What members have been doing locally

In Abergavenny Anthea Fairley took part in a Hiroshima Day event with Quakers around a statue of Sadako Sasaki. Together they made paper cranes which were looped over Sadako’s hands. Contact was made with local primary schools who were given copies of the Joint education resource Teach Peace, which includes an assembly on Sadako.

Ann Dekker, who wrote the Cambridge Peace Trail, led a JBP group from Bishop Stortford on the trail last summer. Ann worked closely with the Norwich J&P group to facilitate their hosting of the Pax Christi ICON of peace in St John’s Cathedral. The group organised meditation and prayer, and a talk with Pat Gaffney about symbols, images and peacemaking.

Paul McGowan, with the JBP of Coventry Deanery, monitors and challenges Coventry City Council’s pension fund. With the city’s investments in the largest weapons manufacturers in the world, the group feels a responsibility to engage in dialogue and protest about this, especially as Coventry is known as a City of Peace and Reconciliation. This painstaking work is making an impact in Coventry and beyond.

Pax Christi Liverpool, led by Jan Harper, ran Pax Christi stalls at the Metropolitan Cathedral at the ‘Embrace Youth’ event and on Peace Sunday. They led their own Ash Wednesday liturgy in the city, and held a vigil during Drone Campaign Week outside Liverpool University which is linked with drone research. In the autumn the group organised a retreat day on nonviolence, with Fr Tom Cullinan and Pat Gaffney.

In her community in Harrogate, Sr Kate Holmstrom used newspaper cuttings and Justpeace for an International Women’s Day discussion on women building peace. Participants were encouraged to use the Pax Christi postcards to write to women around the world, and said prayers for women in Cuba on Women’s World Day of Prayer.

There is one quotation from the Pope’s World Peace Day message of 2012 that I return to time and again: ‘Peace is not merely a gift to be received but a task to be undertaken’.

That ‘taking up of the task’ is what our work in Pax Christi is all about.

As I look back over this year I am deeply aware of the commitment of individual members and of our staff to the task of peace building and peace making – in so many ways: campaigning, prayer, articles, letters, talks, vigils, stalls, witnessing and working creatively and persistently.

Pope Francis has spoken often of the need to build bridges not walls to bring about the justice-based peace that is central to our vocation as Christians. I recognise more and more Pax Christi’s role in being a bridge between the Church and the rest of the peace movement, interpreting one to the other. One of Pax Christi’s strengths has always been its collaboration with a wide range of partners, both faith based and secular, in challenging the culture of militarism, opposing nuclear weapons, developing peace education, or its Israel/Palestine work. Pax Christi’s clear focus, rooted in Gospel values and Catholic Social Teaching, is respected and valued by that wide range of other organisations.

Our role is to encourage and challenge the Church itself to put peacemaking and peace building at the heart of what we are about as Catholics. In speaking out within the Church and to the world outside the Church we are fortunate to be able to draw on the resources, commitment and enthusiasm of the small dedicated team at the Pax Christi office: Pat, Fausta, Matt, Peter and Valerie, backed up by our volunteers.

But Pax Christi’s voice and witness depends on every individual member. One feature of this year’s work has been the growth of regional groupings of members particularly in Leeds and Liverpool. Another feature has been the increasing number of requests by parishes and schools to host the Pax Christi Peace Icon. Its stories of reconciliation from the Old and New Testaments, and from the Eastern and Western Church, are a powerful starting point and inspiration to promote reconciliation.

After six years as Chair of the Executive I will be standing down at this year’s AGM but I will try to live up to the challenge given to Pax Christi members at a memorable International Assembly at Strasbourg: ‘If we want to be witnesses of peace, that is to say messengers and builders of peace, we must first be ourselves men and women of peace inhabited by a genuine sense of justice, a spirit of charity and reconciliation’.

Anne Dodd
Highlights of our work this year

First World War Peace Commemorations

‘How different is the remembrance of war in a land and among a people destroyed by war!’ This was one of the comments from a participant in the Pax Christi peace pilgrimage to Flanders in October 2015. Members of the British Section joined others from Germany, Flanders, Wallonia Brussels, and Pax Christi International, to mark the 70th anniversary of our movement in a spirit of pardon, reconciliation and peace. The experience affirmed us in our work for peace. The past urges us to say a clear NO to war and war preparations. We co-hosted the Subversive Peacemakers musical event in London. Clive Barrett presented the stories of some of the 20,000 Conscientious Objectors using images and examples of music that would have inspired them at the time. Valerie Flessati coordinated this project and continues to represent us on the First World War Peace Forum.

National Justice & Peace Network Conference

‘Hopeful’, ‘encouraging’, ‘exceptional’, ‘excellent’, were just some of the adjectives used to praise Professor Paul Rogers’ presentation, ‘A century on the edge: from cold war to hot war, at the NUPJ July Conference on the theme The things that make for peace. Pax Christi was a key partner, guaranteeing peace workshops on Gandhi and nonviolence, militarisation and young people, the EU as a force for peace, climate and conflict, and creative campaigning with Campaign Against the Arms Trade. It was a great opportunity to show-case our work, strengthen the ‘peace’ message of the Justice and Peace network and build connections with individuals and groups around the country.

