

# The Peace Current

Pax Christi USA, The National Catholic Peace Movement  
Membership Newsletter, Spring 2020



*Pax Christi USA Executive Director, Johnny Zokovitch speaks at rally advocating for no war with Iran. Johnny began as executive director in September 2019.*

## Welcoming Johnny Zokovitch as Executive Director of PCUSA

by Robert Shine, National Council Chair



Dear members and friends of Pax Christi USA,

I first met Johnny Zokovitch, our movement's new executive director, when I was a college student more than a decade ago. What stays with me from that time is Johnny's warmth and energy when welcoming my friends and I to Pax Christi USA's event coinciding with the School of the Americas witness. Our campus Pax Christi chapter was tiny. Most of us were newcomers to the Catholic peace movement, somewhat intimidated to be among

people we considered heroes. We were exhausted having driven through the night to make it. But even while helping run the event, Johnny made sure we knew we had a place in that community. That welcome made all the difference to keep us coming back.

Last spring, a common priority emerged when the National Council held conversations about our hopes and desires for the new executive director: a necessity to grow Pax Christi USA and the Catholic peace movement. The Holy Spirit was at work in

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**The Peace Current**

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# Coming back to Pax Christi USA is like coming home

By Johnny Zokovitch, Executive Director



I cannot tell you all how excited and energized I am to be back at Pax Christi USA. Much of who I am today is due to the formation that I received from many of you throughout our movement — former staff members, Ambassadors and Teachers of Peace, local group and regional leaders — who taught me about what it means to follow the nonviolent Jesus and witness to

the peace of Christ in our world. For me, coming back to Pax Christi USA, after my time at Pax Christi International in Brussels, is truly a coming home.

As I write this, I've been "on the job" for 5 months now, and most of that time has been spent listening. I've been reaching out to folks within our movement all across the United States who serve in a variety of capacities and asking them a few simple questions: Why are you part of Pax Christi USA? What do you think the gifts of our movement are? Where do we need to grow and change? What are your hopes for Pax Christi USA as we move forward? Your stories and insights inspire me and humble me, and I hope you will see how what you have shared influences the work that we do in the years to come. And if I have not already had the chance to speak with you, reach out to me anytime. Relationships are at the heart of who I believe we are as Pax Christi USA and I look forward to seeing many of you and hearing from you in the weeks and months to come.

Lastly, thank you for all you do, for the many concrete ways you pray, study and act for peace and justice. And thanks to all of you who have welcomed me with such kindness and support. Our world is crying out for the peace of Christ. I feel privileged to work alongside you in witnessing to that peace.

In peace,

Johnny Zokovitch

Executive Director

**Thank you for donating to Pax Christi USA. We can't do this work without you.**

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# Pax Christi USA Says “No!” to the SOA

by Rachel Schmidt, Communications Coordinator



Thirty years after the Jesuits, their housekeeper, and her daughter were assassinated by military trainees of the School of the Americas, the SOA still exists and is wreaking havoc in Latin American countries. This past November Pax Christi USA went to protest the SOA in Fort Benning, Georgia, which is now called the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC). As leaders at the protest said the weekend of Nov. 15, 2019, they changed their name, but they haven't changed their shame.

There were many PCUSA members and others in attendance at our evening program on Nov. 16. The program was titled, “Solidarity, Resistance and Hope: The Spirituality of Nonviolence Lived Out in the Central American Martyrs and Struggles for Justice Today”. Executive Director Johnny Zokovitch opened the program by reminding everyone that “protesting the SOA is in Pax Christi’s DNA.” Then, PCUSA member Scott Wright and Communications Coordinator,

Rachel Schmidt led a reflection on remembering the Jesuits, their co-worker and her daughter, with seven volunteers reading a portion about each person killed. PCUSA National Council member, Jean Stokan, welcomed all prisoners of conscience who had been arrested and jailed for the cause of peace to be acknowledged. There was also a panel on grassroots campaigns in El Salvador and Panama as well as the efforts of the SOA Watch. The program ended with words from Araceli Rodriguez whose son was murdered by the U.S. Border Patrol, and a candlelight vigil.



Sunday morning PCUSA joined the peace walk led by Buddhist monks to the gates of Ft. Benning where PCUSA Teacher of Peace Roy Bourgeois spoke, the puppetistas danced, and a litany of the names of those killed by SOA trainees were sung with the crowd responding “Presente!”



