

The Peace Current

Pax Christi USA, The National Catholic Peace Movement

Membership Newsletter, Spring 2021



Sister Dianna Ortiz, OSU

(Sept. 2, 1958-Feb. 19, 2021)

Deputy Director at Pax Christi USA

PRESENTE!

WE GIVE THANKS FOR THE TIME AND LOVE YOU GIFTED US AND WE COMMIT OURSELVES TO CONTINUE YOUR WORK FOR A MORE JUST AND PEACEFUL WORLD.

Our statement on the passing of our beloved Dianna Ortiz, OSU

Early in the morning, on February 19, Dianna Ortiz, OSU, our friend and colleague, passed away after a short illness. As anyone who ever encountered Dianna knows, she was an extraordinary person. We have lost a member of our family, the heart at the center of our life together as a staff who lifted all of us with her unceasing encouragement, support, kindness and gentleness. Our heartbreak and grief are only tempered by our gratitude and love for all Dianna has been for us, and for the rest and peace that she now has. The entire Pax Christi USA community mourns with all those who know and love Di, and we give thanks for the time that she was among us.

Many of us in the Pax Christi world first met or learned of Dianna in the 1990s when, with grace and perseverance, she pushed the U.S. government to tell the truth about the kidnapping and torture she suffered in Guatemala in November 1989. Dianna drew on her own excruciating experience to create the Torture Abolition and Survivors Support Coalition (TASSC), which provides tools and assistance for torture survivors to advocate for themselves, to raise awareness of the ongoing use of torture around the world, and to change laws and customs. She served as TASSC's executive director for several years.

Dianna was a part of the Pax Christi family for many years. She received the Pax Christi USA Teacher of Peace award in 2000, and then served as program director and internship program coordinator from 2009-2012. She returned to the staff as deputy director in March 2020.

We are grateful for all those who have reached out and for the opportunities these past two months to remember Dianna's life and witness in prayer and with our community. We continue to ask for prayers for Dianna's Ursuline community in Kentucky, for the Assisi community in Washington, D.C. where Dianna had lived since the 1990s, and especially for her mother, siblings, nieces and nephews. Please check out the Pax Christi USA website for more on Dianna, tributes written about her, photos and more.

Dianna Ortiz, presente!





The Peace Current

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An Easter message

By Bishop John Stowe, OFM Conv

Pax Christi USA Bishop-President

“Why do you look for the living among the dead?” (Lk 24:5)

That was the question from the angels poised outside the empty tomb to the faithful women who had arrived to perform the sad but reverent ritual of giving a proper anointing to the already buried body of Jesus. How could they grasp the startling meaning of those words? It defies all of human experience and they had witnessed with their own eyes the tragic end of Jesus' earthly life even as many of his followers joined in the taunts of the deriders or ran away in disappointment and despair.

With the evidence of an empty tomb before their eyes, and knowing how soundly the tomb was sealed and how securely it was protected, what other kind of answer could there be? Is it true?



“Why do you look for the living among the dead?”

It is a challenging question, especially for Christians, throughout the ages. It is one that as Pax Christians we should ask ourselves as well during this Eastertide. Do we acknowledge how “our way of life” may actually be related to the culture of death?

We live in a nation that again and again chooses to build up state-of-the-art weaponry and seeks to employ the best of technology for the purpose of destroying human life — often claiming that our defense is for the purpose of protecting “our way of life”. We know the industries that engage in weapons research (including nuclear weapons) employ many people, i.e. “provide a living” for them. Is that not like searching for the living among the dead?

What about the preservation of a culture that depended on the enslavement of people from Africa? Monuments and plaques that the descendants of the enslaved must see day after day and the rebel flag flapping in the breeze defended as a symbol of “our way of life”?

And what about those unaccompanied minors, teenagers, little kids, toddlers held in confinement at our southern border because their presence might threaten “our way of life”, as if they were taking bread from our tables rather

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An Easter message from Pax Christi USA's Bishop-President from page 2...

(continued from page 2) than eager to work to provide for those tables? They ran away from death-dealing gangs and the devastating consequences of climate change which eliminated their ability to provide for themselves — and no one offered a hand.

There are many more examples that resemble the apparent failure of Good Friday as Jesus' body was sealed in a tomb. But that cannot be and is not the end of the story.

With the celebration of Easter, hope is reborn. Life is possible, we learn, even in the midst of what appears to be death. If our eyes are open, we can't help but see the Good Fridays that are all around us, the plight of a crucified people. Our faith assures us that they will know life in abundance. What a great celebration and great tribute to the Risen Christ it would be to separate ourselves from the powers of death and stop looking for the Living One among the dead.

