Beyond Poppies

Pax Christi - and the wider peace movement - can be modestly satisfied with its contribution to the Centenary of the First World War. This has been a significant strand in our work since 2012 when national organisations formed the First World War Peace Forum.

It’s impossible to summarise the range of imaginative projects, from peace quilts to re-enacting a conscientious objector’s tribunal. Collectively we have certainly ensured that the once shameful war resistance has been uncovered and recognised.

Greatest press interest arose for Conscientious Objectors’ Day 2014, when local radio contacted us for stories about men from each region, and the Guardian featured information we provided, such as the experience of Tom Attlee, brother of Clement. In London we gathered 150 descendants of FWW COs for the ceremony in Tavistock Square. Most poignant were elderly sisters from Cumbria who said it was the first opportunity they had ever been given to honour the stand of their CO father. Families generously shared private memoirs which have enlarged the documentation available to researchers like Cyril Pearce, and the Peace Pledge Union.

With a joint conference in 2015 Pax Christi celebrated the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, founded after the 1915 women’s congress in The Hague. In 2016, anniversary of the Military Service Act, the Forum supported Conscience in bringing before Parliament a bill to allow conscientious objection to military taxes. In 2018 peace groups offered a different perspective on Remembrance under the banner ‘No More War - Let’s Make Peace Happen’. Liverpool members held a vigil outside Walton prison; Leeds members put together a Remembrance booklet circulated round the entire Diocese.

Throughout the centenary Pax Christi’s website has provided links to films, liturgy, posters, and resources - CAAT’s ‘Arming All Sides’ (100 years of arms dealing) or Sue Gilmurray’s song cycle for choirs. Schools have been busy, using our assembly on women peacemakers, or the Christmas Truce by the Peace Education Network, and creating projects like the Peace and Memorial Garden at All Hallows College, Macclesfield.

We’ve given FWW talks for many organisations including Catholic People’s Weeks, Peace News, CND, Justice and Peace networks. Our seminar with Rob Esdaile and Richard Carter considered appropriate language, symbols, and attitudes for truly Christian commemoration. We assembled a scratch choir for Clive Barratt’s re-telling of the anti-war story through songs. We published Stations of the Cross based on words from the COs. We joined Pax Christi colleagues from several countries for our own impressive pilgrimage to Flanders. We stimulated articles on Fellowship of Reconciliation history, and Pope Benedict XV’s peace witness. With scant documentation about the few Catholic COs, several members conducted research, and in 2018 The Tablet published an article about them for the very first time.

Some plans - such as our petition to abolish army recruitment for under-18s - attracted less support than expected. The Church nationally missed opportunities (a pastoral letter on peacemaking?) but then the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative arrived with the tantalising hope of a papal encyclical instead. The deeper questions posed by this extraordinary commemoration of an extraordinary war will continue to challenge us. How do we convert our remembrance of war, violence, and sacrifice into determination, energy, and practical action for world peace NOW?

Valerie Flessati

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The Catholic Nonviolence Initiative - the story unfolds

‘Nonviolence is a way of life, making choices about how we deal with situations, looking for the most loving way yet including challenge and conflict...’  
Pax Christi member Carol Burns.

Carol is one of four women we filmed responding to our questions ‘What does nonviolence mean to you and how do you see its value and power?’ These are helpful questions for all of us in teasing out our understanding of active nonviolence.  (See more here https://tinyurl.com/PaxYouTube).  They also mirror the on-going conversations within Pax Christi International’s (PCI) Catholic Nonviolence Initiative (CNI) project. We are represented on the CNI executive committee and involved in all developments.

Choosing Peace: the Catholic Church returns to Gospel Nonviolence was published after our 2016 Vatican gathering, and we have recently produced a quick study guide to help individuals and groups make the best of this book. We then held a year-long series of international roundtables to further draw on the knowledge and experiences of activists, theologians and academics. We gathered materials to share with the Vatican on themes including the power of nonviolence, the scriptural basis for nonviolence, how we can create new moral framework. In May 2018 PCI produced a position paper on Nonviolent Approaches to Sustaining Peace, with 12 policy proposals such as reviewing peacekeeping operations, refocusing on nonviolent methods of preventing conflicts and protecting civilians, facilitating exchanges between governments and civil society for capacity building in diplomacy and mediation - illustrating the concrete nature of nonviolence as a tool and strategy.

