

In the defence of life: the work of Pax Christi in the Philippines

The Philippines was ranked by the Global Peace Index in 2016 as one of the least peaceful countries in the world. The overall score has deteriorated since President Rodrigo Duterte assumed office in June 2016. Duterte's administration is waging a war on drugs that has claimed thousands of lives. The Guardian (2017) reported 2,500 killings by police and 3,600 by vigilantes in nine months. The current government is also working to restore the death penalty and the lowering of age of criminality to nine years old. It is attempting to abolish the Commission on Human Rights which has been consistently critical of the war on drugs.

The 'unrelenting' drug war is just one of the country's many killers. The war in Mindanao has claimed roughly 150,000 lives while the war between the government and the CPP-NDF-NPA has had roughly 40,000 casualties the last 47 years. Both conflicts are two of the longest-running armed conflicts in the world. Additionally, 5,970 counts of murder and 1,052 counts of homicide were recorded in the country from July to November 2016, equivalent to 46 deaths daily. Moreover, clan conflicts (rido) in the South and clan wars in the North) periodically rock indigenous communities. These create patterns of revenge among members caused by disputes over property, political rivalry, and violation of a family's honour or dignity. The Philippine National Police in ARMM estimated that 5,500 people have died in 'rido'-related cases over the past three decades – equivalent to about 183 deaths per year. Many overlook the role that guns play in enabling and sustaining armed violence. The Small Arms Survey (2007) reported that there are 4.2 million small arms in civilian hands in the country; one million of these, according to the Police, are loose or illegal. Private reports, however claim that there are almost 2 million illicit guns around. Hence, death by guns becomes a daily occurrence in the Philippines.

Faced with rising violence, Pax Christi members in the Philippines have been engaged in various activities in the defence of life. Heeding Pope John Paul II's proposition that to reach peace, teach peace, the Centre for Peace Education, Pax Christi-Pilipinas' (PCP) Secretariat, has its hands full organising and accepting invitations to teach peace. It has, recently, been able to reach roughly 1,500 Catholic administrators in three regions of the Philippines to give suggestions on building life using a whole-school approach. It has conducted trainings on challenging bullying, creating peaceable schools and educating for peace amongst teachers in various parts of the country. It has been training the youth from North to South of the Philippines on building peace and countering violence. Pax



Left is Mady Yabut, current President of Pax Christi-Miriam College. Beside her is Zina Vazquez, Vice-President.

Christi-Pilipinas also did a tour of schools with support from the Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines to talk to students about nonviolence and respect for diversity. PCP, through this peace roadshow was able to reach roughly 3,000 students. It has co-organised an inter-generational dialogue on extra-judicial killings (EJKs) and martial law.

Other creative activities were initiated by the CPE and Pax Christi-Miriam College to raise awareness about rising violence with the hope of eliciting support for action. They gave a space for students to articulate their thoughts and feelings about extra-judicial killings through the spoken word. They led a petition-signing in support of Gospel Nonviolence, against EJKs, against the restoration of the death penalty and the Reserved Officers Training Course mandating students to go thorough military training. They lobbied Philippine parliamentarians not to restore death penalty and led a noise barrage to protest against its restoration. It joined candle-lighting ceremonies, masses and processions in defence of life.

The threats to peace continue to rise, hence, there is no time to rest for Pax Christi members in the Philippines. We will keep on to defend life.

Jasmin Nario-Galace, Executive Director, Center for Peace Education, President, Pax Christi-Pilipinas.
(Full list of references available from the Pax Christi office)

Resources on nonviolence

If you're on social media, PCI has created a special social media primer explaining how you can help spread the message of nonviolence. Nowhere more than on the internet do we see the potential to reach so many people so quickly. You can find the primer online at <http://www.paxchristi.net/news/join-thisisnonviolence-campaign-twitter-facebook/6521#sthash.R3ffT6Jn.B370ZfAR.dpbs>.

www.word4weapons.co.uk: Background on the first UK Knife Exchange service and details of how to get involved.

www.wagingnonviolence.org: Inspiring and practical news stories and blogs on nonviolence in action.

www.nonviolencejustpeace.net: Website of the Catholic

Nonviolence Initiative. Background papers, prayers, videos and discussion starters.

www.peacenews.info: Two helpful articles: October-November 2015 and June-July 2016 issues: The surprising popularity and effectiveness of nonviolence and Learning to ride the bicycle of nonviolence.

www.research.ncl.ac.uk/martinlutherking: A new set of school resources on Martin Luther King Jr includes assembly and class-based materials.

www.paxchristi.org.uk/resources/nonviolence-in-action: Pax Christi's own Nonviolence in Action webpage. Contact us if you are interested in running a workshop in the *In the direction of nonviolence* programme.

Choose Life. Drop the knife.

On the tube one day in 2007 I opened a free newspaper and recognised a photograph of a fellow parishioner: Lorraine Dinnegan. The shocking story was that her 14-year-old son Martin had been stabbed and killed in an unprovoked attack by a gang of boys.