"He has gone ahead of you" (Matthew 28:7) are great words of promise from the angel to the women at the tomb ... and to us. Jesus has shown us the way to the fullness of life. Let us commit ourselves to that life in abundance that God desires for all the human family.

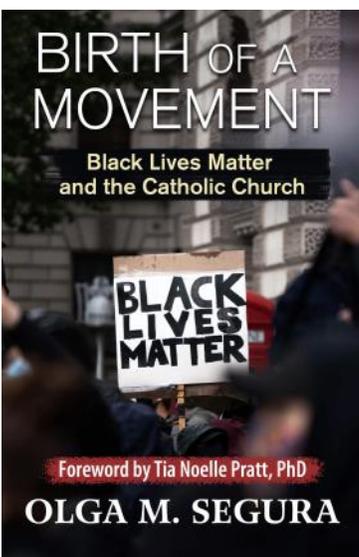
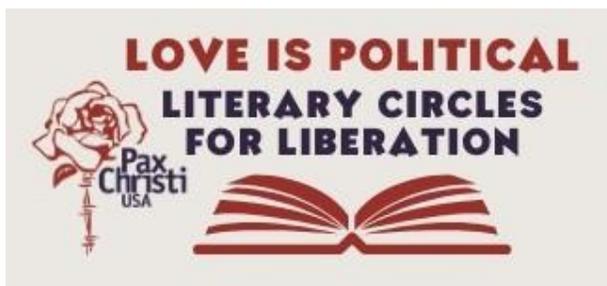
Christ Is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!

NEW PROGRAM: Love is Political: Literary Circles for Liberation

Starting this past February, Pax Christi USA began offering opportunities for our community and friends to study in-depth a particular book together, incorporating in-person study groups, virtual study groups, panel discussions and speakers, study guides, and other resources. We're calling the series, "Love is Political: Literary Circles for Liberation" (#LoveIsPolitical). These circles are aimed at deepening our political, theological & socio-cultural education around particular issues on which our movement engages.

Once each study circle for a particular book is complete, we'll continue to leave posted the resources — videos, a timeline for suggested study, study guides with questions, and more — so local groups can organize study circles on their own.

Our first study circle was "Advancing Nonviolence", a study of the book *Advancing Nonviolence and Just Peace in the Catholic Church and the World*, by eds. Marie Dennis, Ken Butigan, Rose Marie Berger, and Judy Coode of the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative. It was held from February-April 2021 with nearly 300 people participating. See all of the resources associated with this study circle on the Pax Christi USA website, including video recordings of our 5 panel discussions with a variety of theologians, social scientists and peace practitioners.



Our current study circle is entitled, "Birth of a Movement", a study of *Birth of a Movement: Black Lives Matter and the Catholic Church*, by Olga Segura. The first Zoom session is scheduled for May 24th with others scheduled through July 19th. Both groups and individuals can register through the Pax Christi USA website.

The Birth of a Movement study circles are aimed at exploring the myriad ways that the Black Lives Matter movement and the teachings of the Catholic Church intersect and how, by embracing the values of BLM, Catholics can begin to embody the values at the heart of what Jesus preached and practiced and the Church is called to imitate. Author Olga Segura, in relating the story of the Black Lives Matter movement through a Christian lens, guides readers toward insights and a deeper understanding of the movement and why it can help the church, and the country, move closer to racial equality.

This study circle is also functioning as a lead-in event for our National Conference on July 30-31 with Ms. Segura serving as our opening keynote speaker. Check out the website and register to participate!

Pray-Study-Act: Gun Violence

The resources here are drawn from Pax Christi USA's website and our partners. You can adapt the information below for use for yourself, within your family or household, with your local Pax Christi group (whether in-person or virtually), religious community, parish, school or other group. Pax Christi USA is a partner in the work of Everytown for Gun Safety/Moms Demand Action. This year, we'll be forming a working group to help us further develop our response to the gun violence that plagues our nation. If you're interested in being a member of that working group and can offer experience or expertise on organizing to end gun violence, contact jzokovitch@paxchristiusa.org.

PRAYER

Let the Shooting End

from the Sisters of Mercy

God, our hearts are broken with pain at the senseless deaths caused by gun violence. Families mourn, children live in fear, and some in our nation respond by arming themselves with more guns with greater capacity to end life. Our disconnection and alienation has caused some to turn to guns for protection and safety. We ask that you touch our hearts with your love, heal our brokenness, and turn us away from violence toward peace. Help us to transform our own hearts and to seek peaceful ways of resolving our differences. Let our hands reach out and connect with those who feel alone, those who live in fear, and those suffering from mental illness. Let our voices be raised asking our legislators to enact gun laws to protect all in our society, especially those most vulnerable. Let our pens write messages demanding change while also scripting words of hope and transformation. We ask this in the name of the God who desires that we live together in peace. Amen.

