

The Peace Current

Pax Christi USA, The National Catholic Peace Movement

Membership Newsletter, Summer-Fall 2021

“White nationalism is the greatest threat to peace.”



[Ed. Note: Pax Christi USA presented our 2021 Teacher of Peace Award to Rev. Bryan Massingale, STD at the 2021 National Conference. What follows is the speech he delivered in accepting the award, via Zoom, in front of over 400 Pax Christi USA members on July 31st.]

By Bryan Massingale, STD
Pax Christi USA Teacher of Peace

I'm at a loss for how I can thank you adequately for honoring me. I deeply appreciate your warm welcome, generous words, and many personal expressions of appreciation. From the moment Bishop John Stowe (an inspiration and ally for getting into “good trouble”) called to ask if I would accept Pax Christi's award, I have been moved and somewhat embarrassed by your trust. Great giants and pioneers of social justice have received this honor: Dorothy Day, Helen Prejean, Martin Sheen, Ray East, and other outstanding leaders in the American Church. Since learning of your decision, the words of a Sesame Street song have been buzzing in my head: “One of these things is not like the others.” As I shared that sentiment with friends and colleagues who heard the news, they reassured me that I belonged. I am not sure I to-

tally believe that yet, but I trust your judgement and theirs. So, I embrace this award with joy and with pride in the organization that grants it.

I accept this award with pride in Pax Christi USA. The reasons for my pride in you are two-fold. The first is your courageous witness. Standing for peace and justice is not easy. Moreover, Pax Christi is the *Catholic* peacemaking organization, and let's be honest: at times, your relationship with the official Church can become strained, to put it mildly. Working for peace in a fractured world – while standing within and speaking out of a troubled and ambiguous faith tradition which too often aids and exacerbates those fractures – takes courage, perseverance, and grace. Your message and witness are not always welcomed by those in power in both country and Church. So, I take pride in being recognized by you: women and men of courage, faith, and perseverance.

The second reason for my pride is that honoring me with this award is itself an act of faithful courage. I mean, honoring someone who is Black, publicly gay, and a Catholic priest who denounces white supremacy and ecclesial homophobia as threats to social peace and forms of idolatrous faith – well, there are easier choices that could have been made. Honoring my ministry opens you to vilification, scorn, and rejection from those who pose as guardians of the faith. If Jesus were alive today, and witnessed the vitriol on certain Catholic websites, he would add to his list of Beatitudes, “*Blessed are you when they blog about you and post vile slander against you because of me.*” Having received more than a few of such rebukes and rejections from church leaders and members for my ministry, I treasure your recognition and support. As I

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2021 Teacher of Peace



Congratulations to
Rev. Bryan Massingale
awarded by Pax Christi USA



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"What humans break, divide, and separate,
we can — with God's help — also heal,
unite, and restore."



The Peace Current

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Laudato Si' & nonviolence

By Marie Dennis, Pax Christi USA Ambassador of Peace

Senior Advisor to the Secretary General, Pax Christi International

Despite the tremendous challenges of the past year, my heart is filled with gratitude for the diversity and creativity I continue to witness in our Pax Christi International movement. Both – diversity and creativity – are particularly evident in the leadership and staff of Pax Christi USA and in the phenomenal ways PCUSA is responding to the hunger for spirit-nourishment in bleak times and to the urgent need to address the violence baked into our U.S. “way of life.”



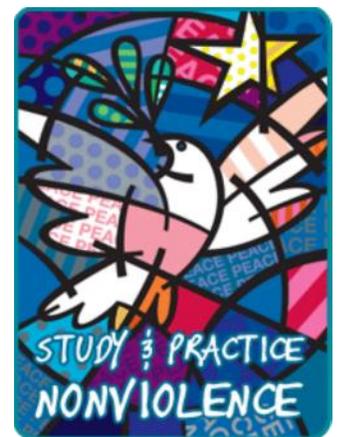
Systemic racism, poverty and inequality, the prioritization of weapons and war over health care and education, failed immigration policies, a disastrous response to the cry of the earth — so much brokenness has been laid bare by COVID 19, by Black Lives Matter, by Indigenous peoples, by immigrants and youth, by all of you! But Pax Christi USA’s monthly Mass for peace, literary circles for liberation, webinars, and thoughtful articles or statements on so many critical issues have added much to the hope that continues to reside in our international movement. Grounding that hope, I believe, is our deep, long term commitment to nonviolence.

