Letter from the Executive Director

Dear Companions on the Journey,

The theme of this Peace Current is ‘Human Rights and Global Restoration’ and there is no shortage of materials to address these two critical issues. Pope Francis in his recent trip to the United States spoke eloquently and forcefully for the human rights and dignity of all peoples. In his encyclical letter, “On Care for Our Common Home,” he addresses the human root causes of the ecological crisis as well as explaining how both Scripture and authentic spirituality are the reasons we should work tirelessly for the whole of creation.

The common thread that runs through the lack of basic human rights, both at home and around the world, along with our failure to believe that we should be concerned about our planet, is indifference.

Our indifference to poverty, systemic evils based on greed, hate and racism is what is keeping us from really seeing one another and speaking out forcefully when hatred and violence trump the dignity and goodness found in all people.

Our indifference to the suffering of those most affected by climate change and who have so few resources to speak up, or to be taken seriously when they do, is what is tearing at the fabric of our fragile common home.

This issue of The Peace Current addresses both these concerns and invites Pax Christi members to continue working intentionally and non-violently to replacing indifference with commitment.

Sr. Patricia Chappell, SNDdeN
Executive Director, Pax Christi USA
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“Catholics and people of faith worldwide are marking this occasion (September 1, World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation) by praying for solutions to the climate crisis. ... What we know is that climate change is real and it is getting worse. It is a global problem with grave implications for us environmentally, socially, economically, politically and spiritually.”

~ Sr. Patricia Chappell, SNDdeN, Executive Director of Pax Christi USA
Three new council members have been elected and one current member has been appointed to the Pax Christi USA National Council.

From the at-large slate of candidates, Pax Christi Anti-Racism Team member Isaac Chandler and Sr. Regina Ann Brummel, CSJ have been elected to three-year terms. From the regional slate, Nancy Oetter, Pax Christi Illinois state coordinator, was elected. Additionally, Olga Sarabia of Pax Christi Southern California has been appointed to another year on the council.

Isaac Chandler is a high school biology teacher from Florida. He has worked with the Pax Christi Anti-Racism Team (PCART) for ten years, the Youth & Young Adult Forum, and served on the Planning & Programming Committee for the 2012 National Assembly in Atlanta.

“Even though our world has changed, we are still being confronted with similar problems which may appear to be separate, yet they are bound together by common themes of domination, subjugation, avarice, and misuse of power,” stated Chandler. “In times like these, people of faith must rise up, speak up, lift up, and act.”

“I believe that Pax Christi can live out its organizational commitment to Christian nonviolence, multiculturalism, and anti-racism by encouraging its members to educate Christians in their communities to pray and work constantly for justice throughout the world, with special attention to immigration justice,” stated Sr. Regina Ann Brummel, a Sister of St. Joseph of Concordia, KS.

Sr. Brummel has been an educator for many years, teaching predominantly in inner cities and American Indian reservations. She has led in the development of a tribal high school and two tribal colleges and is teaching at Turtle Mountain Community (Tribal) College in North Dakota.

Elected from the regional slate, Nancy Oetter’s education is in Business Administration and Political Science. She worked with the U.S. Department of Energy for over 31 years in Budget and Financial Management and has been the co-coordinator for the Illinois region of Pax Christi since 2009.

“My vision of Pax Christi USA is a vital, diverse organization that is sought out for its expertise in nonviolent, multi-cultural, anti-racist education and activism. We should be an organization that partners with groups of all faiths and peace-seekers that work for systemic change in our communities to build justice,” stated Oetter.

Appointed to another term, Olga Sarabia has been a member of the PCUSA National Council on 3 occasions over the years. She is a first generation PCART member and also has been on the Southern California PC Leadership Team since 2004. She has been a participant in “Muslim and Catholic Women in Conversation” for 4 years.