STUDY

The Pax Christi USA statement following the mass shooting in Atlanta in March

Charleston. Pittsburgh. Atlanta. Once more we have seen what appears to be the devastating result of racial hatred and our nation's inability to address gun violence. A recent study by Stop AAPI Hate documents the rise in violence against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders over the past year, marked by a pandemic which some of our leaders have not only



politicized for their own agendas but racialized as well. It is in that context that we see clearly where fanning the flames of racism leads.

Everytown for Gun Safety documents the shootings yesterday in Atlanta as the third mass shooting this year in the United States and the 244th mass shooting since January 2009. And yet the carnage has yielded little to no movement from our elected leaders on sensible policies that the vast majority of people support to curtail the suffering that gun violence wreaks on families and communities with alarming frequency.

Too many statements today will note how 'we are stunned and heartbroken' and yet not lead to any significant change in our laws. Too many leaders will offer their 'thoughts and prayers' while tomorrow resisting any action that would mitigate the next round of offering 'thoughts and prayers'.

The letter of James, 2:14-17, states the challenge for us in this moment clearly and unequivocally: "What good is it, my sisters and brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and has no food for the day, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well,' but you do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is it? So also faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead."

There can be no tolerance of the race-baiting rhetoric that stokes the fire of hate crimes against communities of color. And while the offerings of 'thoughts and prayers' so easily and cheaply flow in politicians' press releases and Twitter feeds, the true measure of the moment will be taken by what actions follow.

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It should be a basic article of faith that we demand our respect for human life and dignity result in common-sense, reasonable restrictions on guns in our country. Pax Christi USA pledges our solidarity with all those who have been affected by gun violence and will continue to work alongside all who seek a world where no one suffers because of another's armed hate. The grief that we share with all those affected by these deaths will be matched by our commitment to make the change that puts an end to these acts which lead to our mourning.

For more statements on gun violence by Pax Christi USA, please see our "Statements" page on the website.

From Pax Christi USA's Statement of Principles 2020

On average in the United States, 100 people are killed every day due to gun violence, resulting in over 36,000 lives sacrificed annually and millions more forever



traumatized in deference to the gun lobby. The disproportionality of gun violence is evidenced by Black people being ten times more likely to be murdered with a gun than their white counterparts, and women five times more likely to die if they are a victim of domestic violence when their abuser has access to a firearm. Individual and community trauma resulting from gun violence is devastating. As a community of conscience, we stand together to call for common sense legislation that reflects how much we love our children and each other; this includes such reasonable measures as universal background checks, a ban on assault weapons, and the recognition that gun violence is a national public health emergency.

>> Read Johnny's article in NCR last month, "We need more than 'thoughts and prayers'; we need gun background checks".

ACTION

Legislative Action: Background Checks Now!

from Everytown for Gun Safety

In the run-up to the 2020 elections, Everytown for Gun Safety announced a new initiative with faith organizations across the country to mobilize faith communities to elect gun sense candidates in the 2020 elections. Pax Christi USA was a partner in this work.

"At the heart of Catholic social teaching is the fundamental belief in the dignity of every human being – that every person is sacred, a creation of God," said Johnny Zokovitch, executive director of Pax Christi USA. "I live in St. Louis, where we're experiencing an epidemic of gun violence, of children being shot and killed in our city with mind-blowing regularity. It's the same story in cities all across our country. It's time we honor the dignity of our children by putting concrete action behind all those 'thoughts and prayers.'"

Pax Christi USA has continued our involvement with Everytown and we encourage our individual members and local groups to check out Everytown's website for the latest legislative and grassroots efforts taking place. **One specific action that we're recommending is to contact your senators and tell them to take action on background checks.** The U.S. House has passed four pieces of life-saving gun safety legislation. Now, it's the Senate's time to act.

Background checks save lives, and during the last year, the need for them has only become clearer. Loopholes in the background check laws have been exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic, meaning more guns sold to people without a background check, and more guns in the hands of people who should not have them.

The Senate must support gun safety and help deliver the first federal gun safety law in over 25 years. Find your senators' contact information at senate.gov.

Sign the statement to stop anti-Asian hate

from the Asian American Christian Collaborative (AACC)

Sign the AACC Statement on the Atlanta Massacre and Ongoing Anti-Asian Hate, calling Christians and church leaders to make a clear and urgent response condemning this heinous act of hate, and inviting all Americans to work toward the dignity and respect of Asian and Asian American lives, especially women. Go to asianamericanchristiancollaborative.com.