In the last few years, Pope Francis’ powerful reflection in *Laudato Si’* on the cry of the earth; his assertion that everything is connected; his description of “one complex crisis which is both social and environmental”; and his invitation to ecological conversion have generated in many of us a deeper understanding of nonviolence. He describes ecological conversion “as a loving awareness that we are not disconnected from the rest of creatures, but joined in a splendid universal communion.” (*Laudato Si’* 220)

Nonviolence is a process for nurturing such an ecological conversion to right relationships among humans and between humans and the rest of the natural world – from the old way of domination and exploitation toward universal communion. Michael Nagler, founder of the Metta Center for Nonviolence, writes in his excellent book, *The Third Harmony*: “Violence is a tendency that pulls us back, away from the recognition of unity; nonviolence pulls us forward, toward the recognition of unity....”

With increasing clarity we have seen that the destruction of earth’s ecosystems and the suffering of the creatures living on this planet are intrinsically interconnected with human violence. The cultural violence of indifference and domination; the direct violence of war and militarization; the violence of economic injustice; and what Thomas Merton called “the polite, massively organized, white-collar murder machine” have seriously damaged earth’s ability to sustain life.

Many communities around the world are already tapping into the tremendous creative potential unlocked by a commitment to nonviolence as they develop strategies for realizing the vision of *Laudato Si’*. That is what Pax Christi around the world and so many of you are trying to do as well.



Reflecting on a generation of war; striving to live humanly

By Ryan Di Corpo, Pax Christi Young Adult Caucus

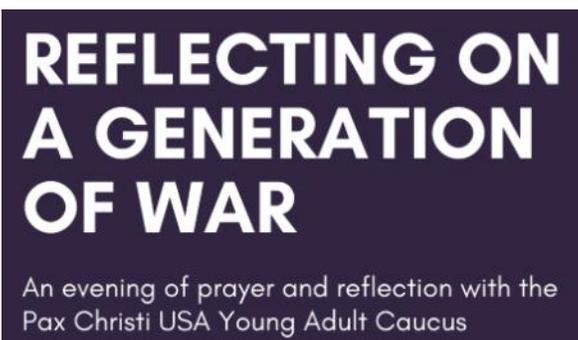
Ed. Note: In observance of the 20th anniversary of 9/11, the Pax Christi Young Adult Caucus (PCYAC) held an evening of discussion called, "Reflecting on a Generation of War". Ryan offered one of the reflections. This is excerpted from that evening.



In mid-December 1969, as the conflict in Vietnam raged on and peace activists took to the streets to demand the war's end, billboards by John Lennon and Yoko Ono appeared around the world in 12 major cities, including in New York's Times Square. The posters all read: "WAR IS OVER! If You Want It."

"What we're trying to tell [people]," said Lennon at the time, "is that 'You are the goal. Nobody on earth can do it for you. Whatever it is you want, you must do it yourself.'"

It seems that today there is a new question to consider: So war is over, but do we want it to be?



Now it must be said that the effects of war — its psychological traumas, its exorbitant costs, its destruction of the environment, its murder of civilians, its denigration of cultures — are not over. Those last for generations. For the families of those who lost loved ones in Afghanistan, Iraq, and in the terror attacks of September 11, 2001, this war is not over. War inflicts wounds on the entire human family that are not healed by hasty evacuations, solemn memorials or international treaties.

Our political leaders and military officials are beholden to a cult of pragmatism that diminishes and ignores the ethical dimensions of militarized violence and warmaking. The motto is this: If it works, do it. Principles come later. General Mark Milley, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, said it best during a Sept. 1 press conference at the Pentagon: "In war, you do what you must [...] not necessarily what you want to do."

War distorts our humanity, rendering evil as practical and good as imprudent. We as followers of Christ, but also as human beings, are called to reject decisions that regard human life as expendable or as something to be occasionally annihilated for political objectives. Nonviolence as an ethical principle, a manner of living, is not necessarily opposed to pragmatism, but beyond it, witnessing not only to this world but to the kingdom come.

"But why bother?" you may ask. "They say criticizing war is easy but true peacemaking is hard. Our current politics rejects nonviolence as hopelessly utopian and instead favors vengeance and retribution, the poisonous fruits of hatred. Why not just accept violence as our way of life in America?" The Jesuit pacifist Daniel Berrigan provides us with a succinct answer. Because there must be another way. "In the midst of dead ends, moral detours, there must be a way of living humanly," Berrigan wrote.