In subsequent months our Justice and Peace group considered what we could do to oppose the fashion for knife crime. We held a discussion day for concerned adults on 'Overcoming Violence – for the sake of our children', asking 'how can we help to make a safer world for them?'

To raise awareness we organised an annual peace walk in memory of Martin – taking families round five local peace gardens. We invited Barry Mizen to come and speak about the safer streets scheme he and Margaret had organised in south London after the murder of their son, Jimmy.

More substantially, we worked over several years, with London Citizens and the police, persuading shops round Finsbury Park station to become 'CitySafe' havens. Staff are briefed, and the shops display a sticker indicating that this is where young people can find refuge if they are frightened or threatened. Lorraine Dinnegan herself campaigned energetically, and with the encouragement of the J&P group gave many talks at schools and events for young people.

Tragically, knife crime has already killed 25 young men across London in 2017. Two years ago another parishioner lost her son in a local attack.

Our J&P group has returned to the question: how can we help to prevent this? St Mellitus church is on a prominent corner near parks and estates where these crimes have happened. After consulting the police and Islington



Knife bins being delivered.

Council officials about current campaigns, we have now commissioned a large banner for outside the church, proclaiming 'Choose Life. Drop the knife'.

The next step will be to raise funds for a knife bin to be installed on parish land. Provided by a Christian charity called Word4Weapons, these secure bins – there is at least one now in every London borough – seem to be successful, and hundreds of knives, and even guns, are being deposited in them. These are all small initiatives of course, but steps in the right direction.

Valerie Flessati, Vice-president

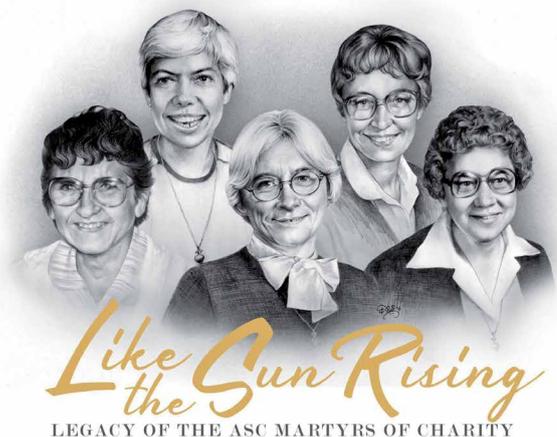
Five Sisters and Me – a witness to nonviolence and solidarity

It was October 1992 in Liberia, and the Civil War in that benighted country was moving into a critical phase. The armies of Charles Taylor, the Rebel leader, were closing on Monrovia, the capital of Liberia, for the final blow. As always, there were the pitiful columns of refugees fleeing the fighting, seeking whatever refuge they could. On the road through the suburb of Gardnersville, they passed a Convent, where five American sisters gave to the needy refugees whatever water they could spare.

The Adorers of the Blood of Christ, to which these five sisters belonged, had been present in Liberia since 1971. The sisters had been active in a wide range of activities, from teaching basic numeracy and literacy to health advice among Liberia's poor and needy people. Little did the sisters know that this latest in many acts of kindness would also be their last.

On the 20th October, with the sounds of battle getting nearer and nearer, two of the Sisters, teachers Sister Mary Joel Koelmer and Sister Barbara Ann Muttra, attempted to drive their anxious security guard to his home, as he was worried about the welfare of his family. The three never returned, as they were all shot to death in an ambush.

Three days later, the rebel forces came at last to the Convent. Sister Kathleen McGuire, who worked as a children's nurse and a tireless advocate for nonviolence, was killed at the gate. The rebels demanded of Sister Shirley Koelmer, unofficial leader of the mission and teacher of mathematics, that she hand over any American dollars that the mission might have. All Sister Shirley could offer was worthless Liberian dollars, so the rebels shot her, together with Sister Agnes Mueller, a nurse and teacher, who ran literacy classes for adults and children.



These five sisters will always be remembered by the Adorers. Although their order has had no official presence in Liberia since 1992.

As I see it, not to desert people in their hour of need, even in the face of violent impending death, is surely a deeply sacred thing. As a practising Anglican myself, I have shared the story of these five dear sisters with others, as one of the best examples of Christian discipleship I have ever known. However long it takes for their cause to progress, I would dearly love to see these five dear ones take their place alongside such as Franz Jägerstätter, in the company of the blessed.

