AGM
At our Annual General Meeting in Nottingham on 2 June we welcomed two new members to the Executive Committee who both live in Leicester. Lorraine Mirham has been involved in issues of peace and social justice for many years and currently co-convenes the International Environment Working Group for the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom UK (WILPF). Having worked as a teacher and language therapist, Theresa hopes to bring her skills of communication to this work for peace. Establishing a peace and justice group in her parish Theresa writes: ‘everything finally fell into place three years ago. I feel quite a lot about this process at the AGM; for those who were not there, this is the progress so far.’

Holly Ball, Chris Cole and Helen Gilbert were re-elected for a two-year term. A report of the Annual General Meeting can be found here http://paxchristi.org.uk/news-and-events/news-reports/may-august-2018/.

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 peacekeepers 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.

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

Change and transition in Pax Christi
In this issue of Justpeace Holly Ball looks at some of the changes which will be taking place within Pax Christi over the coming months and in particular with regard to its staff and leadership. For months now the Pax Christi executive team has been working hard to face the various changes and challenges which we anticipate for 2018/2019.

Yet, even with so much attention on the future, our day to day work still goes on. Pax Christi continues to engage with the many peace issues that concern us. Paul McCartney examines here the impact of the air-strikes by the west on Syria and questions what we have to say to our young people.

Chris Cole describes how the use of drones has been normalised, and is now virtually central to the way in which armed forces fight wars today.

At the AGM in Nottingham on 2 June, we formally announced the coming retirement of our dear General Secretary, Pat. We will be leaving us at the end of March in 2019, after nearly 30 years at Pax Christi’s helm. Over the summer the Executive Committee will be very busy recruiting for Pat’s job, which is named ‘Director’. At the same time we will recruit for our peace education worker as Matt Jeziorski, who has been with us for nine years, has recently been appointed to a new post in the Archdiocese of Liverpool, which he will take up in September.

Knowing that Pat would be retiring in the near future, and anticipating inevitable transition in the core team, was the catalyst for Pax Christi to begin a Strategic Planning process in 2016, to ensure a smooth transition during the change of leadership. I said quite a lot about this process at the AGM; for those who were not there, this is the progress so far.

Five strategic aims were developed:

- Financial stability – to resource the time of transition and the ongoing work of Pax Christi and future growth.
- Creating and supporting a community of peacekeepers – to nourish and sustain individuals and groups in developing a nonviolent lifestyle and a commitment to active nonviolence.
- Developing a theology of nonviolence – to create and stimulate a process of theological reflection on nonviolent peacemaking for today that will bring a rigour of thinking to our work - and encourage a papal encyclical on nonviolence.
- Continuing peace education with schools and young people – to support young people in critical engagement with issues of peace and nonviolence and train and resource educators in the skills of peace education in order to inspire and develop young peacebuilders.
- Transition of leadership and core team development – to maintain an effective organisation and leadership before, during, and after a three-year period of transition.
It seems a long time ago now. In fact, it was April 14, just a week after chemical weapons were allegedly used in Douma, Syria. Many things can be learnt, of course. My points are limited by word count and personal bias. First, we, as a peace movement, need to learn that our national leaders will never be guided by principles, only opportunities. Mrs May would have bombed Syria the year before, only she messed up the general election. We should assume bad faith on their part at all times: “The strong do what they can”. Second, their actions will only be changed if we can restrict them, not because they have had a change of heart. But the tighter the restrictions proposed, the greater will their resistance be.

For all the recent talk of parliamentary opposition to foreign military adventures, there has been only one occasion in the last fifteen years when MPs did not endorse such plans. The majority, sometimes almost unanimously. Third, Remote Control Warfare, as it has become known, is not a new phenomenon but as the enemy target. Nowadays, though, we have to choose between versions of the facts, and sometimes the only way we can do so is to follow our own instincts.

