Pax Christi Annual Report 2018-2019

There are signs of hope in the world about us, but one has to look hard to find them! The uncertainty of when - and if - Brexit happens, weighs heavily on us. Violence, and especially knife crime, continues unabated. Trident renewal persists, and exported British weapons are killing civilians overseas. Pax Christi is needed more than ever.

We work closely with Pax Christi International, especially on the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative, the nuclear weapons ban treaty, and the Israel-Palestine peace process - the latter even more important now with recent inflammatory actions by the US and Israel to claim Jerusalem as the Israeli capital city and Israel’s ‘sovereign right to annex the Golan Heights in Syria’.

A year of change
Our executive committee has been extremely busy - most notably in preparing for big changes in our staff. At a wonderful celebration in April members said thankyou to Pat Gaffney after nearly 30 years of service as General Secretary. To say that Pat will be missed is woefully inadequate, but we also wish her many blessings in the years to come. Pat has agreed to continue her work on the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative.

Pax Christi’s new Director, Theresa Alessandro, started work in March. Theresa, from Leicester, was a Speech and Language Therapist with a long history of peace and justice involvement. We are delighted that she will lead Pax Christi in the months and years ahead. Aisling Griffin, new staff member for Schools and Youth, who joined us in September, is building on the good work done by Matt Jeziorski, to whom we said farewell last August.

Working groups have been making progress on our strategic plan, including human resources, education, the community of peacemakers, nonviolence, and financial sustainability. This is a priority because Peace Sunday contributions - our main source of income - are decreasing despite specific actions to increase Peace Sunday donations. Smaller church congregations, an ageing membership, the challenge of reaching younger potential members, austerity and uncertainty are all factors. We will keep the membership updated.

Fr Owen Hardwicke
Owen Hardwicke, General Secretary of Pax Christi UK from 1985-87, died in January, aged 94. Owen was a conscientious objector in WW2 and began training for the priesthood in 1950. He served in many capacities with Wrexham Peace & Justice Centre, CND Cymru, and was well known for his work on the Disarmament Group and the Israel-Palestine peace process - the latter even more important now with recent inflammatory actions by the US and Israel to claim Jerusalem as the Israeli capital city and Israel’s ‘sovereign right to annex the Golan Heights in Syria’.

In the office:
President: Archbishop Malcolm McMahon OP
Chair: Holly Ball; Vice-Chair: Chris Cole, Treasurer: Joe Burns; with Emma Atherton, Helen Gilbert, Jan Harper, Lorraine Mirham, Laura Atherton, plus Paul McGowan and Ann Farr (both co-opted).
In the office: Theresa Alessandro, Director from April 2019, Pat Gaffney, General Secretary to April 2019, Fausta Valentine, Administrator. Aisling Griffin Youth and Schools from September 2018, Matt Jeziorski, Youth and Schools to August 2018. Peter Hickey, Publications and Member Support, with Valerie Flessati, Editor, and volunteers: Lauri Clarke, John Dowbekin, Nuala Flynn, Peter McIlhara, Rebecca McLaughlin, Ann Milner, Sr Monica O’Brien, and many more who help with mailings and events.

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What people say about Pax Christi...

“Really profound way to spend Ash Wednesday, joining Pax Christi for Christian witness and resistance to MOD’s preparations for deployment of Weapons of Mass Destruction.” Christopher, Methodist Presbyter

“The Pax Christi daily prayer has inspired me to remain dedicated to work for Justice & Peace for much of my adult life. I am now 80 and retired from leading our long established parish group.” Michael, Alltrincham

“The online script for Peace Sunday is a really good resource. It can be adapted, tweaked and gives members something to start off with and gives confidence to first-timers.” Anne, Abingdon

“I appreciated finding different, fresh language to express aspects of my own work in another way. I can take this back to clarify about my priorities and how I approach them.”

“I feel more inspired to get more involved with peacework – see women as being inherent peacemakers in their nature and how better they can be listened to.”

Quotes from participants at our day ‘Celebrating Women Peacemakers’
Aisling Griffin writes: Since September I have been fortunate to be able to build on Matt Jeziorski’s work by visiting schools that we have developed relationships with over the years, such as Sacred Heart, Hammersmith. In November I worked with Year 8 on retreat days looking at friendship. One of the activities examined problems we might have with our friends, including disagreements and conflict. We facilitated a conversation with Pax Christi women, Emma Atherton, Ella Holliday and Carol Burns (L to R in picture) to explore motivations and approaches to peacemaking in different contexts and ages.

Our members in action

In Plymouth, Sr Margaret Mary planned a service using both the Christian Unity and the Peace Sunday booklets for a combined service for Justice and Peace. She said, “I think ecumenism and peace are not exactly understood. I find the daily prayer for peace great; it includes so much, a great examination of conscience.”

Jan Harper continues to lead the Pax Christi Liverpool group. They hold monthly meetings to coordinate activities. Fr Gerry McFlynn led a day retreat to help nurture their work and they cooperated with Merseyside CND on events for Remembrance, wreath-laying and a vigil at Walton Prison where First World War Conscientious Objectors were held. On Ash Wednesday they attracted a large group for open-air prayer in the city centre and in April arranged a viewing of ‘Of Gods and Men’ to deepen understanding and discussion of nonviolence.

A new Pax Christi group has formed in Southampton, which meets monthly, led by Frank Campbell. They invited Fr Gerry McFlynn to speak on Peace Sunday and have embarked on a series of discussion themes such as From Just War Theory to Just Peace and Does nonviolence work? Frank has contributed articles on peace-related issues to The Universe, Vocation for Justice and our own Justpeace.

Pax Christi Scotland

Since spring 2018 a group has been mapping a way towards forming Pax Christi Scotland. With the support of the Scottish Bishops’ Conference and JBP Scotland they are now in contact with Pax Christi International. Two reflection days were held and the steering group will “work within a Scottish context, which will include issues of peace-building within the workplace, the home, the school, the parish. To do this we will seek to work with appropriate partners”. Bruce Kent spoke about Pax Christi in parishes in Musselburgh in January.

Vigil outside Walton Prison, Liverpool

No more war - let’s make peace happen theme proved powerful in conveying a positive message for Remembrance 2018. From the No More War postcards and leaflets with ideas on how to mark Remembrance 2018 to the prayer and story resource on Catholic conscientious objectors of the First World War, parishes and groups were well supported. Nationally, Pax Christi played a key role in the national events outside Westminster Abbey and in Tavistock Square on 11 November and in coordinating a Peace Festival with 23 other organisations in Friends House, London. The Tablet featured an article by Valerie Flessati offering insights into the specific experience of Catholic COs. In Leeds the Justice & Peace Commission with Pax Christi Leeds created and distributed a liturgy resource to every parish in the Diocese. Church-services, talks, the distribution of our cards, events in peace gardens, took place from Liverpool to Leicester, Wisbech to Wolverhampton and beyond.

The Pax Christi ICON of Peace provided a focal point for prayer and discussion at a parallel event at the Eucharistic Congress in Liverpool. Ann Farr’s moving meditation introduced people to the stories depicted on the ICON and how they deepen our understanding of peacemaking. We facilitated a conversation with Pax Christi women, Emma Atherton, Ella Holliday and Carol Burns (L to R in picture) to explore motivations and approaches to peacemaking in different contexts and ages.

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