





# 2020: The year in review...

By Johnny Zokovitch, Executive Director



Like many of you, I am welcoming the start of a new year after all of the tension, struggle, suffering and pain of 2020. Despite all the challenges that 2020 presented, I want to share with you a short overview and some highlights of all that we accomplished together as Pax Christi USA during the past year. (You can view this letter with accompanying links on our website. Look for the widget on the home page entitled, "2020: Year-in-Review".)

**The Peace Current**  
Editor: Johnny Zokovitch

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**Challenging White Supremacy, Supporting Black Lives Matter:** In the wake of the murder of George Floyd and the subsequent nationwide protests under the banner of Black Lives Matter, we curated and developed resources for our members and the wider Catholic peace and justice community to pray, study and act to end systemic racism. We issued two major statements which figured prominently in the national Catholic media and reached tens of thousands on social media. The first came immediately after the murder of George Floyd and built on the anti-racism work we've been doing since 1995 to unequivocally condemn the racism that seeds terror in our communities of color and disfigures all of humanity.



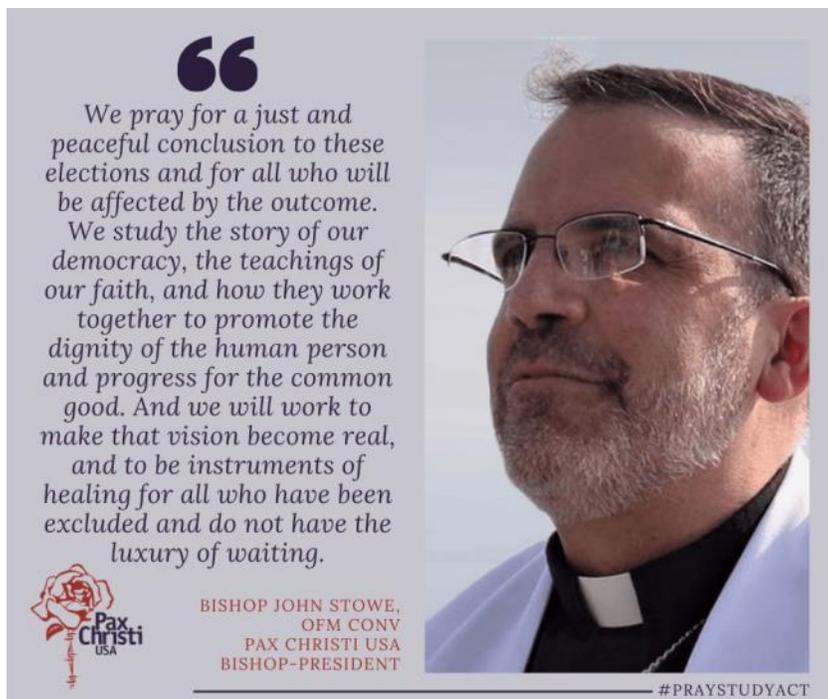
The second was a challenge to the broader Catholic Church to not let white fragility block the conversations we need to have in our churches on racism. We helped organize and promote an action affiliated with Black Lives Matter that attracted hundreds of people outside the St. John Paul II Shrine in Washington, D.C., protesting President Trump's photo-op there the day after his stunt at St. John's Episcopal Church where he used the police and military to violently disperse BLM protesters so he could take a photo holding the Bible (awkwardly if you saw the photos). We helped to amplify the voices of Black Catholics on our website and the actions of organizations led by People of Color over our email network and through social media and the website as resources for prayer, study and action throughout the year. And we made racial justice the first issue addressed in our Statement of Principles regarding the 2020 elections. Thousands of Pax Christi USA members on the ground turned out in solidarity at BLM actions from Baltimore to the Bay Area.

