At our Rome gathering in April we recognised that we are in a “Kairos” moment which calls the whole Church to bring nonviolence from the periphery of Catholic thought on war and peace to the centre.

The CNI Executive Committee met in July to map out a plan for the years ahead. This includes continued work with partners in the Vatican and, equally important, work with the Catholic community at large, through education and the application of nonviolent practices and strategies. We welcomed Pax Christi’s two new international co-Presidents, Sr Wamuyu Wachira, IBVM, professor of peace and conflict studies at St Paul’s University in Nairobi, and Bishop Marc Stenger from the Diocese of Troyes, France. Bishop Marc says, “Pax Christi International must have as its mission to prevent conflicts through advocacy work, in order to transform the risks of violence, searching for a new balance and protecting the most vulnerable people and communities... to seek the promotion of a culture of nonviolence in the light of the Gospel”.

At the Stop the Arms Fair at the London Excel a young participant reflected, “We see things coming together, what is happening here in Newham, what is happening in India, in America, all of these things are connected and we can no longer afford to have a fragmented view of the world”. Add to this list Hong Kong, Pakistan, the US-Mexican border, Brazil, Afghanistan, town centres throughout the UK, where ordinary people are taking personal responsibility in challenging the injustices, violence and lack of democracy they experience. “Seeing things come together” helps us to understand and respond with a clear “no” to inhuman social order and a clear “yes” to the fullness of life. This spirit is at the heart of the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative (CNI) a project of Pax Christi International (PCI).

“In October, we are encouraging our members to celebrate nonviolence during the month of October — and beyond. Be creative and deepen your understanding of nonviolence as an authentic way of living the Gospel. Do share with us your ideas, your favourite resources, your achievements in exploring nonviolence, so we can enrich our own responses and resources.

Pat Gaffney
(Member of the CNI Executive Committee)

In August Dieudonné Serukabuza, PCI’s Africa Coordinator, took part in a 'train-the-trainer' workshop in Kinshasa as part of a nonviolence project in the Great Lakes region. 12 trainers from different PCI organisations took part: educators, missionaries, youth workers. One participant commented: “Our country has just known periods and cycles of conflict. What we have just learned is a formation that goes in the direction of the resolution of conflicts by nonviolent methods. The presence of conflict sometimes creates trauma in people’s hearts... we must work to help those who are traumatised to live in peace with others”.

Here in England and Wales we encourage members to celebrate nonviolence during the month of October - and beyond. Be creative and deepen your understanding of nonviolence as an authentic way of living the Gospel. Do share with us your ideas, your favourite resources, your achievements in exploring nonviolence, so we can enrich our own responses and resources.

Pat Gaffney
(Member of the CNI Executive Committee)

Reflection from the April meeting:
https://tinyurl.com/PCInonviolence
Statement on the Amazon Synod:
https://tinyurl.com/PCIAmazon
Proclaiming Nonviolence—an invitation to us all

Nonviolent peacemaking offers creative and long-lasting responses to violence at all levels. How can we better understand its power? Better put it into practice? How can we follow the nonviolent Jesus? Setting out on the path is one way - following in the footsteps of those who have and do walk this path.

“The decisive and consistent practice of nonviolence has produced impressive results. The achievements of Mahatma Gandhi and Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan in the liberation of India, and of Dr Martin Luther King Jr in combating racial discrimination... Women in particular are often leaders of nonviolence, for example, Leymah Gbowee and the thousands of Liberian women, who organised pray-ins and nonviolent protest that brought an end to the second civil war in Liberia.”

Pope Francis, World Peace Day Message 2017

Telling stories

The International Day of Nonviolence is kept annually on 2 October, Mahatma Gandhi’s birthday—and 2019 marks the 150th anniversary of his birth. Our calendar is rich with the memory of so many nonviolent peacemakers and movements. Why not arrange a service or time of reflection to celebrate them—perhaps during Advent? A sample service and other resources that could be used in an event or gathering are here: https://tinyurl.com/activenonviolence

Here are just some of the examples you might include as well as those mentioned above by Pope Francis:

- The Ecumenical Accompaniers in Palestine and Israel, Christian Peacemaker Teams, and Operation Dove volunteers, who put themselves in the front line in conflict hot-spots.
- Berta Caceres, Honduran indigenous environmentalist and campaigner against corruption
- Margaret and Barry Mizen, the London couple who have responded to their son Jimmy’s murder by working to make city streets safer for young people
- Wangari Muta Maathai, founder of the Kenyan Green Belt environmental movement and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize 2004
- Franz Jägerstätter, Austrian farmer executed in 1943 for refusing to fight in Hitler’s army
- Sister Dorothy Stang, American-born Brazilian Notre Dame Sister who defended the Amazon Rain forest and its people against logging companies.
- Pax Christi International, which brings together an amazing network of peace activists in 50 countries

We need to talk about nonviolence

When we hear stories of nonviolence, meet people who practice nonviolence, what do we learn from them? Can we say, “This is nonviolence because...”? Ask people what nonviolence means to them. Does it have a special value or power? Take a look at the short films Pax Christi has made - could you make similar videos in your parish, school, community and share them with Pax Christi? Please send us images or photographs that could help us talk about nonviolence. More here https://tinyurl.com/activenonviolence

The nonviolent Jesus

The Pax Christi prayer card (detail above) showing the two hands of nonviolence in John Petts’ Alabama window helps us to see some of the ways we can all put nonviolence into practice. (More here https://tinyurl.com/JesusTwoHands

