In his World Peace Day message Pope Francis reminds us that all of us want peace and many people build it day by day through small gestures and acts. Our experience in Pax Christi is that this search for peace is best undertaken with others, combining energies, skills, expertise, in networks and coalitions. Organisations gather around issues and find distinctive ways to amplify the campaigning and action within their own membership or constituency, and also bring key values and teaching from their tradition to the common work.

Here we highlight just four of the eleven coalitions of which we are members. As you read them you will recognise sister organisations and may well be in local coalitions, or be encouraged to create such coalitions, that replicate what happens nationally.

This year begins with many opportunities: working for justice for Palestine during the commemorations of Balfour; celebrating the peace witness of FWW Conscientious objectors; campaigning for a Nuclear Weapon Ban; highlighting the scandal of global military spending; developing our work on nonviolent peacemaking, and building on the World Peace Day message. Everyone can be an artisan of peace, says Pope Francis, and we don’t need to be alone in this work.

Together for a Nuclear Weapon Ban Treaty

The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) is a global coalition which brings together humanitarian, environmental, human rights, peace and development organisations in nearly 100 countries. In the UK, ICAN is made up of a coalition of faith and partner organisations which include CND, Scientists for Global Responsibility and Medact. Key partners internationally and in the UK also include a range of faith organisations such as PAX Christi, Quakers, Soka Gakkai International (Buddhist), Christian CND and the Joint Public Issues Team (Methodists, Baptists, United Reformed and Church of Scotland). We also work with Religions for Peace to reach out to other religions.

An example of the interfaith campaigning done by faith organisations acting together as ICAN partners is a statement published in The Times in March 2015 signed by 26 British faith leaders, the culmination of months of networking and awareness-raising. It articulated a faith perspective on the use and threat of use of nuclear weapons:

“Our faith traditions share a belief in the dignity and unique value of every human life. Consequently, common to our traditions is the invocation that we shall not kill. Our faiths discern a strong prohibition to mass slaughter and the indiscriminate killing of civilians. The threat of mass destruction can never become the norm among nation states and it therefore follows that our common security must be achieved by means other than the threat of use of nuclear weapons:

...Biological and chemical weapons are deemed to be illegitimate under international law and international treaties have been agreed to ban their stockpiling and use. As nuclear weapons are similarly indiscriminate and potentially even more destructive it is very difficult to see why they should not be treated in the same way.”

Moral and ethical arguments are key to the ‘humanitarian approach’ to nuclear weapons, which has enabled significant progress to be made towards a new treaty prohibiting nuclear weapons, the first and historic negotiating conference for which will meet in March 2017 following a majority vote at the United Nations General Assembly. Members of Parliament who attended a meeting at Westminster on the Ethics of Nuclear Weapons last year, organised by Martin Birdseye of Pax Christi and Christian CND, said they welcomed the opportunity to discuss such an important issue in more depth and away from partisan pressures.

Internationally, Pope Francis has put the full weight of the Catholic Church behind the global movement to ban nuclear weapons. He has urged governments and civil society “to ensure that nuclear weapons are banned once and for all, to the benefit of our common home”. Nuclear deterrence, he argued, “cannot be the basis for an ethics of fraternity and peaceful coexistence.” Pax Christi is doing sterling work trying to persuade the Catholic Church in the UK to follow the Pope’s progressive lead on this issue, engaging both grassroots and leaders of the Church. Pax Christi members are encouraged to help promote a new joint statement from UK faith organisations in support of the historic negotiations to ban and ultimately eliminate nuclear weapons once and for all.

Rebecca Sharkey, UK Co-ordinator
www.uk.icanw.org
The Peace Education Network at 25

The Peace Education Network [PEN] marks its 25th anniversary this year and Pax Christi, a founder member, has been at the heart of this network - which brings together organisations engaged in peace education - ever since.

The first meetings of the fledgling network took place in 1992 and, in November 1993, the first PEN Conference, A New Look at Peace Education, was held in London. These conferences would go on to become an annual fixture in the peace calendar as the network established itself as a respected champion of peace education.

Over the 25 years of the Peace Education Network our priorities have shifted, our strength has ebbed and flowed, and the people and organisations involved have changed. After the last PEN conference was held in 2008 the network underwent a period of transition which led to a thorough review and reimagining of our nature and purpose.

What emerged was a network built around three network days each year. Half of the time is dedicated to a business meeting - dealing with the management of the network, sharing resources and good practice, exploring opportunities for collaboration, and discussing issues relevant to peace education. The second half of our day is taken up with a skill-share workshop where we showcase a resource, technique, or new development in the field. This workshop is usually open to educators from beyond the network and is a continuation of the professional development provision that the PEN Conference represented.

Alongside our professional development work PEN exists to build collaborative relationships between members, share resources and ideas, to produce high quality peace education resources, and to speak with a common voice on issues of peace education and wider peace issues that particularly affect children and young people.

Pax Christi remains at the heart of all that PEN does. Having chaired PEN for five years the work of co-ordinating the network is shared between us and Quaker Peace and Social Witness.