Choosing Peace by Pax Christi International Co-President Marie Dennis takes a deep look at the practice of nonviolence in a violent world, Jesus and nonviolence, traditional Catholic teaching on nonviolence, and reflections on the future of Catholic teaching. Now available with a Study Guide.

Valerie Flessati and I participated in the recent gathering in Rome, co-sponsored by the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development. For me it was like being involved in a revolution of nonviolence, through the lived experiences, energy, creativity and hope conveyed by those taking part. Theologian Emmanuel Katongole provided examples of non-violence from Africa, such as the seminarians of Buta, Burundi, who refused to separate Hutu vs Tutsi. They stood together in solidarity and were shot. As one of them declared before he died, ‘We have won’. Emmanuel says nonviolence is a calling, not simply because it ‘works’ but because it is the way of God. It is the way that God creates, governs and redeems the universe. Pietro Ameglio from Mexico challenged us to bring the moral reserve of the church, its people, language and practices, its actions, witness and teachings to places of violence and oppression.

Encouraging Pope Francis to write an Encyclical is the ‘big ask’ of this process but for me engaging in conversations that make nonviolence real and understood in our schools, parishes, communities and nation is just as important - we don’t have to wait! Let’s imagine those ahead of us in 2119, celebrating 100 years of global leadership by the Catholic Church on nonviolence. It is possible if we choose to make it happen.

Pat Gaffney

If you are interested in learning more about the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative then please follow the links below to find out more and engage in this ongoing work:

- Practical tools and resources here: http://paxchristi.org.uk/resources/nonviolence-in-action/educational-resources-for-nonviolence/
- Catholic Nonviolence Initiative http://paxchristi.org.uk/resources/nonviolence-in-action/catholic-nonviolence-initiative/
- Choosing Peace by Pax Christi International Co-President Marie Dennis takes a deep look at the practice of nonviolence in a violent world, Jesus and nonviolence, traditional Catholic teaching on nonviolence, and reflections on the future of Catholic teaching. Now available with a Study Guide.

Valerie and Pat with colleagues in Rome
On Saturday 9 March a group of women peacemakers from across the UK met in Birmingham to celebrate International Women’s Day. One of the first discussions of the day surrounded the idea of intergenerational peace work. As the youngest member of the group, I emphasised the importance of young people feeling welcome at the table of peace and justice work. It is common for us to be dismissed as idealistic or naïve. However, the older women in the group stressed that they saw value in the opinions and voices of the young, in the same way that the young see value in the experience and knowledge of the older generation. Having such an open and honest conversation with these women, highlighted that age does not influence our passion to work towards a more peaceful future. None of the older women in the group were any less motivated and eager to seek change than the younger peace workers and this illustrated to me the great value in intergenerational collaboration.

This discussion was particularly interesting as it challenged one of my preconceived ideas about the day. I was originally quite apprehensive that the women involved would be strongly religious and this was a concern, as despite being brought up Catholic, there are several teachings that I question. After meeting the women, I was comforted by the realisation that while most of us shared belief in God, we all had our own grievances towards Catholicism and organised religion in general. My own preconceived idea highlighted that many people may be put off from getting involved in religious peace making groups, because of their attitudes towards religion. This may be something that we could address in the future, to get more people involved.

We went on to discuss further barriers that women in peacemaking experience. One of these surrounds the idea of ‘not doing enough’. Several women expressed that they didn’t consider themselves as peacemakers, as they did not feel their contribution was sufficient. The fact that some women do not place value on their work, may put them off from further commitment. However, many women are naturally peacemakers and their contributions to peace work in their daily lives, however small, are valuable. It is important that peacemaking organisations emphasise that it is okay to flow in and out of this type of work. Doing as much as we can is enough. Organisations need to be more mindful of the many demands on working women and mothers, to facilitate for their involvement. Women individually need to be more forgiving of themselves, as we cannot do everything.

The day as a whole was enriched with inspiring women peacemakers and stimulating discussions. The main thing I took from the discussions was the importance of inclusion. There needs to be more emphasis on the fact that everyone is welcome in peace and justice work, no matter who they are, where they are from, and how much they can offer.