# Pax Christi USA Groups Successful in Getting Back from the Brink Resolutions to Prevent Nuclear War Passed

by Veronica Fellerath-Lowell



*An interim report on Pax Christi USA's Back from the Brink campaign: Aug. 6, 2019 to Aug. 9, 2020*

The goal of Back from the Brink is to get local, city, and state governments to vote affirmatively

for a Back from the Brink resolution. Since this initiative was launched last August, more than 250 Pax Christi USA members and supporters have signed up for PCUSA's Back from the Brink Campaign. (You can still join at [www.paxchristiusa.org](http://www.paxchristiusa.org).)

There's new momentum on the horizon for abolishing nuclear weapons:

- In July 2017, the United Nations drew up a Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons that would make nuclear weapons illegal. Since then, 81 nations have signed it, and 35 of these countries have ratified it (50 are required for the treaty to become international law). The Vatican was the first country to approve the treaty. (The United States opposes this treaty.)
- In the fall of 2017, the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to the International Coalition Against Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) for their anti-nuclear work (of which Pax Christi USA is a member).
- In order to support this international effort, United States peace groups are making their voices heard. Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR) have taken a leadership role in the U.S. with their Back from the Brink campaign. Pax Christi USA is an official endorser, as are many regional and local Pax

Christi groups.

- California and Oregon have already passed Back from the Brink resolutions, as well as many cities across the country, such as Los Angeles, Baltimore and the District of Columbia.

## How a Pax Christi USA Member Lobbied to Pass a BFTB in East Providence, RI

In September 2019, Bill Waters attended his local Pax Christi meeting in Providence, RI. Group leader and PCUSA National Council member, Madeline

Labriola explained this new PCUSA national commitment to Back from the Brink. Bill had heard of the campaign, but when his local group embraced this initiative, Bill decided to approach his local East Providence City Council to pass a Back from the Brink resolution.

Not knowing his council members, he did internet research and discovered that his

councilman was also the president of the council. For the next month Bill emailed him about the Back from the Brink resolution and also mailed him supporting materials – all without receiving any response. Bill decided that the next step was to telephone. He successfully reached the council president and was able to arrange a meeting over coffee. After friendly conversation and a full explanation of the Back from the Brink resolution, Council President Robert Britto took the initiative of drafting a Back from the Brink resolution, calling upon Bill to testify and scheduling a vote on October 29, 2019, where the East Providence City Council passed the Back from the Brink resolution.

When Bill was asked what advice he had for

**Back from the Brink:  
A Call to Prevent Nuclear War resolution:**

We call on the United States to lead a global effort to prevent nuclear war by:

- Renouncing the option of using nuclear weapons first;
- Ending the sole, unchecked authority of any U.S. president to launch a nuclear attack;
- Taking U.S. nuclear weapons off hair-trigger alert;
- Canceling the plan to replace its entire nuclear arsenal with enhanced weapons;
- Actively pursuing a verifiable agreement among nuclear-armed states to eliminate their nuclear arsenals.

*For more information go to [www.preventnuclearwar.org](http://www.preventnuclearwar.org)*

someone else trying to successfully get a local official to support a Back from the Brink resolution, he said, “You don’t know until you try.” He added that it’s a “no lose” situation because you are helping educate people about the danger of nuclear weapons.

### **Additional Pax Christi USA Local Groups Successful in Getting Resolutions Passed**

#### Pax Christi Western Washington

Pax Christi Western Washington has been active in calling legislators and writing letters in support of this anti-nuclear resolution. For two years a coalition of peace groups convened by Washington Physicians for Social Responsibility have worked toward getting the State of Washington to endorse a Back from the Brink resolution.

The Back from the Brink resolution has already passed out of committee in the Washington State Senate and is waiting for a floor vote; the House committee will hold hearings later in the session but it is likely to pass to the floor and be approved by both houses of the legislature.

#### Pax Christi Metro DC and Pax Christi Silver Spring, MD

The Montgomery County Council in Maryland passed a Back from the Brink resolution 8-0, with one abstention in November 2019. This vote resulted from a year-long process begun by Peace Action and then other supporting groups such as Physicians for Social Responsibility, the Sandy Spring Friends Meeting (Quakers) and members of Pax Christi Metro DC and Pax Christi Silver Spring, MD.

Over many months, members had telephoned, emailed, visited, and “button-holed” council members to ask for their support of a Back from the Brink resolution.