This is our great challenge as we face this brave new America: terrified to end this war on terror, committed to the same methods as our adversaries. We must all, in our own individual ways, strive to live humanly, in nonviolent opposition to the unchallenged military logic that swallows up young lives and makes wastelands of our common home.

COMING IN OCTOBER: Caravana de Madres de Migrantes Desaparecidos

For the first time in 17 years, the Caravana de Madres de Migrantes Desaparecidos (Caravan of Mothers of Missing Migrants) will transcend borders and arrive in the United States to uplift their plight by sharing their stories and advocating for changes in foreign policies. This historic journey is being co-sponsored by el Movimiento Migrante Mesoamericano, Migrant Roots Media, and Pax Christi USA. Check out the Pax Christi USA website for more information and how you can support this historic effort.



PCUSA Teacher of Peace Rev. Bryan Massingale, cont'd...

(continued from page 1) told Bishop John, his phone call with this news came at a time when I was despondent, and wondered, "What's the use? Who needs this crap?" (Or some other word). All this is to say, this honor – your affirmation of my ministry and advocacy – is more treasured than I can express.

Of course, we are not strangers to each other. I have had the privilege of both working with your Anti-Racism task force and of addressing this national assembly on three past occasions, in 2003, in 2010, and most recently at your 40th Anniversary celebration in 2013. At that time, I gave a challenge to Pax Christi USA. I declared that if it was to be relevant and on the frontier as a Catholic peacemaking movement with justice, then it had to become more "intersectional" in both theory and practice. Peace, I declared, can no longer be a stand-alone issue. The crises that face us – militarism, racism, ecology, and poverty – are interlocking, overlapping, and compounded. Single-issue groups and struggles will be neither effective nor compel people's attention. To paraphrase the great Audre Lorde, many people do not have the luxury of engaging single-issue struggles because they – we – do not live single-issue lives.

Yes, Pax Christi enters the justice struggle through a



particular lens, namely, a deep concern for peace and a decisive "no" to violence. But these cannot be its exclusive focus if it is to not only accurately understand society but also effectively engage it.

So, I challenged Pax Christi USA: To remain relevant and on the frontier as a Catholic movement of peacemaking with justice, you must be perceived as not only anti-war and pro-nonviolence. You must also make explicit linkages between peacemaking, racism, consumerism, and ecological justice. And you had to be LGBTQ inclusive. This award today is a sign of the seriousness with which you engaged that challenge.

In preparation for today, I re-read that address. Everything I said then, I re-affirm today with a resounding "Amen." "Intersectional" is a word often invoked today, now more than in 2013. While an "academic" sounding word, its meaning is straightforward, namely, that power relations of race, gender, class, and sexuality (among others) are interrelated and work together, building upon and mutually shaping each other. This means that the threats to peace and justice are complex and multiple. So, the work of peacemaking and peacebuilding must be complex and multiple as well.

This leads to my main message today: *The greatest threat to peace in our time, both nationally and even internationally, is the rise of white nationalism.* White nationalism is the existential, visceral conviction that this country – its public spaces, its history, its culture – belong to white people in a way that they do not and should not belong to "others". That America is, was meant to be, and always should remain, a "white Christian nation".

This means that multiracial democracy is an existential threat to white nationalism. The results of the 2020 election, with the election of the first president whoever used the phrase "white supremacy," the election of the first woman and woman of color as the vice president (with the first Jewish spouse of a president or vice president), and the elections of the first Black and Jew as U.S. senators from Georgia – this election was an existential threat to white nationalist hopes and dreams, and a confirmation of its deepest fears. The election had to be overturned by any means necessary, including allegations of fraud, armed rebellion, and violent insurrection.

The brutal mob violence of January 6 was a clear declaration that many white Americans would rather live in a white dictatorship than in a multiracial democracy. If democracy means sharing power with people of

color, and especially Black people, they want no part of it. White nationalism, white supremacy, is inherently violent. It depends upon violence and the threat of violence – police violence, carceral violence, rhetorical violence, mob violence, lynch violence – to create it and maintain it.

