



Women Peacemakers



Dorothy Day



Dorothy Day was an American peace activist. Born in Brooklyn, New York in 1897, she became involved in social movements as a student. Dorothy converted to the Catholic Church in 1927 and in 1932 she met Peter Maurin and they co-founded the Catholic Worker Movement, built around the works of mercy mentioned in the Gospel: feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, sheltering the homeless, visiting the prisoner, caring for the sick. Her beliefs also led her to protest for peace and justice, for which she was sometimes arrested. She died in November 1980 and is buried in New York.

One of the famous quotes attributed to her is: “Don’t call me a saint, I do not want to be written off so easily”, meaning that if the work she did was considered to be extraordinary, people might see it as an excuse not to do something similar.

How are we called to live out the works of mercy today?

Do we sometimes feel that we can’t do things as we are not ‘saints’?

Have a look at our assembly on Dorothy Day on our Assemblies page: www.paxchristi.org.uk/peace-education/secondary/assemblies/

Seeds of Hope Ploughshares

On 29 January 1996, Jo Blackman, Lotta Kronlid and Andrea Needham used household hammers to disarm a Hawk warplane by breaking into a British Aerospace factory in Lancashire. Instead of trying to escape, they put up banners saying “Swords in Ploughshares” and “Peace and Justice in East Timor”. The women believed the jet would be sent to Indonesia and used by the government there to oppress the people of East Timor.

The women were arrested and sent to prison until their trial. A week later, Angie Zelter was arrested whilst going to repeat the action.

The women were tried in July 1996 at Liverpool Crown Court and found not guilty, as it was recognised that they acted to prevent a greater wrong by stopping violence.

Andrea Needham said, “I believe that above all else in life, we are called to love and to be human. I can therefore not stand aside and allow the Hawks to be delivered without doing all that is in my power to peacefully resist. I believe that to be silent in this situation is to be complicit with injustice.”

In what ways are we complicit in injustice today?

How could we nonviolently resist?

Have a look at our resources on the Seeds of Hope Ploughshares at: www.paxchristi.org.uk/resources/peace-people-2/the-4-ploughshares/ and our 2016 assembly at: www.paxchristi.org.uk/peace-education/secondary/assemblies/



Wangari Maathai

Wangari Maathai was born in 1940 in Nyeri, Kenya. She studied in the USA and at the University of Nairobi, where she became the first woman in East and Central Africa to gain a PhD.



Whilst a part of the National Council of Women of Kenya, she founded the Green Belt Movement, a grassroots movement which works to reduce poverty and conserve the environment through community-based tree planting. She was known for promoting the environment, democracy and human rights. Despite facing harassment and difficulties because of this work, she continued. She was also a Member of Parliament and Assistant Minister for Environment and Natural Resources.

In 2004 she became the first African woman to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for her work for democracy, sustainable development and peace. She died in September 2011.

What can I do to protect my local environment?

How does working for environmental justice link to peacemaking?

Have a look at our resource exploring peace and the environment using the story of Wangari Maathai and the Green Belt Movement: www.paxchristi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Elements_SowingSeeds.pdf

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Biography : <http://www.greenbeltmovement.org/wangari-maathai/biography> and <https://wangerimaathai.org//wangeris-story/>

Gertrud Luckner



Gertrud Luckner was born into a German family living in Liverpool in 1900. Having returned to Germany in 1931, she could see the influence of Nazi propaganda. She organised discussion groups for pupils to practise English, using pro– and anti–Nazi writings to encourage students to debate and think critically. She collected foreign newspapers to read news about her Jewish neighbours that was not being reported in Germany. She stood in solidarity with Jewish neighbours, helping with shopping, accompanying baptised Jewish people who were forced to wear the Star of David to church and staying with two women to protect them and help them to escape. She convinced others to also work with her to prevent people being transported to camps and used her networks to help families who needed visas to escape. She worked with the Catholic Bishops' Caritas organisation, travelling across Germany and Austria, collecting more information and warning people at risk. Despite her caution she was arrested in 1943 and taken to Ravensbrück concentration camp, where she endured nine weeks of interrogation. Her commitment to interfaith relations continued after the war, as she founded a journal to improve Jewish-Christian relations.

Whose stories need to be heard in our society today?

How do we show solidarity with our neighbours?

Have a look at our resources on Gertrud Luckner at: www.paxchristi.org.uk/resources/peace-people-2/gertrud-luckner/

Acknowledgement: Photograph of Gertrud Luckner from www.denktag.de