The Pax Christi USA National Council met the weekend of August 28-30 in Washington, D.C. at Trinity University. In addition to seating newly elected members, a new executive committee was elected. The new executive committee is: Cathy Woodson, National Chair; Ed Martinez, Vice-Chair; Kim Mazycz, Secretary; and Donald Levan, Treasurer.

The council and staff thanked departing National Chair, Sr. Josie Chrosniak, HM and departing Treasurer, Cynthia Morris, as well as departing council member Heather Navarro.
Official statements on Pope Francis’s visit to the USA, Oregon shooting massacre

It began in Congress and culminated at the United Nations: For the past 3 days, Pope Francis clearly and eloquently spoke of the need for organizations like Pax Christi who continue to struggle and educate to empower the voices of God’s people so that the U.S. and the world may bring forth the image and likeness fashioned by God on every human face. At the joint session of Congress, Pope Francis gave flesh to our Catholic Social Principles by lifting up the dignity of human life, the equality and dignity of all people, and that the common good must be the common aim of all elected officials, especially those rendered poor and vulnerable by unjust systems. He gave examples of the principles of participation, subsidiarity, stewardship and solidarity that must inform all of our processes as we strive to empower one another.

We also resonated with the eloquent, simple and direct words of Pope Francis when he spoke to the UN about peace through non-violence, resistance to systems that exclude, innate human rights of all people, and restoring the global climate to a level where all people can thrive and not merely exist.

Of particular interest to us were the concrete suggestions he offered. It is not enough to have dreams for peace with justice, but we must match those dreams with specific actions for justice that will be effective and practical for the good of all people.

We commend his courage as well as the challenge and the support he has given to our movement.

Official statement on the shooting massacre at Umpqua Community College in Oregon

It is impossible for anyone to be stunned anymore when the media reports another shooting massacre in our country. It is a profoundly sad reality that gun violence, like the shooting which occurred at an Oregon community college yesterday, is now so commonplace that it is difficult to remember and recall all of the mass shootings which have taken place in our nation over the past few years. It is time that we shake off our collective lethargy and root ourselves in a deep, sustaining and holy anger which will fuel a movement to end this insanity once and for all.

Every single death from Sandy Hook to Charleston to Oregon could have been prevented if our nation implemented reasonable, common-sense policies regarding firearms. This is a plain and indisputable fact; any debate on this point is an insult to our children, our parents, our sisters, brothers and neighbors who have died as a result of efforts to frustrate any limits placed on guns and the sale and manufacturing of firearms.

Today let us grieve with those families who lost their loved ones in yesterday’s massacre. Let us feel the full force of that grief today, but tomorrow let us turn that grief into a righteous anger that will propel us past all of the obstacles that stand in the way of ridding our nation of the violence attributed to our easy acceptance of gun culture. Let us remember each and every victim as we confront the mostly tone-deaf leaders of the National Rifle Association. Let us remember each and every victim as we confront politicians greedy for the donations that come from the radical gun lobby. Let us remember each and every victim as we challenge every single institution that financially benefits from our nation’s addiction to guns.

Today we grieve, we mourn with all those affected directly by the tragedy at Umpqua Community College. But tomorrow we organize and mobilize and demand that what happened in Oregon yesterday never happens again.

As we wrote in our statement in the wake of the Sandy Hook massacre, “We are devastated by the sheer madness of it all.” The madness that continues to frustrate even the most common-sense limits placed on firearm sales and ownership. The madness that grips our elected leaders when they are more concerned about the green of donations for their campaigns than they are about the red of the blood spilled from the people they are elected to serve. The madness that such events can occur in our nation with alarming frequency because our outrage at such tragedies fades long before we have accomplished what needs to be done to assure it never happens again.

It is time to reform our culture. It is time to turn away from the idolatry we practice toward our weapons. It is time to value life—the lives of all those affected by gun violence—more than we value our guns. The choice is that stark. As it reads in the book of Deuteronomy, chapter 30, verse 19: “I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life, then, that you and your descendants may live...”

