Movements like yours are precious — Pope John Paul II 1995

In addition to its faithful work for peace in England and Wales, the British section of Pax Christi is also an important member of Pax Christi International. Founded in France in March 1945 as a Catholic movement for peace and reconciliation following World War II, Pax Christi International is now a network of 115 member organisations on five continents with over a hundred thousand members worldwide.

Recognised by Pope Pius XII as the official Catholic peace movement, Pax Christi has also always been autonomous, with members of the hierarchy, clergy and laypeople working together as equals for peace and reconciliation in situations of violence and war around the world. The presidency of Pax Christi International, for example, is now shared by a bishop, Bishop Kevin Dowling from South Africa, and a lay woman, Marie Dennis from the United States, both of whom were elected by Pax Christi member organisations.

Pax Christi International has held consultative status at the United Nations since 1979 and is working at the UN in Geneva, New York, Vienna and Paris. It is also officially represented at the Africa Union and the Council of Europe and has regular access to the European Parliament, the European Commission and NATO.

Inspired by Gospel values and by the rich history of Catholic social thought, Pax Christi members have a deep commitment to active nonviolence and a spirituality that enables a nonviolent response even in the most complex, violent and destructive situations.

Everywhere, efforts to foster a culture of active nonviolence; to insert moral and ethical principles on issues of war and peace into the public and political arenas; and to promote action for peace and social justice remain central to Pax Christi’s mission. As a faith-based Catholic movement, Pax Christi pays special attention to the positive impact and the negative impact of religion in relation to violent conflict.

Pax Christi members around the world contribute to the prevention, demilitarisation and resolution of conflicts; strengthen human rights, democracy and international law; and build peace. They incorporate a wide range of peacemaking practices into their daily work for a better world. Among them:

- a multi-year strategy to address deep-seated racism in the United States
- dynamic ‘sports for peace’ programs in South Sudan and Haiti
- strategies to integrate former combatants back into their own communities in the Democratic Republic of Congo
- courses in preventive reconciliation using the principles of haikido in the Philippines
- efforts to address destructive mining practices in Colombia and Peru;
- advocacy and campaigning at a national and international level for the abolition of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons; for a meaningful Arms Trade Treaty; for an end to the use of depleted uranium in weapons
- ‘peace week’ initiatives, many of them annual, in the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, France, the African Great Lakes region, Kosovo, Russia, Croatia, the Philippines and Colombia
- collaboration with local partners to support active nonviolence in southern Mexico
- excellent grassroots peace education programs in Lebanon and the Philippines
- exchanges of experience between civil society from the Middle East and from Central Europe on their role in bringing about nonviolent social change
- work with the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT), our partner in Brazil, in response to growing conflict over land - and ongoing work with civil society groups in Syria, Iraq and Palestine.

Pax Christi members combine activism with a strong spirituality, still inspired today by the original motivation of the movement: reconciliation - bringing opposite sides in a conflict together to create a new, positive, peaceful relationship.

Marie Dennis, Co-President, Pax Christi International
Annemarie Gielen, Pax Christi Flanders

What is most valuable for me about the work of Pax Christi International is the focus on peace-building and reconciliation despite much devastation, hatred and violence. The strong conviction that hatred can be countered and transformed into something creative and builds peace. This is for me the biggest asset of our organisation.

Every year we coordinate the Flemish Peace Week, and in 2014 the message was, ‘Stop Hatred, Talk’ (in Flemish you could also understand it as ‘stop hate speech’). We received a lot of positive echoes about the necessity of this topic, as people don’t know how to react to hate messages in the public space. This Peace Week we also saw a very high number of activities throughout Flanders (37 events). Around 5,000 people let themselves be photographed with a ‘No Hate’ tattoo on their arm or leg. 1,200 pins with No Hate on them were sold, and 15,000 No Hate tattoos were distributed. Our team was very pleased with the high number of people who showed interest in this issue.

It is probably boring to repeat it over and over again, but the main obstacle is a lack of resources. We have only one head, two hands and two feet. Our budget is never enough. And there are only 24 hours in a day. But looking back each year to see what we have accomplished in the previous year we are proud of the many things that have been achieved, the people that we have reached, the articles we saw published, the politicians who have (at least) listened to us.

The Flemish section began in 1973 and at the moment we have 14 staff members, (10.5 working full-time).

Pax Christi International Peace Awards

Since 1988 Pax Christi International has given recognition to individuals and groups who hare working against violence and injustice, usually at the grassroots level. National sections are encouraged to nominate those whom they may have worked with or encountered who meet these criteria. The first went posthumously to Margarida Maria Alves, President of the Farmworkers Union in Brazil, for giving her life in the struggle for the rights of poor rural workers. She was assassinated in 1983. In 1997 the British Section of Pax Christi, during which time it was working to stop arms sales to Indonesia, nominated Father Domingos Soares and Maria de Lourdes Martins Cruz from East Timor for their work on education, development and dignity of people in poor communities.

The 2015 Award will be presented at the World Assembly in Bethlehem and goes to a women’s collective from Colombia, the Colectivo de Pensamiento y Acción Mujeres, Paz y Seguridad for making visible and encouraging the essential contribution of women to peacebuilding in their country and for their work to promote an ethical transformation of Colombian society as the path towards sustainable peace.

You can find an excellent time-line of Pax Christi International’s work here: http://paxchristi2015.net/news-media/

The ‘No Hate’ peace week

Members of the Women’s Collective, Colombia

A glimpse of life in Pax Christi Member Organisations around the globe
We greatly value the work of Pax Christi International, especially its links with the UN and other international bodies and projects. Through these we have been able to make contacts with other groups linked to Pax Christi from other countries. Our members can feel that we are part of something which is beyond the parochial.

