons Home Affairs Committee of the "unacceptable" numbers of people making the perilous journey in small boats.

Immigration compliance minister Chris Philp called on France to be stronger on intercepting vessels at sea and directing the return of boats trying to get to the UK. At least 202 migrants managed to cross to Britain on Thursday, 30th July in a surge of 20 boats, a single-day record.

End of free TV is a 'sad day' for elderly

The end of the free TV licence for over-75s has been called a "sad day for our older population".

The BBC will now means-test the entitlement, having previously delayed its introduction because of the pandemic.

Over-75s must receive pension credit to receive the free TV licence, which costs £157.50.

Caroline Abrahams, charity director of Age UK, said: "This is a sad day for our older population, many of whom are feeling badly let down by both the Government and the BBC over the demise of these free licences."

Pope Francis pictured at Hiroshima in 2017