Letter from the National Council Chair

By Isaac Chandler, Pax Christi USA National Council Chair

Eds. Note: This is an excerpted version of the letter to our membership that Isaac Chandler, National Council chair, wrote for the month of February 2021, Black History Month.



First of all, let me say that it is an honor and privilege to serve as Pax Christi USA's National Council Chair. ... I along with the Council are working to continue our mission of "peace with justice". In light of the times we are in, the National Council has been unable to meet in person due to the ongoing pandemic. This has not however prevented us from doing the work; we are continuing to meet via Zoom. ...

On the January 6th insurrection: Many of us watched in terror and disbelief as a large mob of mostly white protestors stormed our Capitol building in D.C. For some the actions of this mob of insurrectionists was shocking. For me, I saw clearly the Triple Axes of White power, White privilege, and White superiority on full display. The rioters breached the Capitol barricades and gates with little to no resistance and entered the chambers of the floor of the House to take pictures, breaking windows and defacing property. Five individuals, including a member of the Capitol police, lost their lives. In some cases, local police posed for pictures with these agitators. Questions going through my mind: "Why were they able to get so close to the Capitol en masse? When things were getting rowdy, where were the tear gas and rubber bullets (used in BLM protests this past summer)? Why were so few arrests made? Where were the police shootings that happen when police feel their lives threatened?" I can only imagine the blood and carnage that would have ensued had this rally been predominately Black, Indigenous People of Color. ... Obviously, these individuals felt this an okay way to air their grievances. "And what was their grievance?" you ask: Economic opportunity? No. Human rights? No. Clean water? No. Guess again. To contest a fair and impartial election that had been litigated in court through some 50+ lawsuits.

Voting Rights: Stacey Abrams, through her Fair Fight organization, worked to change the voting demographic in the state of Georgia. ... Many people have stated that this effort helped to "save democracy". Yet as we speak, 28 states have entered over 100 pieces of legislation to restrict voting by imposing stricter voter ID laws, limiting mail-in voting, shortening early voting hours, limiting voter registration drives, eliminating drop boxes, and allowing for more voter purges. It is clear that these efforts are in response to the lies and misinformation regarding widespread "voter fraud". These lies are particularly egregious and racist being that the "fraud" was only present in certain states and in certain neighborhoods (those that were predominately Democratic and urban). This is happening not only in Southern states, but also as far west as Washington State and up to New Hampshire and Connecticut in the Northeast.

What you can do: With many issues looming, there are signs of hope to be found. Activists nationwide are galvanizing their efforts. You, the membership of Pax Christi USA, are a part of this effort. During this time when many families are struggling to make ends meet, you have continued to be generous with your time, talent, and treasure. It is through your generosity that we have continued to stay afloat during these difficult economic times and your passion and diligence are needed now more than ever. So as you continue to celebrate and commemorate the achievements of African Americans (every month), consider doing the following:

- ⇒ Spend time in prayer regarding the "nonviolence" texts of the Gospel (PRAY).
- ⇒ Continue to learn and study about the contributions of African Americans (STUDY).
- ⇒ Examine the intersectionality of our 4 priority areas by examining them though an anti-racist lens (STUDY).
- ⇒ Seek out partnerships with African American organizations looking at issues such as voting rights, environmental justice, nuclear disarmament, etc. (ACT).

Final Thought: I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge 2 dynamic female leaders who paved the way for me serving in the position of National Chair. The first is Pearlette Springer (*far right in gray shirt*), who in the late 2000s became the 1st African American chair of the National Council, and Cathy Woodson (*right, pink blouse*), who served 2 years as Chair of the National Council. These women paved the way for me to be here and for that I am grateful. I hope I continue to make them proud.



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

PAX CHRISTI SOUTH DAKOTA HOSTS CONFERENCE

Pax Christi South Dakota hosted their state conference on Feb. 27 where they were able to present Srs. Michelle Meyers and Kay O'Neil with the Artisan of Peace Award. Srs. Michelle and Kay founded PC South Dakota in 1998 after having a conversation about peacemaking with Fr. John Dear. PC South Dakota has



grown to become a force of change through grassroots organizing, legislative advocacy, and community building. The local PCUSA communities present represented Sioux Falls, Watertown, Brookings, and Aberdeen. During the gathering, representatives from each of the local groups shared their experiences working on human trafficking, the death penalty, Indigenous rights, interfaith collaboration, and more.