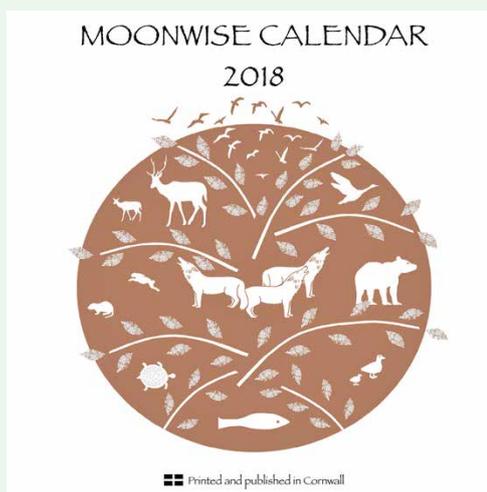
Nigel Baldwin, Pax Christi member, Portsmouth
See more: www.adorers.org

Office Report

Online Shop and New Resources

It's a busy time of year again as we look forward to various events and peace building opportunities this Autumn/Winter. As always we would like to extend a word of encouragement and support to our members who might be thinking of running a stall at an event day or within their own parish/local community. We have plenty of resources to offer and we are happy to support your peace-work in this way. Our Advent and other resources are available to be ordered direct from the online shop: www.paxchristi.org.uk/shop. Do have a browse online or get in touch with us if you would like to order for events.

Moonwise Calendar 2018: Design: William Morris, illustrations: Maggie Organ (Pax Christi member) on the theme of rewilding, with illustrations inside featuring environmental challenges and positive human responses, which echo Pope Francis encyclical *Laudato Si*. There are religious festivals and secular holidays from all round the world, and a moon phase for every night. Full of information and inspiration. Runs from 19 December 2017 to 5 January 2019. Printed on FSC grade paper from



sustainable sources, using vegetable oil-based inks. Mention you are a member of Pax Christi and a donation to Pax Christi will be made for each sale. Available from www.moonwise.co.uk price £13.50 +£1.75 p&p.

Diary

14 October (Sat) Solihull

Birmingham Diocesan Justice and Peace Assembly 'Peace, Pope Francis and the call to active nonviolence'. Speakers Pat Gaffney and James Trewby (Columbans) 10.30am-4.15pm at St Peter's Catholic School, Whitefields Road, Solihull B91 3NZ, £8/£5. Bring lunch. Register at www.birminghamjandp.org.uk or email Janet Vaughan bham.jandp@gmail.com

21 October (Sat) London

Taking Action on Militarism – speakers and workshops, 10am-5pm at Friends House, Euston Road organised by Quaker Peace and Social Witness and ForcesWatch. Book a free place: www.forceswatch.net

25 October (Wed) London

Towards a world free of nuclear weapons. Seminar organised by Religions for Peace UK. @Friends House, 173 Euston Road, London NW1 2BJ at 6.30pm. Information from 07825 189263.

31 October (Tue) London

The Balfour Centenary: Britain's Broken Promise: Time for a New Approach.

Conference at Methodist Central Hall Westminster, SW1H 9NH. Speakers include Baroness Helena Kennedy QC, Rt Hon Tom Brake MP, Sir Vincent Fean and many more. Organised by the Balfour Project. Booking essential <http://bit.ly/2xaCV5M>

2 November (Thurs) London

Celebrating 35 years of the Christian Peace Education Fund. Gathering and reception at Cathedral View, St Vincent Centre, Carlisle Place, London SE1P 1NL Euston 5.15-7.30pm with Pax Christi President, Archbishop Malcolm McMahon. RSVP to coordinator@paxchristi.org.uk

3-4 November (Fri-Sat) Minsteracres, Northumberland

'Resurrection of Hope: Digging Deep for a Just Peace in Palestine and Israel'. Focus on the Balfour Declaration, 50 years of Occupied Territories, and this Kairos moment. Keynote speaker: Prof Mary Grey. Residential and part-time bookings. Details: Fri/Sat rate £80; Sat only £35 and other rates here: <http://urc-northern-synod.org/event/resurrection-of-hope-in-palestine-and-israel/>

12 November (Sun) London

Philip Jennings, General Secretary of UNI Global Union (trade union for the service sectors) will give the Remembrance Day lecture at 3pm in the Imperial War Museum, Lambeth Road, SE1 6HZ. Organised by Movement for the Abolition of War, www.abolishwar.org.uk

25 November (Sat) London

World Religions for Peace – day conference with speakers from different faiths, 10.30-4.30pm at Wesley's Chapel, 49 City Rd. EC1Y 1AU. Details: www.unitingforpeace.com

4 December (Mon) London

Pax Christi Advent Service at St Aloysius Church, Phoenix Road, Euston at 7.00pm.

14 January 2018

PEACE SUNDAY



Follow Pax Christi on Twitter:
<https://twitter.com/paxchristiuk> and
<http://www.twitter.com/PaxChristiYouth>

If you are organising a local event don't forget to let Pax Christi know in time to advertise it, and send a report/photo for the Members' News section of the website.

Keep peace alive. Remember Pax Christi when making or updating your will

Please send me information on

Membership Publications Legacy

I enclose a donation of £ to support your work

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Return to Pax Christi, St Joseph's, Watford Way, Hendon, London, NW4 4TY
Tel: 020 8203 4884 email: info@paxchristi.org.uk www.paxchristi.org.uk

Pax Christi – Our Values

Pax Christi members live by the biblically inspired values of **Peace, Reconciliation, Nonviolence.**

These values are supported by the witness of peacemakers down the ages and the experience of the Pax Christi community.

Pax Christi is rooted in Catholic Christianity but is open to all who are in sympathy with its values and work.

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