And we benefit considerably from our membership too. The resources produced - notably the popular Teach Peace primary assembly pack - are things that are beyond our capacity alone. The collaborative relationships fostered at PEN meetings (or in the pub afterwards) have enabled us to organise or given us access to a variety of wonderful peace education opportunities.

In this 25th year of the Peace Education Network members will be working to produce an education resource which explores creative nonviolence as a means of working for change. We will also have our usual three network days - the first of which will be on Thursday 23 March at Friends House, Euston. The workshop at this event will showcase a new resource from QPSW on Israel/Palestine.

Matt Jeziorski, Pax Christi Schools and Youth Outreach

www.peace-education.org.uk

Kairos Britain in 2017

In 2009 a group of prominent Palestinian Christian leaders asked a key question of the global Church: ‘Will you help us get our freedom back?’ After enduring years of suffering under occupation, Palestinian Christians were finally calling to account the Churches’ silence and indifference to their plight, and asking for a coordinated global effort to help end the occupation and establish equality for all Palestinians. This became known as the Kairos Palestine call.

In the UK, our response was to form the Kairos Britain network, set up in solidarity with the Kairos Palestine movement. Our focus over the last four years has been on building a strong and committed network of individuals, churches and community groups. The network has trebled in numbers, and we have established ourselves as a Christian voice of authority on issues pertaining to justice in Palestine and Israel, finding a place also amongst fellow organisations and groups working for Palestinian rights.

Now, on the eve of a significant year where we mark 100 years since the Balfour declaration, 50 years of occupation and 10 years of the Gaza blockade, what can we do to contribute to a just peace in Palestine and Israel? The global political landscape has dramatically changed in the last year, and we could look on in despair as we face a US-Israel alliance that has even less respect for international law and human rights than ever before. Meanwhile the rest of the world seems paralysed to stop the wave of settlement building and theft of land from the West Bank, and the continual decline of Gaza into a humanitarian disaster. Justice seems a distant dream.

However, perhaps our hopes should not lie with those in power, but with ourselves. At its heart Kairos has always been a call for the ordinary person to take action, along with others, and create a global movement for change. We support the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement against anything profiting from the occupation, which is having significant success. Global pressure has worked - companies like G4S, Veolia, and SodaStream have withdrawn their support to Israel’s occupation, resulting in a loss of approximately 46% of direct foreign investment to Israel over the last
10 years. Israel’s reputation has also suffered in the process, and many more people are becoming aware of Palestinian rights. We will be increasing our support of the BDS campaign in 2017 and challenging our audience - Christians and Churches in the UK - to engage with this movement for justice.

Our remit also remains to work in partnership with our members, community groups and fellow organisations, Pax Christi being one of those. As an organisation that has a rich history of social action and speaking out for the poor and marginalised, we look forward to continuing our work together to raise awareness of the occupation, and to campaign for its end. In such a significant year, a unified voice can only strengthen our message, and help us to reach many more people, working together to build a movement for justice, equality and peace in the Holy Land.

Charlotte Marshall, Advocacy Worker, Kairos Britain
www.kairosbritain.org.uk (Copies of the Time for Action booklet can be obtained free from the Pax Christi office.)

Support for nonviolent peace activists

We send our support, prayers and encouragement to a number of people involved in recent nonviolent actions for peace - challenging nuclear weapons production and the arms trade.

In January Pax Christi member Nick Cooper was found guilty of wilful obstruction of the highway, with four others, as part of the Put Down the Sword affinity group. They had blocked a gate at Burghfield Atomic Weapons establishment last June as part of a faiths day of action. They have a solidarity fund to help with costs, fines etc at 08-92-86, 17488437. Matt Jeziorski was able to attend one day of the trial to offer Pax Christi support. You can read more about them here https://putdownthesword.wordpress.com/

Daniel Woodhouse, a Methodist minister from Leeds, and Quaker activist Sam Walton were arrested in the early hours of 29 January at Bae Systems Warton, Lancashire. Their purpose was to disarm warplanes bound for Saudi Arabia for use in Yemen. This was on the anniversary of the 1996 East Timor Seeds of Hope Ploughshare Action, when three women entered the same site to disarm a plane destined for Indonesia. You can read more here https://blog.caat.org.uk/
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In 2017 we will again make a presentation of the award to more
very much appreciate your help. This is an opportunity to acknowledge the often hidden work of grassroots peacemakers who simply get on with the job and seek no glory.
Please send in your nominations by the 31st March 2017, making sure each nomination is accompanied by two references. Please send them to the Hendon office. There is no need to wait until the deadline, the Award Team are ready to receive nominations now — Arn Dekker for the Award Team.
Thank you for Peace Sunday. While it is too early yet to judge how we have fared with donations we have been delighted to receive reports of great creativity and persistence from members who have organised services, exhibitions and activities in their parish for Peace Sunday. Take some time to read through these and capture some good ideas for Peace Sunday 2018! http://paxchristi.org.uk/news-and-events/members-news/members-news-2017/

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. If you would like free or sale-or-return resources for events, stalls, meetings please let us know. We would be delighted to provide them.

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