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**On the 75th Anniversary, the Peace Ribbon Project Remembers Hiroshima, Nagasaki:** Pax Christi USA facilitated the Peace Ribbon project to observe the 75th anniversary of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and to issue a call to recommit ourselves to advocate for a world free of the threat and tyranny of nuclear weapons. Hundreds of people from all over the world created special panels expressing what they feared losing in the event of nuclear war which Pax Christi USA connected “virtually” into a peace ribbon at a special event online attended by hundreds of people and viewed by over 1,000 to commemorate the anniversary. We created a special website for the project, [thepeaceribbon.org](http://thepeaceribbon.org), where we featured the ribbon panels and provided resources for prayer, study and action for individuals and communities.

**Election 2020 – #VotePax:** For engagement by our membership in the 2020 election season, we created the campaign #VotePax with a central organizing “Statement of Principles” that was read by several thousand people on our website and social media. Bishop Stowe published a post-election reflection (pictured upper right) which we posted to our website that rooted people in hope in the days immediately after the election when the results were still being determined. The piece reached tens of thousands of people through coverage in the media, social media and on our website. Our Fall edition of the membership newsletter, *The Peace Current*, featured resources for groups and individuals to pray, study and act, and more resources were developed and shared through our website. A special prayer card by Sr. Dianna Ortiz, our Deputy Director, was shared and distributed & we hosted three webinars focusing on issues we wanted to elevate in the election: immigration, racism, climate change, economic injustice, nuclear disarmament and military spending. Over 3,000 people attended or viewed these webinars. And as concerns arose about safeguarding the election, we highlighted steps our community could take, including mobilizing over 120 Catholic priests and deacons who preached on or otherwise engaged their parishioners on how to nonviolently respond in the event of a contested



election & social unrest.

**Our Pandemic Response and the Pledge to Protect Others:** Anticipating by several months the politicization of masks, Pax Christi USA launched the Pledge to Protect Others in early May, with over 2500 people signing on to pledge to undertake actions aimed at protecting others, especially the most vulnerable. The effort was launched through its own special website, [mypledgetoprotect.org](http://mypledgetoprotect.org) and included a social media campaign which reached tens of thousands of others with our message of a thoughtful compassionate response to the threat of the coronavirus. The Pledge was featured in the national and Catholic media. Additionally we mobilized our members to pray for peace in solidarity daily during the pandemic with a special prayer written by PCUSA National Council member Michelle Sherman which was downloaded or shared by over 15,000 people. Since the pandemic hit during Lent, we pivoted our Lenten campaign of prayer, study and action to include special weekly reflections developed by Pax Christi USA leaders exploring Lent in the context of the pandemic.

**Pax Christi USA regions and local groups** led the way in their respective locales, witnessing to the “peace of Christ” in a variety of ways, including:

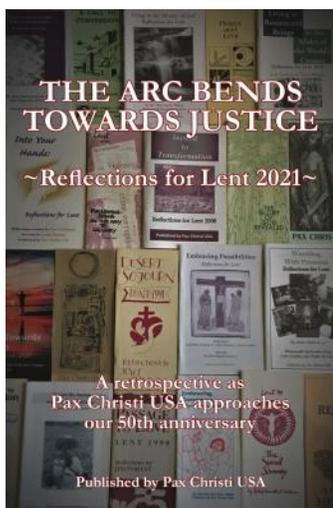
- Pax Christi New Jersey’s continuing leadership and advocacy for immigrants and those held in detention;

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# A reflection for the 3rd Sunday of Lent: March 7

By M. Shawn Copeland, Ph.D.

**Ed. Note:** The following reflection is from Pax Christi USA's Lent booklet, *The Arc Bends Towards Justice: Reflections for Lent 2021*.



This year's booklet is an historical retrospective covering over 40 years of reflections from past booklets. It was curated as a contribution to the celebration of our 50th anniversary year coming in 2022. The booklet, in hard-copy and for your e-reader, can be purchased through our website. This reflection was originally written in 2003.