Sometimes, one heartfelt email makes a real



*Pax Christi members at the meeting of the Montgomery County Council in Maryland*

difference. Members of Pax Christi-St. John the Baptist in Silver Spring, MD were telephoning and emailing their councilmember without getting a reply. Then member Betty Thompson sent an email, writing in part:

“Can you remember back when it seemed impossible that land mines would be outlawed internationally, and destroyed, and monitored? Yet it happened. Nuclear arms will destroy us one day unless we build momentum to eliminate them. Please endorse the ‘Back from the Brink’ campaign to move us toward that goal.”

This email eventually led to a meeting and the council member’s endorsement.

### **Initiate a Back from the Brink Resolution in Your City, County, or State**

Join PCUSA’s Back from the Brink Campaign by going to [www.paxchristiusa.org](http://www.paxchristiusa.org) and clicking on the image [insert back from Brink meme] to join the campaign and get updates.

Resources, background information and a step-by-step case study are also available on the website.

*“I plead for disarmament and for the prohibition and abolition of nuclear weapons.”*

~Pope Francis’ 2017 World Day of Peace Message



Above: Johnny Zokovitch, executive director of Pax Christi USA kicks off Pax Christi USA's program the weekend of the SOA protest. Below left: Johnny participates in the SOA protest. Below right: Johnny with participants at an anti-death penalty conference.

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our search process because we could not have found a candidate more suited to this task than Johnny. As the search process progressed, he spoke about needing a national grassroots organizing effort. He spoke about the imperative to do all of Pax Christi's work through an anti-racism lens. The Council was jubilant when we decided to make Johnny an offer.

For me personally, it was Johnny sharing his desire for Pax Christi USA to "make space" for younger



generations who would not only participate but lead that convinced me he was the right pick. He told Catholic News Service last year that, "Pax Christi USA will be 50 years old in 2022. I want to ensure the work they (the older generation) started will be carried on by the new generation . . . My goal is not just to get young people to support our agenda, but to support the agenda of young people." I know firsthand, and have talked to several younger members of Pax Christi USA who affirm likewise, that Johnny can help create space for, provide a welcome to, and work alongside younger members.

In writing this welcome, I am reiterating what many of you already know about Johnny given his years-long commitment to Pax Christi, both in the U.S. and at the international level. From 2001 to 2016, he served on the staff of Pax Christi USA doing communications, organizing, and programming at various points. From 2016 to 2019, he was Senior Communications Officer for Pax Christi International helping coordinate peace work on a global level. Briefly put, Johnny has not only the capacities to be our movement's director, but the vision to lead Pax Christi USA into a bright future. What he has already done since beginning last September is remarkable.

So, in reality, this short note is not so much a welcome to a new director as it is a welcome home to one of Pax Christi USA's most committed members. Thank you, Johnny.

In Christ's Peace,

Robert Shine  
Chair, Pax Christi USA National Council



# An Essential Book for Pax Christi USA Readers

by Mike Moran



A recent book by two local authors with close ties to Pax Christi Massachusetts offers important lessons and valuable inspiration for readers of this newsletter. *Loving Life on the Margins* is a personal and collective memoir by Suzanne and Brayton Shanley which tells, as their subtitle indicates, “the story of the Agape community.”

Having worked with the Shanleys for the past 25 years or so, I thought I knew them pretty well. But I learned a lot from the early chapters that I hadn't known before: about Suzanne's working class roots in Buffalo, NY, as the middle child of a Polish-American mother and French-American father; about Brayton's middle class background growing up as the younger child of Irish-American parents in Pelham, NY; and about how they met in Boston in 1974, where both had moved to find meaningful work after completing their undergraduate degrees at SUNY Buffalo (Suzanne) and St. Anselm's College (Brayton).

One of the book's most appealing features is that the authors write alternating chapters in their own words. So we hear both their perspectives on: their 1980 “Quatholic” wedding in Cambridge, celebrated by Paulist Fr. Joachim Lally, with a homily by Liz McAlister; the start of the Agape community in their Brockton home; and the adoption in 1986 of their baby daughter Teresa.

While we meet many public figures whose lives intersected with those of the Shanleys – Dan and Phil Berrigan; Fr. Emmanuel Charles McCarthy; Wally and Juanita Nelson; Dave Dellinger; and Roy Bourgeois, to name just a few – some of their most affecting portraits are of people on the margins of society, like: Joanne, an imprisoned young mother of three children, whom Suzanne met while serving a sentence at MCI Framingham for civil disobedience; and Billy Neal Moore, whose release from death row in Georgia was spearheaded by a national campaign, including the Shanleys, and who remains their close friend and a regular visitor to Agape.