The Gospels give us insights into Jesus’ active nonviolence. Explore what these passages mean to you. Examples here https://tinyurl.com/CourageousJesus

Here you can find resources from Pax Christi and the Catholic Nonviolence initiative: videos, powerpoints, worksheets and more. https://tinyurl.com/activenonviolence

Catholic Nonviolence Initiative, project of Pax Christi International https://nonviolencejustpeace.net/

Nonviolent Peace Force, the work of Unarmed Civilian Intervention https://www.nonviolentpeaceforce.org/

Peace News, grassroots newspaper covering the full spectrum of peace and justice issues https://peacenews.info/

Waging Nonviolence: news and analysis of nonviolence struggles around the globe. https://wagingnonviolence.org/

Maya Brand-Feigenbaum, 18, from Kiryat Tivon near Haifa, first declared her refusal to be conscripted into the Israeli army on 14 July this year and was subsequently sentenced to two prison terms, during which she spent at total of 27 days behind bars. After appearing before the Conscience Committee on 25 August she was granted an exemption from military service. Simultaneously another young woman CO, Yasmin Ricci-Yahav, was given her first prison sentence.

In her July statement, Maya clearly articulated her understanding of and commitment to nonviolence.

“I will refuse to be drafted. I have contemplated this for several years, knowing that this decision will get me imprisoned. I believe that refusing to serve in the military is the best and most effective way for me to promote anti-war principles and contribute to the ending of the occupation...”

I have always agreed with nonviolent action for social change. Great leaders such as Gandhi, Wangari Maathai and Martin Luther King Jr inspired me and gave me hope to act for a better world and fight oppression, with the goal of improving all lives.

I believe that there is no dispute - even across political disagreements, that war leads to destruction, death and poverty and makes no contribution whatsoever to human society. Committed to the belief that states, peoples and humans can resolve disputes and disagreements through respectful and nonviolent communication, I cannot take part in an organisation that operates wars...

I protest against the humiliation of people who want to live freely and have to pass checkpoints every day. I protest against all war crimes, committed quietly beneath the surface. In solidarity with my Palestinian friends who act nonviolently, I, an Israeli, am also taking nonviolent action to promote peace and end the occupation.”

You can read more about Maya and other conscientious objectors here here http://jfjfp.com/israeli-conscientious-objector-sentenced-to-20-days-in-military-prison-2/
European Lawyers on Lesvos win Pax Christi International peace prize

Talking of nonviolence, surely one of the most potent instruments in the justice and peace toolbox is the law? So it has been heartening to learn about the European Lawyers in Lesvos (ELIL) - recipients of the Pax Christi International peace prize 2019. At the award ceremony in Brussels their Managing Director Philip Worthington described their work.

Based on the Greek island of Lesvos, where so many desperate migrants are now stuck, these lawyers have assisted over 9,000 people in the past three years, with an impressive 74.5% of them successfully gaining refugee status. The small staff team includes two Greek lawyers and two interpreters. They have been joined by more than 140 volunteer lawyers from 17 European countries, each working long hours and often giving up their holidays to help.

The charity was founded in 2016 by the German Bar Association and the Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe (CCBE). They recognised the acute need for free legal advice when, following the initial influx of refugees into Europe, and notably with the EU-Turkey deal of 2016, countries toughened their border controls. Now those arriving on Greek shores have to stay there until their asylum cases are heard. There are 7,000 in Lesvos, the majority held in the squalid and overcrowded Moria refugee camp. The largest groups are from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Most do not understand that they are entering a complex asylum process, nor that specific criteria have to be met for them to be granted refugee status. The lawyers hold general advice sessions in the camp and distribute leaflets in 10 languages to inform people of their human rights. Their most effective work is to prepare individuals for their crucial first interview so that they present all the relevant background, including painful facts about persecution or violence they are escaping from. This personal attention helps to restore some sense of dignity in an inhuman situation.

Philip Worthington reminded his audience that last year over 2000 migrants drowned in the Mediterranean. Over 1216 arrived in Lesvos in June 2019 alone. The Pax Christi International award will help to give prominence to a forgotten issue (as far as the media and the public are concerned). ELIL hopes to expand its work beyond Lesvos and will be pressing for legal assistance to be recognised as a humanitarian right along with food, water and shelter.

Valerie Flessati

Welcome to Rachel

Only her second day in the job and Rachel Sweetman (left) took part in the ‘No Faith in War’ protest outside the ExCel arms sales fair in East London. Rachel is our new Communications and Resources officer. She graduated this summer with an English degree from Southampton University, and spent her gap year running youth retreats at St Cassian’s Centre, Kintbury.

and welcome to Pax Christi Scotland

Exciting news! After a period of discernment, encouraged by Pat Gaffney and Bruce Kent, a ‘Pax Christi Scotland’ section has been launched with the full support of Pax Christi International, the Scottish Catholic Bishops’ Conference and Justice and Peace Commission. Our National President, Archbishop Malcolm McMahon, has sent his good wishes to the group. Contact them directly if you’d like to join and support them. (It is fine to be a member of either or both sections.)

Find Pax Christi Scotland on Facebook or email hugh.foy@xavs.org or marian.pallister@zen.co.uk or write to: Pax Christi Scotland, @Justice & Peace Scotland, 65 Bath Street, Glasgow G2 2BX

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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