The razing of parts of Aleppo by Russian and Syrian bombing may be compared with the razing of parts of Mosul by Western coalition bombing. We can be sure these events happened, but we are supposed to think these events happened, but we are supposed to think.

By the time Chilcot put down his pen (in 2016), no one but Mr Blair would attempt to justify the Iraq war in public. This does not mean that the country had finally concluded “Never Again!” and we had at last bought the war to end all wars. In fact, while Chilcot chewed on his pen those seven years, the UK wrecked Libya, invaded violent uprisings in Syria, then bombed Syria, started bombing Iraq, finally did bomb Syria and continued to bomb Iraq. Of the most important services peace campaigners can perform is to remember such things as these and not allow them to be covered up, blotted out, submerged, swept aside, forgotten. These are the wells we drink from. Not in bitterness but in renewal. Pau McCowan

Rest in Peace Peggy Attlee 1918—2018

We struck gold when, in about 1977, Peggy Attlee offered a weekly prayer for Pax Christi, then for which the Centre for the Study of the Christian Peace Movement set up at Dominic’s Priory, north London. Pax Christi’s blend of faith and politics matched Peggy’s lifelong interests and she soon became an indispensable member of the office team. Her legacy remains visible, not least in an extensive filing system of newspaper cuttings we still use.

Human rights and relations between global East and West were her two major concerns. Peggy ran a letter-a-month scheme, encouraging members to write to prisoners of conscience. She kept us in touch with Amnesty International, Action by Christians Against Torture and many other organisations.

During the Cold War years of the 1980s Pax Christi International was engaged in dialogue with the Russian Orthodox Church and Peggy helped to organise a British East-West group, wrote a pamphlet explaining the history and outlook of Russia, and organised visits by Pax Christi members and others to peace-minded contacts in Russia.

On Ash Wednesday 1988 Peggy made a dramatic public statement about the immorality of nuclear weapons by engaging in nonviolent civil disobedience at the Ministry of Defence. She was arrested, appeared in court, and fined.

Displaying the courage of her convictions herself, Peggy admired this in other people and helped to establish the annual ceremony in Tavistock Square honouring the conscientious objectors of all nations and centuries.

From bazaar stalls stocked with homemade jams and jute Peggy raised funds for the East West project. She sold stamps coming into the office to a dealer, and collected books on Catholic Herald were not going to review. Theology went to East European colleges; the rest sold second-hand. After the break-up of the Soviet bloc this paid for a British East-West project the booklet to be sent to Catholic contacts in 11 East European countries who could not have afforded a subscription themselves.

With her experience as a diplomat’s wife, Peggy knew how important friendship and good conversation are in international relations. Countless guests from all over the world—many of them via Pax Christi—enjoyed her hospitality and warm conversation. (See her recipes in our book A Taste for Peace.)

From top-level inter-church dialogue to the nuts and bolts of office life, Peggy’s contribution to Pax Christi over 25 years was courageous, practical, generous and efficient: quite immeasurable. Blessed are the peacemakers—and she was surely one of them.

Valerie Flessati (General Secretary of Pax Christi 1972-1985)

The Danger of Drones—Normalising War

Despite insisting that the UK would not go down that path, in 2015 and separate from the Coalition military campaign against ISIS in Iraq, UK drones in co-operation with the US hunted down and killed Cardiff-born ISIS member Reyaad Khan, his cousin from Aberdeen, Ruhul Amin, as well as another Cardiff-born man, Junaid Hussain, in Syria.

Then PM David Cameron admitted that the killings were the first time that the UK had undertaken air strikes in a country in which the UK was not engaged in a war. Parliamentary objections to this crossing of the Rubicon were quickly snuffed out by a baying tabloid press, and the government went on to develop a policy of drone killings. More recently, Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson has argued that the entire ISIS battlefield should be killed by drones. Thankfully, his comments were condemned by a broad range of politicians and international law experts.

The theme chosen by the UK Working Group for the week is ‘Investing in Young People’. For resources visit http://tinyurl.com/UK-WWPP1.