**Exodus 20:1-17 | 1 Corinthians 1:22-25  
John 2:13-25**

*His disciples recalled the words of Scripture, "Zeal for your house will consume me." (Jn 2:17)*

In writing about the meaning of discipleship in John's Gospel, Wes Howard-Brook suggests that we understand Jesus's overturning the tables in the temple as his "mission statement".

The money changers and the merchants selling sacrificial animals have gotten into the temple precincts through a corrupt arrangement made between the temple elites and the Roman authorities. The rates of exchange and the price of the animals are set to maximize profits and accommodate bribes. This arrangement takes unfair advantage of the people, especially the poor who

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- Pax Christi Illinois' advocacy for workers during the pandemic;
- Pax Christi Southern California's conference on the 2020 elections and how it is impacted by our commitment to morality in a time of pandemic;
- Pax Christi Baltimore's participation in faith communities' rallies in support of Black Lives Matter;
- Pax Christi Metro New York's anti-racism workshop examining both the effects of internalized racial oppression and internalized racial superiority;
- Pax Christi Metro DC's continued leadership and advocacy addressing the evils of drone warfare;
- Efforts by numerous Pax Christi regions and local groups, including PC Rhode Island, PC Western Washington, Pax Christi Silver Spring (MD) and others, in the Back from the Brink nuclear disarmament campaign;
- Pax Christi Little Rock (AR) participated in the Take a Knee for Justice rally aimed at addressing white privilege and systemic racism;
- And we initiated or formalized new state chapters in Arkansas, Missouri, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and Wisconsin, bringing our regions and state chapters to a total of 19...

And so much more!

### Other items of note:

Our work nationally and by local groups and regions was featured in the national media numerous times, including quotes and coverage in *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*, *The Huffington Post*, *The Nation*, *The Arizona Republic*, *The Baltimore Sun* and Reuters. In the Catholic press, we were featured in the *National Catholic Reporter*, *Vatican News*, *America Magazine*, *US Catholic*, *Religion News Service*, *Catholic News Service*, *Crux*, *The Tablet*, numerous diocesan newspapers and websites, and more. (See a partial list of articles on our website under the "News" section.)

We doubled the traffic on our website from 2019 to 2020, with over 100,000 unique visitors to the site and over 200,000 page views. Our *Prayer for Peace and Solidarity in a Time of Pandemic* was read or downloaded over 7,000 times on the website; Bishop Stowe's post-election reflection garnered nearly 5,000 views; and our statement following George Floyd's murder was read over 3,500 times. Our weekly Lenten and Advent reflections regularly topped 1,000 views with some reaching over 2,000 people on the website alone (and thousands more through social media and our email network).

Our social media presence grew significantly with almost 12,000 followers on Facebook now, nearly

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## *Lenten reflection from page 4 continued...*

have no option, no choice. For, living without option, without choice, is what being poor means.

But Jesus created an option where none existed; he made a way out of no way. Quite literally, he turned things upside down, rearranging the physical and mental furniture. Jesus sent up a “sign” that something new and different might be possible. The poor saw in him someone who would not accept the unjust status quo without putting up a struggle. The religious elites, merchants and money changers were put on notice; someone knows about their exploitation of the poor, bribery and fraud.

In acting out his mission statement, Jesus provoked a *krisis* (in Greek). He confronted the people with a grave “moment of decision”, a choice of life or death. They could trust in Jesus and his struggle for the God of life or continue their habituated endurance of the status quo.

When we encounter Jesus, we too encounter the same “krisis”, the same moment of decision: either we trust Jesus and his struggle for the God of life, or we surrender to the idols of the status quo. The choice of life or death is ours.

*Question for reflection: What “krisis” does following Jesus provoke in you?*



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## **Responding to the World Day of Peace message**

*By Sr. Teresa Wamũyũ Wachira (IBVM)  
Co-President of Pax Christi International*

**Ed. Note:** *The following is excerpted from Sr. Wachira’s reflection on Pope Francis’s World Day of Peace message for 2021. For the complete letter, visit <https://bit.ly/3qCbuKY>.*



Blessings, joy and peace, to you all this New Year 2021.