Other previously unsung heroes who emerge from

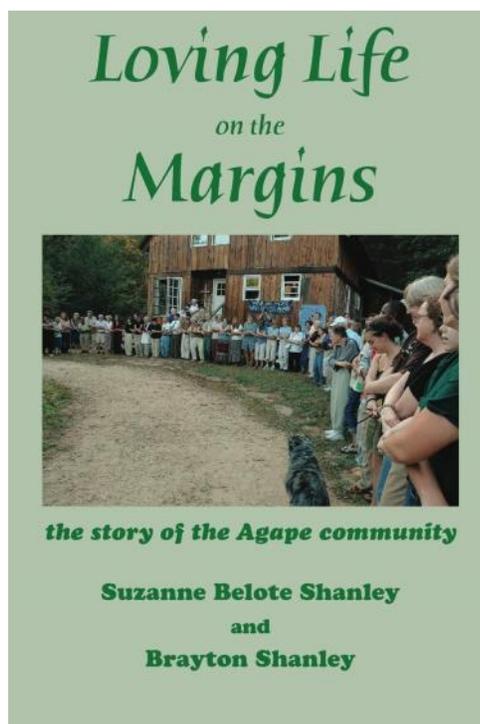
these pages are the master builders of Agape's first home in Hardwick, Francis House, in the late 1980s – Bob Wegener, Dan Lawrence, and their team – and of the straw-bale Brigid House ten years later – Clem Watson, Mark Korban, and their team.

Brayton's detailed accounts of both projects, and of the grease car that still serves the community, highlight the environmental responsibility that underlies every aspect of Agape life.

We learn that besides growing their own food to provide a rich vegetarian diet, daily life at Agape includes many more ways of witnessing gospel nonviolence, from demonstrating on the streets of nearby Ware to welcoming the stranger, as they did in embracing the Kader family after father Sabah and his young sons Omar and Ali emigrated from Iraq to Boston following the 2005 death of Suad, Sabah's wife and the boys' mother, at the hands of American soldiers who fired at their van in Mosul.

Though sometimes at odds with the Church establishment, Agape numbers many Catholic priests, nuns, and members of other religious communities among their most committed supporters. Not surprisingly, Pax Christi turns up often in the book as Agape partners and collaborators, whether inviting the Shanleys as presenters at PCMA assemblies, honoring them with the PCMA Peacemaker of the Year award, or joining them on the barricades, as PCMA

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# Easter Reflection from Lent Booklet

by Michael Vazquez

Easter Sunday

April 12, 2020

Acts 10:34A, 37-43; Colossians 3:1-4; John 20:1-9

“Mary of Magdala came to the tomb early in the morning...” John 20:1

The rumor is: Jesus is back. Mary Magdalene says she saw him, and we should believe her. Believe the story of Mary. Believe the story of Jesus – the story that God came and dwelt among us. The story that God came and proclaimed a message of healing and justice. The story that God came and began the process of making all things new. The rumor is that Jesus is back. That he overcame empire, that he defeated sin and death, that he conquered the grave. The Blessed Mother birthed a savior. Mary Magdalene anointed him for his journey into hell and then witnessed and proclaimed his victorious return. Christ. Is. Risen.

*Go now, go and tell the story of the one who is, in fact, making all things new.*



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co-coordinator Pat Ferrone did several years ago when they and other death penalty opponents vigilled weekly outside the courthouse where Boston Marathon bomber Dzhokar Tsarnaev was being tried.

The lively text of the book is enhanced by almost 100 lovely photos. Among my favorites are: Suzanne as senior class president at Bishop Colton High School in Buffalo surrounded by enthusiastic classmates, all in their school uniforms, foreshadowing the charismatic leader so many of us know (page 20); and Brayton on his graduation day at St. Anselm's, in full academic regalia, showing the same determination to change the world that he still exudes almost half a century later (page 14).

While not all of us are called to go “back to the land” as completely as the Shanleys have done, the community they so intentionally designed over three decades ago with co-founders Steve and Nancy James, who have since been giving desperately needed medical care to the poor in Haiti, offers many opportunities for direct participation in their mission (work days, student internships, public events, board membership, financial support, etc.) and gives us countless examples of smaller changes we can all make in our own lives to reduce our footprint on the earth through a just balance of diet, spiritual grounding, and renewable energy consumption while also building up Martin Luther King Jr's “beloved community” of peace, justice, and nonviolent love (agape) in the world around us.

May the next generation of Agape leaders be as good and faithful stewards of God's creation as the founding giants on whose shoulders they humbly stand.