Every time our nation experiences a tragedy like the one that occurred in Oregon, the choice is put before us again: Life or death, blessing or curse. We cannot continue to choose death and curse. Let each of us commit ourselves to the choice of life and blessing. And let us be committed to do whatever it takes to force our elected leaders to do the same.
Global Restoration: 
Climate change is a moral issue

By Rev. John Rausch, glmy
PCUSA Teacher of Peace

Throng of people poured into Washington, New York and Philadelphia during Pope Francis’s visit to see him, receive his blessing and hear his words.

Addressing Congress, Pope Francis touched on numerous themes, but reference to the environment will continue to receive great scrutiny: “In Laudato Si’, I call for a courageous and responsible effort to ‘redirect our steps’ (par. 61) and to avert the most serious effects of the environmental deterioration caused by human activity.” In his environmental encyclical, he affirmed, referencing the bishops of Bolivia, that countries having benefited the most economically from the enormous emissions of greenhouse gases, “have a greater responsibility for providing a solution to the problems they have caused” (par. 170). Ultimately we Americans face a moral obligation.

Curiously, many people in developing countries might have missed the pope’s visit to the U.S.—people in villages of Bangladesh or on small South Pacific islands—yet his message to the world’s wealthiest nation may directly affect them.

About 100 million people worldwide live one meter above sea level. Some 650 million live along coastal areas that could be submerged if global climate change melts the great ice packs and raises the ocean level. Lives, cultures and livelihoods depend on a stable environment.

If a person accidentally kills someone by reckless behavior, it’s considered manslaughter. If the lifestyle of the world’s wealthy destroys a culture or people, it approaches genocide. This is why human activity contributing to climate change is a moral issue.

Pope Francis cited the “Golden Rule” before Congress: Do unto others as you would have them do unto to you. The basis of Christian morality is interconnectedness. We are our brother’s and sister’s keeper! And we can’t submerge them!

The first defense against this moral responsibility is denial. Dr. Katherine Hayhoe, a climatologist and evangelical Christian at Texas Tech University, cites three reasons for the disconnect between believers and the findings of science:

- “The evidence is not easy to see.” With air conditioning and adjustable thermostats, everything looks fine. But recall photos of birds and shorelines caked with oil after the BP spill. Our dependence on oil is easy to see, and our lifestyle can display some graphically bad effects.
- “Confusion is rampant.” The fossil fuel industries have adopted the “tobacco strategy” that sows doubt about scientific conclusions, e.g. does smoking really cause cancer? The oil and coal industries maintain that human activity contributing to climate change is not certain. In reality, the peer-reviewed work of 97 percent of climatologists agree it is. Carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas that traps the sun’s rays and heats the earth, has risen dramatically since the Industrial Revolution. Science can measure CO2 precisely, and temperatures can be tracked. Conclusion: human activity is a major factor in climate change.
- “The truth is frightening.” To change our lifestyle appears threatening, yet “to redirect our steps,” in the words of Pope Francis, may begin simply with turning off lights to save electricity, consolidating trips to use less gas, and avoiding drive-through lines to reduce idling. Small steps can develop an awareness that we are interconnected with one another and creation.

The way forward Pope Francis mentioned in his speech before Congress and wrote about in his encyclical: “I would like to enter into dialogue with all people about our common home” (par. 3). This dialogue will require putting aside ideologies and polarized thinking. It asks for honesty within and with others.

The dialogue can begin with a walk in nature, especially as the leaves turn and vibrant colors dot the landscape. It will deepen when we see the faces of the homeless as individuals struggling for the same dignified life we enjoy. Eventually it will avoid scoring points in debates and nurture that interconnectedness that exposes the moral sentiment allowing us to take responsibility for creation.

Climate change is a moral issue. And, Pope Francis reminds us, “If we approach nature and the environment without this openness to awe and wonder, if we no longer speak the language of fraternity and beauty in our relationship with the world, our attitude will be that of masters, consumers, ruthless exploiters, unable to set limits on their immediate needs” (par. 11).