PC MEMPHIS PRESENTS "LIVING NONVIOLENTLY"

Pax Christi Memphis hosted three virtual sessions addressing the need to live nonviolently in a violent world. Msgr. Al Kirk, Pastor Emeritus of the Church of the Holy Spirit, spoke on the need to live a lifestyle resembling the nonviolent life of Jesus. Therese Gustaitis from Catholic Charities of West Tennessee gave great reflections on her life in pursuit of nonviolence. The three sessions offered thought-provoking reflections about the "why," "how," and "when" of pursuing nonviolence. Through analysis of 21st century papal teachings, participants were encouraged to develop ways to integrate nonviolence into their daily lives.

PC MICHIGAN HOSTS STATE CONFERENCE

The 39th annual state conference for Pax Christi Michigan was April 17. Jean Stokan and Ken Butigan served as the keynote speakers for this year's conference. The theme was on holding the Church and our communities accountable for a commitment to

nonviolence. Speakers discussed how nonviolence is one of the greatest tools for change when creating a future that embodies peace with justice. The conference lifted up the work of the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative, in particular the innovative ways they are encouraging creative peacebuilding that holds space for all of creation. In a call to action, Mary Hanna, State Coordinator for PC Michigan, encouraged attendees to urge their legislators and Church leaders to create a world beyond war.

PC RHODE ISLAND WORKS ON THE TPNW



In an ongoing effort to support the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), Pax Christi Rhode Island bannered the office of Sen. Whitehouse to raise awareness to the ratification of the TPNW. The group had previously displayed the banner outside of Sen. Reed's office, and they plan to carry out future events to encourage action from other stakeholders. By displaying the banner outside the offices of key leaders, members of PC Rhode Island are educating the public and encouraging their community to contact their national delegation members.

PC METRO NEW YORK HOLDS LENTEN ACTIONS

Pax Christi Metro New York held a Lenten retreat, facilitated by Fr. Fred Thelen from Pax Christi Michigan and the PCUSA National Council. The retreat, "Compassion on the Path to Peace: Parable of the Good Samaritan for Our Times," focused on the words of *Fratelli Tutti*, along with a call to compassion inspired by the life of Dorothy Day. PC Metro New York also hosted their 39th annual Good Friday Way of the Cross Prayer Service. The theme this year was, "As we look to the Cross, Jesus is our Hope." Prayers for peace and justice in our world were raised during the service.

VOTE! See ballot for the National Council election in this mailing

Enclosed in this mailing is the ballot for the 2021 National Council election. As a member of Pax Christi USA, you have the right and responsibility to participate in the yearly election for new members of the National Council who will be responsible for setting policy and direction for the movement. Our goal is to have as diverse a council as possible in terms of age, gender, race, and geographic area. Please take a moment to carefully read the short biographies and vision statements each nominee submitted on the ballot itself. We have an excellent slate of 7 candidates. **With the changes instituted in the constitution in 2019, we no longer have two separate slates of candidates. You can choose THREE (3) people from the entire slate.** Deadline to receive your ballot is June 11th. If you have already voted online, please do **NOT** send in the paper ballot. If you prefer to vote online, go to <https://cutt.ly/2021-PCUSA-Election>. Online voting closes at 10pm ET on June 11th.



Pax Christi USA welcomes Hadley Stocker, new database manager

We are excited to add a new member to our growing national staff! For the past year, Hadley Stocker has been overseeing the complete revamp of our data systems and transfer to a new database as a consultant. In March 2021, we made Hadley's position with us permanent and have added her as our new database manager. Hadley loves to bring her passion for social justice together with data analytics to help organizations enhance their effectiveness through innovative organizing and outreach. She grew up in Ohio and New York City and after graduating from the Ohio State University with a Bachelors of Arts degrees in linguistics, she spent years working on political campaigns, including races in Ohio, Kentucky, Louisiana, New Mexico, Virginia, and Vermont. After receiving a Masters in Politics, Economics, and Business from Claremont Graduate University in 2013, she began working as a data analytics consultant for small social justice nonprofits around the country. Hadley is married with three children and lives in Kensington, Maryland. Welcome Hadley!



Pax Christi USA is excited to announce that July 30-31 we'll be hosting our first National Conference since 2016, the first in what will be an annual event going forward. Due to the ongoing uncertainty regarding the pandemic and protocols for in-person gatherings, the 2021 Pax Christi USA National Conference will be virtual with plans for the 2022 version, celebrating our 50th anniversary, to be in-person. Check out the website to register and for more information!

Keynote Speaker: Olga Segura

Pax Christi USA National Conference

Save the date!
Friday July 30th
Saturday July 31st

Location:
Virtual Conference
Details to follow