Time to refocus and keep on!

Brexit, the vote to renew Trident, fragmentation and bickering within political parties. All rather dispiriting! But we are Pax Christi - people putting peace into action. And this is our strength at times such times, to keep doing what we do. We are international and have in place systems of cooperation and sharing across borders to work for peace and justice. We are greater than party politics, so while leaders may change, we work away on the issues that have not gone away; the arms trade, nuclear weapons, the many ‘wars by instalment’ so aptly described by Pope Francis. We are people of faith, holding on to and working for a world built on cooperation, justice and nonviolence. We are persistent, undeterred by parliamentary votes and political deals. Our task is to be creative and offer fresh approaches to disarmament and peace-building, drawing on the international vision and strengths of our movement - some of which are shared in this newsletter.

Towards an international ban on nuclear weapons

The July vote in Parliament in support of the renewal of Trident is not the end of the story of campaigning against nuclear weapons. We will continue to challenge their morality, their cost and utility and will explore more approaches to disarmament that better reflect our international movement.

In August our co-president Marie Dennis was invited to give a paper on Pax Christi’s disarmament work to a conference in Kazakhstan on “Building a Nuclear Weapon-Free World”. The conference of parliamentarians, mayors, religious leaders, government representatives and other was held to mark the 25 anniversary of the closing the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site (between 1949 and 1989, this was one of the primary locations for Soviet above and below ground nuclear testing). One of the calls of the gathering was to call for a nuclear weapon-free zones in the Middle East, North East Asia, and Europe.

Also in August, Pax Christi International played its part in UN meetings in Geneva to help outlaw nuclear weapons by putting in place an international treaty to ban them. Fewer than 20% of UN member states still hold on to nuclear weapons - the UK is one – but with the support, witness and encouragement of the other 80% the door is open to enforcing a ban.

PCIs representative at these meetings Jonathan Frerichs told us that the nuclear working group is sending the UN General Assembly a call to negotiate a ban on nuclear weapons next year. The clear action, the broad support and the definite timeline are a milestone in the humanitarian approach to nuclear disarmament. It took some days of UN drama to adopt the final report and its recommendations. 107 governments now support ‘The convening by the UN General Assembly of a conference in 2017, open to all states, with the contribution of international organisations and civil society to negotiate a legally binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons, leading toward their total elimination.’

On 22 September Austria’s foreign minister, Sebastian Kurz, announced that they would join other states in supporting the resolution which must be tabled by mid-October. He said, “Experience shows that the first stop to eliminate weapons of mass destruction is to prohibit them through legally binding norms”. This opportunity is affirmed by Susi Snyder, nuclear disarmament programme manager for PAX Netherlands. She says that international treaties exist to stop chemical and biological weapons as well as to outlaw other weapons with indiscriminate effects e.g. landmines and cluster bombs. That nuclear weapons are not illegal is bizarre. The UK Government has said that it is opposed to a treaty banning nuclear weapons but as international pressure grows Pax Christi sections around the world will work to challenge and persuade with the non-cooperating states to come on board. Speaking in 2014 Pope Francis said: “To achieve nuclear abolition we need to resist succumbing to the limits set by political realism...The fear that drives the reluctance to disarm must be replaced by a spirit of solidarity that binds humanity to achieve the global common good of which peace is the fullest expression.” Pax Christi and ICAN UK will be monitoring this process and will seek your cooperation in bringing the 20% on board.

Pat Gaffney
Gaining ground: local challenges to investment policies make an impact.

Since 2013 Pax Christi Executive Committee member Paul McGowan has been pursuing a campaign to challenge West Midlands Pension Fund’s investments in the arms trade and cluster munitions in particular. Reports can be found on our Members News web-pages. We invited Paul to reflect on the work and the model created as it could be replicated in other parts of the country.

1. The campaign has established that there is now a permanent question-mark over the city’s much-vaunted title ‘City of Peace and Reconciliation’. Other campaigns need to find the openings which suit their own situation. The Trustees of the West Midlands Pension Fund have been forced to consider their portfolio of investments, whether they are acceptable, and whether they can answer the points made by the campaign.

2. Changes have occurred in the pattern of investments in the arms trade, which we claim to be the results of our sustained pressure, both in specific firms and in the overall level of investment. When we began, in early 2013, WMPF was investing £100 million directly into more than forty firms. Latest figures show that the number and value of the investments has fallen by about 15%.

We also know that the pattern of investments followed by the WMPF is not copied by other Funds. Some invest little in the arms trade; some invest in a much narrower range of companies. These facts in themselves are enough to dismiss the argument which is often made that the arms trade is a vital and necessary component of any well-managed Fund. WMPF itself invests less than 1% of its assets in the arms trade.