Rev. John Rausch, glmy, is a Pax Christi USA Teacher of Peace. He writes and organizes in Appalachia where he has worked for over 35 years. He is the former director of the Catholic Committee of Appalachia.
Human Rights: The continuing need to address the root causes of forced displacement

From Pax Christi International

By the end of 2014, over 59.5 million people had been forcibly displaced as a result of persecution, conflict, generalized violence, or human rights violations. In 2015, UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, anticipates that approximately 400,000 new arrivals will seek international protection in Europe via the Mediterranean. In 2016, this number could reach 450,000 or more. ...

The commitment of Pax Christi International (PCI) on migration, asylum seekers and (internally) displaced persons is in the field of advocacy and awareness raising campaigns worldwide. ... PCI highlights the deeper causes of migration and displacement and focuses on the root causes of (violent) conflicts.

There is a critical need to address the core issues which affect forced displacement around the world. The massive flow of people will not stop until the root causes of their plight are addressed. Much more must be done to prevent conflicts and stop the ongoing wars that are driving so many from their homes. There should be far greater concern for the protection of civilians, as laid down by international humanitarian law. There should be an immediate end to the devastating obstruction of humanitarian aid to the people in need, such as in Syria.

A consistent and global response to refugee situations needs diplomacy, political will and concerted action for the prevention, as well as resolution, of conflicts that force people to move. Such a comprehensive approach is essentially absent in the wars going on in Syria, Iraq, Eritrea, Afghanistan and others. Greater investment in conflict prevention and resolution as well as durable solutions should therefore form an integral part of a diplomatic and political approach to addressing forced displacement. The lack of political commitment on the international level is unacceptable and morally irresponsible!

Some countries in the Middle East such as Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey show admirable humanity and leadership when it comes to hosting refugees and migrants needing protection. The countries neighbouring war zones, which shelter 9 in 10 refugees worldwide, must be more strongly supported, including the necessary funding. ... The UN Relief & Works Agency for Palestine refugees in the Near East, is perpetually struggling to get the necessary budgets to assist the needs of Palestinian refugees.

Efforts to address the root causes of the refugee crisis should then increase funding for humanitarian assistance to stabilise forcibly displaced populations in the region of origin, most notably countries around Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and others.

More robust, timely, and sustained structural support for the most-affected refugee-hosting countries is essential, which requires enhanced operational linkages between humanitarian and development actors from the very beginning of a crisis. It is then essential that development cooperation policies are reoriented with the objective of giving people the opportunity to have a future in their own countries.

Restoring peace, security and human rights in war affected countries will take long and focused work. It is true that the people most responsible for the victims of war and migration are those leaders who have failed to uphold human rights, and robbed their people of hope. The international community, and specifically the UN Security Council, has significant power and influence over terrible conflicts such as Syria and Iraq, and it must now urgently find the consensus to act.

This statement was issued in September from the Pax Christi International home office in Brussels, Belgium. It has been excerpted here. To read the full statement, visit the website at www.paxchristi.net.
Pax Christi Santa Fe (NM) members join “Pope Francis” at a climate justice event at the Cathedral in Santa Fe commemorating Pope Francis’s address to Congress as well as his environmental encyclical Laudato Si’. (Photo courtesy of Bud Ryan)

PC Florida state coordinator Nancy O’Byrne at the Campaign Nonviolence action at Los Alamos Nuclear Labs in New Mexico. (Photo courtesy of Pax Christi Florida)

Joyce Hall (left) of PC-Dallas (TX) with other coalition partners outside Sen. Cornyn’s office after advocating for the Iran nuclear deal. (Photo courtesy of PC-Texas)

Bishop Sullivan Pax Christi in Norfolk (VA) presented Prof. Robert Watson (right) of Hampton University speaking on the history of slavery at Virginia Wesleyan Univ. (Photo courtesy of Michael McLaughlin)
continued from p. 6...