In his earlier reflections on the World Days of Peace, and in the two encyclicals, *Laudato Si’* and *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis intertwines love and care of the environment and of humanity (called to be each other’s keeper). In his 2021 World Day of Peace message, ‘**A culture of care as a path to peace**’, the Pope echoes this when he invites us once more to commit ourselves to care and compassion by promoting each person’s dignity, being in solidarity with the poor and vulnerable, and working towards the common good and concern for the protection of creation. This has been an ongoing invitation for all of us due to the Covid-19 pandemic and climate change reality. Similarly, this global experience has kept us focused on the fact that we are all interconnected irrespective of our gender, creed, race, different affiliations, socio-economic and political status.

Furthermore, the Pope calls us to live and work for what really matters, that is “*the value and dignity of every person, ... solidarity for the common good, and ... relief to those suffering from poverty, disease, slavery, armed conflicts, and discrimination.*” Pope Francis further challenges us to “*become a prophetic witness of a culture of care, working to overcome the many existing social inequalities*” and cautions that this “*can only come about through a widespread and meaningful involvement on the part of women, in the family, and in every social, political and institutional sphere.*” This is food for thought for all of us as we usher in the New Year 2021.

The initial questions we may need to ask ourselves are: What will be different in 2021 in the way we engage with each other (women and men, youth and children), our communities, our neighbors, and the global world? What do we need to do to open our hearts, our homes, and our borders to the “vulnerable” that reach out to us each day, challenging us to act in response to their cry of vulnerability? How can our hearts be converted and our ways of thinking changed, in order to work for true peace in solidarity with one another and our Mother Earth?

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# On the line: News from Pax Christi groups around the U.S.

## PAX CHRISTI LITTLE ROCK HOSTS BISHOP STOWE; CELEBRATES WORLD PEACE DAY

Pax Christi Little Rock hosted a conversation with Bishop Stowe about relational healing in a divided world. Messages about internal and communal healing were uplifted in the program and this came at a time when many people are becoming increasingly aware of the divide that exists within communities. PC Little Rock also took part in an event commemorating World Peace Day on January 1 (*pictured right*) which was organized by Caroline Stevenson, a member of Women's Action for New Directions, Episcopal Peace Fellowship, and Arkansas Coalition for Peace and Justice. As attendees gathered, they were able to intentionally enter the new year alongside fellow peacemakers with a recommitment to the pursuit of justice. More than twenty people attended, hearing quotes, poems, and speeches from the various speakers. Before the conclusion of the event, everyone was invited to write down their aspirations for the year ahead and place them into the fire.



## PAX CHRISTI SAN ANTONIO ADDRESSES DEATH PENALTY, HUMAN RIGHTS

Pax Christi San Antonio held two events leading up to the scheduled executions during the week of Jan. 12. On Nov. 29, they hosted an anti-death penalty gathering with Bishop Stowe, Emma Tacke from Catholic Mobilizing Network, Sr. Martha Ann Kirk from the University of the Incarnate Word (UIW), and Kristin Houlé Cuellar from the Texas Coalition Against the Death Penalty. The speakers each made calls to action, pushing for the abolition of the death penalty, both in Texas and nationally. Shortly after the new year, PC San Antonio reconvened with another meeting in collaboration with UIW. Victoria Velazquez, a student at UIW and writer for the LOGOS newspaper, was able to join the members of Pax Christi San Antonio to discuss Human Rights Day and share about the newspaper submission she wrote about the event on November 29th.