The campaign is aimed only at this direct investment, but there is a further issue in relation to what WMPF invests in other financial institutions which in turn fund the arms trade. We have barely begun to look at this aspect, but we can report some success, which will be explained later.

3. As our campaign has developed, we have made a particular issue of investments in the cluster bomb trade. Since 2010, it has been illegal for UK nationals to assist, encourage or support this trade, wherever they may be in the world. The UK has destroyed its own stockpiles of the weapons. It should also, under the terms of the Convention, be encouraging those countries which have not done so to sign and ratify the Convention on Cluster Munitions. Yet successive governments have refused to apply the law to investments made by UK nationals, on UK soil, with UK taxpayers’ money. My own MP, Jim Cunningham (Lab., Coventry South) raised this matter in Parliament in early September and was given the standard answer that it is up to financial institutions to police themselves.

Nevertheless, we have had considerable success. If sweet reason seems to fail, shame and embarrassment can be powerful allies. In 2014, we identified five companies on the books at WMPF known to be involved in this trade. Two years later, one has been dropped by the Fund - Alliant Techsystems (now merged and known as Orbital ATK); another, Doosan, sold its arms wing to Hanwha; two have been obliged to withdraw from the trade (Singapore Technologies and Textron), which leaves just the Hanwha Corporation of South Korea, to which all attention has now turned.

4. On September 14, Councillor Mutton of Coventry reported that he had moved a resolution that the Trustees and Officers of WMPF work with other shareholders to immediately exert pressure on Hanwha Corporation to cease production of ‘these terrible weapons’. There was no opposition to the proposal.

These changes do not just benefit the Council Tax-payers of the West Midlands. Simply by taking out Textron, UK investors and savers with Prudential UK, Invesco or Standard Life, for example, can feel a bit more comfortable about where their money is ending up. These institutions may decide to continue to invest in Textron, but their investments will no longer be supporting the cluster bomb trade. As PAX Netherlands has shown, Textron has received about £30 billion from financial institutions in the last four years alone. None of this will now end up in cluster bombs.

Needless to say, none of these changes has been directly accredited to our campaign by WMPF. But we do know for sure that WMPF had never before called arms manufacturers to account for their activities.

I give the last word to WMPF’s Strategic Director of Pensions (September 6): “We welcome the decision of Textron to cease production of cluster munitions. This seems to demonstrate that shareholder pressure when applied in the right way can be extremely effective.”

Paul McGowan, Coventry
Don’t Bank on the Bomb - another campaigning opportunity!

We are supporting this campaign, initiated by PAX Netherlands and ICAN, to draw attention to and challenge those financial institutions that are associated with financing the 26 companies involved in the production, maintenance and modernisation of nuclear weapons. These include BAE Systems, Lockheed Martin and Boeing. We believe this is a powerful way to campaign against nuclear weapons.

Their 2015 report, soon to be updated, lists among their ‘hall of shame’ the Royal Bank of Scotland and the Prudential. In the autumn we will begin a process of engagement with both. We have already been in correspondence with The Prudential about the financing of cluster weapons. This is campaigning work that Pax Christi members can engage with wherever they are. The PAX reports provide substantial information on the producing companies and the financial institutions. Take a look and see how you, your parish, Diocese, school may be linked to one of the financial institutions - and start a conversation to bring about change!

Building a local campaign around investment and financing of the weapons industry

1. There are several indispensable sources of information: SIPRI’s annual list of the top 100 arms dealers; the PAX Netherlands annual reports on cluster bomb investments and nuclear weapons investments; your own Fund’s annual statement of Equity Holdings (not to be confused with their Annual Report)

2. Ascertain a clear profile of the Fund, bank or company you wish to campaign on. Use local issues to your benefit, e.g. firms based in your area and what they may be connected to. Specific ways in which the presence of the arms trade/ nuclear weapon production in your area contradicts other values espoused locally.

3. Be persistent. Expect the brush-off. Always analyse and reply in detail to letters sent to you. Offer to meet representatives of the Fund or business. Write to the papers. Write to the papers again. Enlist MPs, councillors, press and radio. Look out for new opportunities, e.g. news reports which illustrate the end-consequences of your local dealers’ / banks activities. Get help from some of the organisations listed and from Pax Christi.

Out and about with Pax Christi

So that our members can see where we are working, perhaps being able to build on our presence in a school, parish or network, we list the out-of-office events for September and October. Contact Matt our schools officer or Pat if you want more information.


Scotland. Between 14 - 16 September, General Secretary Pat Gaffney made a visit to Scotland, coordinated by Justice and Peace Scotland, FoR and Scottish Clergy Against Nuclear Arms (SCANA). The main purpose of the visit was to share with groups more of the background to and follow-up from the Rome Conference on Nonviolence and Just Peace and also to get to know Pax Christi members and other peace groups in Scotland. In Glasgow, Pat spoke at a meeting of SCANA members and then to a group of members from Justice & Peace and Pax Christi. This was a great opportunity to also talk and discuss how we might work together post-Trident vote.