For more photos and updates from Pax Christi USA’s grassroots network, check out “On The Line”, published monthly at www.paxchristiusa.org

Pax Christi Florida protests drone warfare outside MacDill Air Force Base. (Photo courtesy of Phyllis Jepson)

Lorrain Taylor, founder of “1000 Mothers Against Violence,” received PC Northern California’s Peacemaker Award. (Photo courtesy of Tom Webb)

PCUSA Executive Director Sr. Patty ChapPELL, Treasurer Donald Levan and Director of Programs Sr. Anne-Louise Nadeau at the Campaign Nonviolence conference in NM. (Photo courtesy of Sharon Halsey-Hoover)

PC Long Island (NY) members rally for the Iran nuclear deal outside Sen. Schumer’s office. (Photo courtesy of Joseph Volker)

Members of Pax Christi Southeastern South Dakota rally in support of the Iran nuclear deal in Sioux Falls. (Photo courtesy of Leona Wieland)
Reflection for Epiphany Sunday, January 3, 2016
By Rev. John Rausch, glmy, Pax Christi USA Teacher of Peace

Isaiah 60:1-6 | Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6 | Matthew 2:1-12

“We saw his star at its rising and have come to do him homage.” (Mt 2:2)

The astrologers from the East journeyed to find the newborn king of the Jews, but they needed humility to do him homage and respect for creation to follow the star.

We moderns have diminished our sense of wonderment, because we increasingly control nature through technology. We illumine the night and play football “under the lights”. But let a substation malfunction, and...

We established an economic system that created wealth no ancient could have dreamt possible. But, let the poor complain about distribution inequality, and...

We collect armies to protect our wealth and build weapons to threaten our neighbors. But, let a people question the powerful, and...

The point: humanity is not master of creation, economics or social relations. It must, like the astrologers from the East, journey to the Star of Bethlehem with humility. That star can point out the entire array of Catholic social teachings that shine brightly in the dark sky of arrogance, greed and violence.

Driven by the bottom line, capitalists are squeezing workers and sidestepping regulations to the advantage of the few. The star beckons the wise to respect workers with just wages and decent conditions, while considering the common good.

Motivated by comfort and convenience, humanity is changing earth’s climate and altering life adversely for the poor and vulnerable. The wise will follow the star that cares for creation and lives in solidarity with the poor.

Fueled by fear, nations are overbuilding weapons that channel resources away from the needs of human development. The wise will seek the star instead to pursue reconciliation and community-building.

The Star of Bethlehem still shines brightly over our dark world. Like the astrologers from the East, we need to leave our easy chairs, and, with our neighbors, start the journey following it.

How would you finish the three incomplete sentences above: “and...”?

What’s the most urgent point of light from the Star that the world needs now?

“Pope Francis’s concern for impoverished people and for the Earth are well-known, but his words about deadly violence and war are less frequently reported. War, he says, is the suicide of humanity and he repeatedly links war and preparations for war to poverty, to climate change, to ecological devastation... Pax Christi believes that for much too long, we in the United States have accepted a paradigm that justifies enormous loss of human life and widespread destruction of the planet in pursuit of an elusive peace and false security. The consequences of this framework have been front and center in the lives of millions of people around the world and too many, especially people of color, in our own communities.”

~ Marie Dennis, Co-President of Pax Christi International

Advent-Christmas resources are available in the Pax Christi USA Store online and on our website. Visit us at www.paxchristiusa.org.

ORDER NOW! Pax Christi USA’s Lent 2016 reflection booklet is available for pre-order from November through mid-December. Visit online & place your order today or call 814-520-6245!

Peacemaking Quote

When the song of the angels is stilled, when the star in the sky is gone, when the kings and princes are home, when the shepherds are back with their flocks, the work of Christmas begins:

to find the lost, to heal the broken,
to feed the hungry, to release the prisoner,
to rebuild the nations, to bring peace among the people, to make music in the heart.

- Howard Thurman