Building a peace in the footsteps of Jesus, one pace at a time

In Pax Christi, the Catholic movement for peace, we celebrate the birth of Jesus, the Prince of Peace, with joy and hope. But as peacemakers, when there is violent conflict in so many parts of the world and militarism is stronger than ever, where does our hope come from? Where can we find joy as the rights of Palestinian people are eroded even further? Desperate people continue to flee violence and injustice, still risking their lives as there is no legal route to a safe, welcoming place.

Pax Christi members are ordinary people seeking peace and try to do something about it. This year, members from the Abingdon Peace Group organised an exhibition of children’s artwork called ‘Peace and War through Children’s Eyes’ featuring drawings by children from Darfur, now living in refugee camps alongside those of Abingdon children. It was an education resource to help children respond to the images they saw.

In Leeds, Pax Christi members and Justice and Peace friends collaborated with the Leeds Palestine Film Festival, sponsoring a film and arranging a discussion to share ideas about the plight of Palestinian people and actions we might take to help.

When the huge arms fair came to London again, we supported the No Faith in War protest. Beforehand at the National Justice & Peace Network annual conference, Pax Christi provided an opportunity for people to create mini-banners voicing their opposition to the arms trade, with slogans such as “The Arms Trade sells death”, “Selling Arms creates slogans such as ‘The Arms Trade opposition to the arms trade, with violence Not Security’, ‘Peace Is Priceless. Stop the Arms Fair’.

In the Pax Christi office, we say our Daily Prayer together at lunchtime. In May, we held a quiet prayer time in solidarity with Palestine. In time for Christmas, we re-launched our website, featuring a huge parcel of goods handmade by our partners in Palestine for our online shop.

Extinction Rebellion, with its amazing energy has given the peace movement new connections to be articulated. The focus of so many governments on military approaches to difficult situations appears increasingly outdated and overstated. Weapons cannot solve climate change. Alongside killing and injuring people, weapons contribute to the displacement of huge numbers of people and to environmental destruction. We will all need to work together to reduce future warming of the planet and to help those already affected.

At least while it is Christmas time and we are celebrating the birth of Jesus, we can hope that the whole world really will move ‘military security’ down the list of priorities and put the planet and all its peoples first. It is already 2,000 years since Jesus admonished us to ‘Put away your sword’.

A prominent theme this year has been to consider how we as Catholic Christians invest our money so as to further promote peace. For example at Pax Christi we have been asking: Do our Churches invest in international companies who profit from the occupation of Palestine? How wonderful it would be if all Catholic dioceses could report that they do not invest in such companies! What a joy it would be for Palestinian people to hear that the Catholic Church in England & Wales had made this assurance, in order to uphold the human rights and dignity of people living in the land of Jesus’ birth. All this year-round commitment, creativity and the productive working together by people of peace and goodwill, helps us to believe that our world can be changed. Ways that lead to peace can become the ‘straight paths’ for everyone to follow.

Pope Francis announces a World Peace Message at the beginning of each year. The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England & Wales has set aside the second Sunday in Ordinary time as Peace Sunday – 19th January 2020. At Pax Christi, we amplify the pope’s message by providing Peace Sunday ideas and resources to all parishes. We hope parishes will take a collection or make a donation to support our work. Most importantly we are filled with joy when Peace Sunday arrives and it is celebrated with enthusiasm in parishes – as fits followers of Jesus, the Prince of Peace.

This Christmas, the staff and members of Pax Christi wish all readers the joy, hope and peace of Christ.

WANT TO KNOW MORE? Theresa Alessandro, Director of Pax Christi, can be contacted on 0208 203 4884 or see www.paxchristi.co.uk

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