For example in Coventry there is an annual Peace Festival, in which local people run their own events.

Useful websites

- www.caat.org.uk, CAAT
- www.sipri.org, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
- www.paxforpeace.nl/our-work/programmes/cluster-munitions, PAX Netherlands on cluster munitions:
- www.dontbankonthebomb.com, Don’t Bank on the Bomb
- www.uk.icanw.org/ International campaign to abolish nuclear weapons

Pat then spoke at an open meeting at the Lauriston Jesuit Centre in Edinburgh. This more formal presentation looked in depth at the Nonviolence and Just Peace Conference and the opportunities created within faith communities to work with the Appeal.

A similar presentation was shared with the annual meeting of Action of Churches Together in Scotland (ACTS) and with the Church and Society Council of the Church of Scotland. A meeting in the Scottish Parliament rounded the visit. Here Pat met with Bill Kidd MSP who is a member of Parliamentarians for Nuclear Disarmament and was delighted to discover the high regard he has for Pax Christi International and PAX Netherlands whom he meets at international disarmament meetings. We aim to have a residential gathering in spring 2017 where we can share more about work, reflect together and plan ahead.
Office report

Your help with our strategic planning. In July we circulated an invitation to members to take part in our online survey. 146 of you responded and we are most grateful (about 10% of membership). This captures part of our story and our work and together with a ‘critical friends’ survey, which was undertaken through conversations with fifteen people. We now have a core of materials that will be fed into our planning for the next five years. The Exec and office team will meet for a whole day on 15 October to move forward with this process.

£1,700 raised for the Christian Peace Education Fund.
A huge thank you to members and friends who supported Pat Gaffney’s efforts to raise funds for the CPEF this summer. With others from Pax Christi and members of Student Cross, Pat took part in a short walking pilgrimage to Vezelay in France to commemorate the 70 anniversary of the first Pilgrim Cross in 1946. This was a post-war “crusade for peace”. Fourteen wooden crosses were walked and brought from Great Britain, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Belgium, Italy and from several places in France to Basilica in Vezelay where they remain today. The walk raised a magnificent £1715.00. The CPEF which supports the peace education work of Pax Christi. You can read more here http://paxchristi.org.uk/august-september/

CPEF now has a JustGiving account. If YOU feel encouraged to undertake a sponsored activity for our peace education work, then CPEF can help you create a page.

Diary

22 October (Sat) Lancaster
Caring for Creation: what are the issues? How can we get involved? Speakers: Pat Gaffney, Tom Cullinan, Paul Bodenhaim, Sue Holden and Paul Kelly. 10.30 - 4.30pm in The Storeey, Meeting House Lane, LA1 1PJ. Organised by Liverpool Justice & Peace and Lancaster Faith & Justice. Bookings & Info: Maggie McSherry. lfjcmm@gmail.com or 01524 383081

29 October (Sat) Birmingham
“And they shall live secure” (Micah 5,4)
Theological reflection and workshops on the Church as an agent for peace in an increasingly insecure world. Keynote speaker: Simon Barrow of Ekklesia, with Pat Gaffney on the panel. 10.30 - 4pm at Quaker Meeting House, 40 Bull Street B4 6AF Free event, lunch £6. Registrations: Barbara Forbes forbesbarbaraesy@yahoo.co.uk

31 October - 4 November
Archbishop Romero Lecture by Fr Rodolfo Cardinal S.J on “Rutilio, Romero and Pope Francis”. Monday 31st Plymouth Catholic Cathedral at 7pm; Tuesday 1st Nov Amigo Hall, St George’s Cathedral London at 4pm; Wed 2nd Durham University Department of Theology & Religion at 5.30pm; Thurs 3rd St Aloysius College, Glasgow at 7pm; Friday 4th St Wilfrid’s Church, Preston at 7pm. Details: www.romerotrust.org.uk or contact romerotrust@gmail.com

5 November (Sat) London
Southwark Justice & Peace Autumn Assembly on ‘The Refugee Crisis: Practical Action’. 10am - 4pm at “The Pavilion” CAFOD, Romero House, 55 Westminster Bridge Road, SE1 7JB. Book a place: office@ southwarkjandp.co.uk or 020 79289742

13 November (Sun) London
Remembrance Day lecture on “Humanity in the midst of war” by Vickie Hawkins, General Director of Medecins Sans Frontières, 3pm at the Imperial War Museum, Lambeth Road. Organised by Movement for the Abolition of War www.abolishwar.org.uk

6 December (Tues) London
Pax Christi Advent Peace Service at St Aloysius Church, Phoenix Rd, Euston, followed by Advent and Christmas market.

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

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

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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