Last year Pax Christi Victoria decided to focus on the centenary of the Anzac military campaign in WWI in order to challenge the official narrative. We are being told that Australia came of age as a nation on the battlefields of Gallipoli. We felt that this narrative was but a small part of the Australian story, which offered a licence to engage in future wars. We believe that some of the decisions that helped to build Australia included the introduction of a ‘living wage’ and welfare benefits for all mothers, which were well established between Federation (1901) and WWI.

We approached our sister branch in Sydney and were delighted that the Anzac focus was adopted as a national Pax Christi campaign. In Melbourne we invited representatives from other groups (church and secular groups) to an initial meeting which decided to form the Anzac Centenary Peace Coalition - presently there are about 30 member organisations. Though this is no longer an exclusively Pax Christi project, we still are actively participating in fundraising, forums, and other awareness-raising efforts some of which have been independently initiated by members of the coalition, and which we readily support (e.g. a mobile exhibition of WWI Women, a Q & A Discussion at a suburban library, and an ecumenical service of ‘lament, repentance and hope’ at the Anglican Cathedral). The Sydney group (also a coalition) has been instrumental in organising a debate in the Town Hall and the naming of a park a ‘Peace and Reconciliation Park’. Although a work in progress, this has been our ‘success’ story not least because of the significant number of people involved.

Obstacles which prevent us from achieving more include the fact that most of us are lacking the energy of our youth, and young people generally do not seem willing to join organisations - at least for now.

Our section was founded in 1973-74 and neither Melbourne nor Sydney have any paid staff. We very much rely on a small group of dedicated volunteers. However, the Centenary Coalition in Melbourne has been able to employ a part-time project officer, working two days a week for the last few months. We are hoping to extend this at least to the middle of the year.

Pax Christi Philippines was founded in 1995 and accepted as a section in 1997 at the Pax Christi International Assembly in London. We most value the ministry of peace, justice and reconciliation presence of Pax Christi members in situations of conflict all over the world.

For ourselves a success is the attempt to mainstream reconciliation work in the Philippines through the Forum on Reconciliation and our book on ‘Paghusay’ (to comb) Stories of Community Reconciliation in the Philippines. Another important achievement was the establishment of the Niall O’Brien Center for Peace that tries to continue the peace work of Fr. Niall was a Columban priest. Then, the launching of the Catholic Peacebuilding Training that aimed at providing a space where catholic workers engage in an intra-faith dialogue on why Catholics are for peace.

We started, developed and sustained the first ever Master’s in Conflict and Reconciliation Studies in partnership with the University of St. La Salle. We are now even transforming this into a laddered programme with a certificate course, a diploma course and a master’s course.

The main obstacle is the demand for sustained resources to support the work we started and pressure of economic survival for the staff. We always work with a volunteer team.
If someone you know is turning 70 this year – why not make a gift to Pax Christi? If YOU are turning 70 this year, why not make a gift to Pax Christi?

70 pence a week for a year = a gift of £36.40
70 pence a month = a gift of £8.40

Be creative in determining your birthday gift!

Donations are made easy by using the enclosed PCI donation slip. Your gift will ensure a very Happy Birthday for Pax Christi International!

Turning 70 is a milestone in many people’s lives. It is a time for reflection on a life well-lived, and also an opportunity to make the most of the years ahead. In May 2015, Pax Christi will celebrate its own 70th birthday at the World Assembly in Bethlehem. More than 120 delegates from five continents will come together to celebrate Pax Christi’s rich history, and to set out a ‘path to peace’ for the next five years.

The Assembly theme is ‘Pilgrims on the Path to Peace’, and delegates will choose a walking path to follow: Human Rights; Ecological Justice; Justice and Reconciliation; Demilitarisation and Disarmament; Peace Education (Young Peacemakers); and Women as Peacemakers. The aim is to develop a five-year blueprint along these themes for Pax Christi’s work leading up to the big 75th Anniversary in 2020.

Fundraising is needed to help fund our global work over the next five years. If you can’t attend the World Assembly, you can take part by making a 70th Birthday gift to Pax Christi International (PCI). Please consider a one-off gift of 70 Euros on the Pax Christi International website, or a cheque for £70 sent via Pax Christi UK, or a direct bank payment to PCI. Donations are made easy by using the enclosed PCI donation slip.

Be creative in determining your birthday gift!
- 70 pence a month = a gift of £8.40
- 70 pence a week for a year = a gift of £36.40
- If YOU are turning 70 this year, why not make a gift to Pax Christi in solidarity?
- If someone you know is turning 70 this year - why not make a gift in their name?

Occasionally it is good to take a wider view of our world. Some of our Pax Christi UK members will have attended the 50th Anniversary in Assisi 20 years ago and remember what an amazing event that was. It is gratifying and encouraging to meet up with Pax Christi peacemakers from all over the world, and to know that we are not alone in our work. Peacemakers are needed more than ever in a world that is challenged by extremism. Too often military responses are used as a first rather than a last resort.

‘Nonviolence has to be active, bold, courageous, and effective. We need to invest massive financial resources, brainpower, energy and time developing and using nonviolent tools to uproot injustice, to protect people in grave danger, to promote transformation, to reclaim the possibility of just and sustainable peace.’

Marie Dennis, Pax Christi International Co-President

The Pax Christi International team in Brussels is small, but achieves much with its members through networking, capacity-building, advocacy and peace spirituality. PCI need our prayers, and also our financial support to carry forward the outcomes of the World Assembly. Please donate today, using the enclosed donation slip. Your gift will ensure a very Happy Birthday for Pax Christi International!

Holly Ball, Executive Committee member

Happy Birthday Pax Christi!

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

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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