Women and Peacemaking Conference

Four women told their own ‘peace story’, helping participants to explore the personal and political aspects of peacemaking at our September conference organised with the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom and Ekklesia. Asked what it takes to make peace participants responded: ‘Raise our voices’, ‘Be educated about the horrors of war’, ‘Prioritise people over profit’, ‘Stop talking sentimentally about peace & human rights while selling Weapons’. The whole day was a great energising experience. Outcomes of the conference included a dedicated issue of our newsletter, Justpeace, on women peacemakers and the postcard we created to celebrate International Women’s Day.

Opposing Trident renewal

Pax Christi was a key player in coordinating and mobilising the faith presence under the banner, ‘No Faith in Trident’ at the national Stop Trident rally in February 2016. Hundreds gathered for prayer at Hinde Street Methodist church before setting off as a block on the march. We have also been in communication with each of our Catholic Bishops – urging that they reaffirm and strengthen their 2006 statement on nuclear weapons - and we will soon be writing to every Catholic MP to ask that they vote against any plans to renew or replace Trident. We are grateful to Martin Birdseye for his representation of Pax Christi on a number of nuclear working groups and for coordinating an ethical briefing on nuclear weapons for MPs and others in the House of Commons.

Support for peace in Palestine & Israel

‘Pilgrims on a path to Peace’ was the title of the 70th Anniversary Assembly of Pax Christi, held in Bethlehem in May 2015. 160 people from around the globe gathered as an act of solidarity with peacemakers in the region and to meet partners such as the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine & Israel, Christian Peacemaker Teams, Rabbis for Human Rights, as well as Palestinian communities in Hebron, Ramallah and the Jordan Valley. The gathering resulted in the Bethlehem Commitment setting out some pathways for work for the region in the years ahead. Closer to home, we took a lead role in coordinating the Week of Prayer for Palestine & Israel. We host the WWPPI webpage, responded to 44 requests for materials and distributed more than 7,000 WWPPI leaflets. At least 13 events took place, ranging from prayer vigils to full-day conferences. Ann Farr continues to represent us in Kairo British and in a newly formed Pax Christi International working group in Palestine & Israel.

Pax Christi by numbers

Talks, schools, stalls, Icon… where Pax Christi has been this year


Peace Education

The last twelve months have been amongst the busiest ever. Demand for Pax Christi’s schools’ workshops is particularly high, and the period from January to Easter 2016 involved as many days in schools as we normally expect in six months. Requests from non-faith schools are increasing most, and 25% now come from outside the Catholic sector.

The latest additions to our range of school assemblies are Women Peacemakers—which looks at the efforts of the 1915 International Congress of Women to end the First World War—and Overcome Indifference and Win Peace which examines the actions of the Ploughshares women in 1996.

Fly Kites not Drones was the major new resource of the year, produced in collaboration with Quaker Peace and Social Witness, Drone Campaign Network, and Voices for Creative Nonviolence. This pack contains assemblies, lessons, and other activities to encourage children and young people to reflect on the ethics of armed drones.

A wonderful development is that we are working with a group of organisations to offer Catholic spirituality INSET training to teachers. So far this coalition has facilitated two INSET days with others already in the diary. This provides a great opportunity for us to explore with teachers what it means for a school to work for peace.

Yet amongst all of this good news there is a small anxiety as the GCSE Religious Studies curriculum will change in September and what has hitherto been a great source of demand for our schools’ work could be threatened. It seems likely that Pax Christi will be taken off the GCSE syllabus in many Catholic schools. However, with General RE, chaplaincy, A-level curriculum, citizenship, and so much else, there are plenty of other ways in which Pax Christi supports schools. Details are on our website - so please continue to champion our work to chaplains, youth workers, and teachers.

62 Pax Christi stories posted on Independent Catholic News website

73 new members

7 from Westminster

6 each from Birmingham, Liverpool, Portsmouth & Nottingham Dioceses

203 Advent 2015 orders processed

1,327 follow Pax Christi on Twitter

https://twitter.com/paxchristiuk

23 Stalls at conferences, diocesan, & parish events

788 read our Facebook post on Peace Sunday

£118,798 raised in Peace Sunday collections = up £7000 in 2014

9 cathedrals, churches & schools have hosted the ICON of Peace

3855 participated in 104 peace education workshops in schools

we took part in 71 events in 54 towns

3855 participated in 104 peace education workshops in schools

88 read our Facebook post on Peace Sunday

1,327 follow Pax Christi on Twitter

https://twitter.com/paxchristiuk

1,327 follow Pax Christi on Twitter

https://twitter.com/paxchristiuk