## NEW YORK HOLDS ANTI-RACISM WORKSHOP

Pax Christi Metro New York hosted an event titled "Moving Beyond Victimization & Privilege: The Anti-Racism Challenge" with guests Tom Cordaro and Cathy Crayton, former members of the Pax Christi Anti-Racism Team and the Pax Christi USA National Council. The workshop started by defining racism and then transitioned into a conversation about racial oppression and racial superiority. The event created a space for attendees to reflect on their own racial identity and how that impacts the ways that racial justice can be sought without unintentionally reinforcing detrimental beliefs.

## PC NEW JERSEY WORKS TO END DETENTION

Pax Christi New Jersey remains active in the movement to end immigrant detention and abolish ICE. When interviewed by *The Jersey Journal*, Kathy O'Leary, the regional coordinator for Pax Christi New Jersey, said: "People should not be incarcerated by ICE and people should not be incarcerated during a pandemic." In response to a coronavirus outbreak in the Hudson County Corrections and Rehabilitation Center, dozens of detainees took part in a hunger strike demanding better conditions. Pax Christi New Jersey has been active in the efforts surrounding the Hudson County Jail, advocating for the improvement of conditions at this facility, as well as calling for an overhaul of the system that created this situation.

## PC NORTHERN CA STUDIES FRATELLI TUTTI

Pax Christi Northern California held an eight-week study group that focused on the words of *Fratelli Tutti*. The encyclical suggests that social friendship is an essential part of creating a peaceful and just world. In a moment when many are feeling disconnected from one another, gathering in this space allowed for those in attendance to prayerfully reflect on the new Church teaching and how it can be implemented into their daily lives.

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7,000 on Twitter, and over 1,000 on Instagram.

We brought on 3 new staff members including our first Deputy Director, Sr. Dianna Ortiz, OSU; our first National Field Organizer in over a decade, Lauren Bailey; and a new Director of Communications, Roxana Bendezú. We updated to a new database system, expanded our digital footprint and expanded our technological capacities in significant ways. *And did I mention we did all this while juggling a whole new way of working, mainly remotely, during a pandemic?* Seriously though, this is an incredible staff of people who have embraced the challenge of the past year to expand Pax Christi USA's presence and capacity at almost every level.

We also published and sold over 6000 Lent and Advent reflection booklets; issued a statement condemning the assassination of the Iranian general, mobilized our members to resist a war with Iran, and helped sponsor a vigil calling for no war with Iran at the White House; sponsored the first annual Catholic Nonviolence Days of Action in September, including 2 PSAs (Pray-Study-Act e-bulletins) and a webinar introducing the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative (CNI) with CNI project coordinator Judy Coode, attended and viewed by over 700 people; co-hosted a birthday celebration for Pax Christi International's 75th anniversary which included a glimpse into the work of the international Pax Christi network; and so much more.

I also want to draw attention to all of the Pax Christi USA members and friends whom we lost this past year. For many of us, the passing of John Lewis and Sr. Ardeth Platte, during a year in which we so needed their witness, struck particularly hard. We know that they, along with so many others, are now interceding for us and the work we do for peace with justice. For the lives and witness of all whom we lost, we give thanks.

Lastly, **I especially want to say THANK YOU.** This is the work of our entire community, from Maine to California, Michigan to Texas, Washington state to Florida and all points in-between. **In an extraordinarily difficult year, together we witnessed to the peace of Christ in thousands of ways through prayer, study and action.** I hope this cursory overview gives you a sense of the strength and vitality of our movement and excites you for all that we can do together in 2021!

In Christ's peace,



**Johnny Zokovitch**  
Executive Director, Pax Christi USA



**SPECIAL MESSAGE:** We learned from our mailhouse that the Advent appeal we sent out on November 25 may not have reached many of you until after Christmas, perhaps not even until into the new year. Washington, D.C. post offices were instructed to prioritize packages over the holiday season and our appeal letter got pushed back for delivery until late in the season. This appeal is usually our largest fundraiser of the year. I know that many people like to respond to such appeals with an end-of-the-year donation, but we hope that even if you did get it late, you'll still respond. You can use the remittance envelope included with this newsletter. Thanks so much for the support!