Clare Shanley—Birmingham

Celebrating Women Peacemakers

Pax Christi women’s gathering in Birmingham

Diary

June 15 (Sat) London
The DSEI Arms Fair is fast approaching, so we will gather together at St Hilda’s East Community Centre (18 Club Row, Shoreditch, London E2 7EY) to pin down our plans and get more people involved. More info at: www.stopthearmsfair.org.uk/events/stop-the-arms-fair-network-meeting-2/

June 22 (Sat) London
‘You, Me and Those Who Came Before’ Inter-Faith panel and reflection. Examining the effects of forcible displacement worldwide and how war has been a major factor in mass migration and building the link to climate change. 10.30am-1pm followed by shared lunch St John Vianney Parish Hall N15 3QH

June 29 (Sat) London
Save the Earth Abolish War Conference. The conference will examine the theme of militarism and the environment. Speakers include Molly Scott Cato MEP, Stuart Parkinson and Peter van den Dijck and programme at: http://paxchristi.org.uk/event/save-the-earth-abolish-war-conference/?instance_id=836

26-28 July (Fri-Sun), Swanwick, Derbyshire

6 August (Tue) Hiroshima Day, London
Pax Christi will have a stall from 10-9pm outside Westminster Cathedral. Prayers at 11.30am and 3.30pm. Please contact the office if you can help at some time during the day.

9 August (Fri) Nagasaki Day, London
Pax Christi stall and prayer times as above. At 6.30pm in the Crypt Chapel of Westminster Cathedral there will be the annual service marking the anniversary of the execution of Bl Franz Jägerstätter, followed by the annual interfaith peace walk to Battersea Park Peace Pagoda.

3 September (Tuesday)
The DSEI arms fair will return to London Docklands. Pax Christi and other faith-based organisations will be present on the ‘No Faith in War’ day. Join us outside the Excel Centre on the day. More details available in the coming weeks.

16-23 September
World week for peace in Palestine & Israel, a national week of action, prayer and study in support of the World Council of Churches annual initiative. The theme chosen by the UK Working Group for the week is ‘Investing in Young People’. For resources and information please visit: http://tinyurl.com/UK-WWPP
A great crowd of peacemakers came together at our Annual General Meeting in London on 18 May. We welcomed our new director Theresa Alessandro who reported on her first few weeks at Pax Christi. Theresa said it is a great privilege to be in this role and to work with people who believe in peace. She plans to get out and about, meeting members around the country.

We were delighted to welcome two new members to the Executive Committee: Joan Sharples and Henrietta Cullinan. Joan joins us from Shrewsbury Diocese where she previously worked as a Justice and Peace fieldworker. Henrietta is a member of the London Catholic Worker community and has spent time in Pakistan and Afghanistan. We said goodbye to three wonderful committee members; Jan Harper, Helen Gilbert and Emma Atherton, who have served on the exec with great enthusiasm, bringing their gifts to the team. In the morning we heard from our chair, Holly Ball, who gave a round-up of the past year. Staff then reported on developments with finance, outreach and projects.

Members were invited to take part in an exercise with the aim of capturing ideas and ways in which they had been working for peace at home. We heard from our National President, Archbishop Malcolm McMahon, who encouraged us, as peacemakers, not to be silent but to speak God’s truth. After a shared lunch and catch-up, members came together with Archbishop Malcolm to celebrate Mass and to give thanks for the work and fellowship of Pax Christi.

Perhaps the highlight of the day came when we awarded the Pax Christi Peace Prize to some inspiring and committed people whose daily work of peace-making impressed all those present.

The first award was given to Fr Joe Ryan, who leads a busy urban parish in North London and who has also faithfully chaired the Westminster Justice and Peace Commission for many years. Fr Joe shared some of his work with Migrants and also spoke about the J&P’s continuing focus on the environment and climate change.

Our next Peace Medal was awarded to historian Peter van den Dungen. Peter has created an international network of peace museums and encouraged peace trails in different countries. He said he was most proud to have helped set up a peace museum in Tehran. Peter said ‘There is nothing more important than peace education’.

Our final awards went to Anna and Eleanor Marshall who gave a witty acceptance speech about what has shaped their commitment to Justice and Peace issues and how ‘Working for justice and peace is the right thing to do’. Two sharp and inspirational young women who are really committed to working for peace and justice in their daily life. Congratulations to all the award winners!

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

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Pax Christi, St Joseph’s, Watford Way, London NW4 4TY

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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