White nationalism is the gravest threat to peace precisely because it is intersectional, threatening social stability and human flourishing on multiple levels and fronts. Its commitment to *racist political and cultural supremacy* is obvious, manifested in voter suppression laws, crusades against “critical race theory” (which most of its opponents have never read), and public vitriol. But white nationalism is also *anti-women*, as evidenced in the macho posturing of its former presidential standard bearer, the overwhelmingly male violence of January 6, and the public vilifications of both Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Representative Liz Cheney – indeed, the denunciation of any woman who refuses the directives of male leadership. White nationalism is *anti-immigrant* and *anti-life* with its cruel family separations, inhumane caging of children, and callous indifference to Brown bodies seeking shelter and safety. White nationalism is also *anti-LGBTQ*, as evidenced in its homophobic and toxically masculine rhetoric and its hysteria surrounding the smallest attempts to recognize the humanity of trans persons. It is an *ecological threat* to the survival of the planet, with its obstinate refusal to accept the irrefutable reality of climate change. And white nationalism is a *threat to global health* and stability, through its irresponsible and reckless denigration of mask wearing and vaccination in the face of the greatest health crisis to afflict humankind in over a century.

I do not exaggerate: white nationalism is a grave threat to both democracy and peace. It is nakedly racist, blatantly homophobic, violently sexist, environmentally irresponsible, and recklessly narcissistic. If Pax Christi is to be relevant as a Catholic movement of peacemaking with justice, it must name white nationalism as the greatest threat to peace. It must realize that this threat will persist for at least the next three years, certainly through the 2024 election cycle, and probably beyond.

And your peace activism must understand white nationalism as the intersectional scourge that it is.

This is all very heavy. So let me finish with where I concluded my 2013 address: on the note of contemplative spirituality. White supremacy/white nationalism is a soul sickness, an ailment of the human spirit of a magnitude for which we do not have words to describe. Something catastrophic is happening in our country and our church. Genuine peace – the goal, dream, and passion of Pax Christi – is impossible with-

out a cultural evolution so profound and far-reaching it is almost impossible to imagine – and perhaps even terrifying to envision.

I call to mind a statement attributed to Albert Einstein: “If we want to change the world, we have to change our thinking. *No problem can be solved from the same consciousness that created it. We must learn to see the world anew.*”

No problem can be solved from the level of consciousness that created it. We need new ways of thinking, living, and loving. New ways of praying and being. This is the deepest call of our faith. We need to be contemplative witnesses of the possibilities of human transformation. We need to be witnesses of a new humanity, of new ways of being human, of the movement beyond *homo sapiens* toward becoming *homo spiritualis*. (We are called, I dare

to say, to be among the vanguard and pioneers of human evolution.)

For that to happen, we need to be grounded in the Truly Real, in that Infinite Radical Love Who is deeper and bigger than we are. That Radical Love Who sustained our ancestors in the wilderness even as the Holy One led them to new places undreamed and unimagined – the Promised Land. In today’s desert times and wilderness places, we are summoned to a direct dependence on a God that we can understand only intuitively and vaguely. We are summoned to trust in God alone because no other adequate source of life and strength exists.

Contemplative prayer roots us in a horizon beyond the present, which enables us to work for justice despite



Our staff is growing! Welcome Edward & John!

Pax Christi USA is excited about new additions to our growing staff! In June 2021, we welcomed Edward Ablang as a new Program & Communications Associate; and in July 2021, John Noble joined us as our new Director of Development. This past July saw all of our staff gather together for the first time in person (*photo to the right*). We're now at 8 staff members, 6 full-time and 2 part-time and we hope to be adding two others in the near future. Read below for more on Edward and John...

Edward Ablang is the newest member of our Program Team, joining Roxana Bendezú, Program Director, and Lauren Bailey, National Field Organizer, serving as a Program & Communications Associate.



His work experience includes policy monitoring and external relations at UNESCO, the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) and Religions for Peace, with a research focus on religion and global politics. Edward also has a background as a missionary cleric, bringing his aptitude for cultivating relationships and facilitating conversations around faith, politics and more.

"I look forward to stirring greater energy, to drive awareness and action anchored in Catholic social justice," Edward shared. "Jesus' message was radical in his day, and that message is still fresh inspiration for us today!"

Edward hopes to make sure our members, partners and friends have the latest information from Pax Christi USA and that "our programs truly respond to the pressing needs in manifesting our vision of a more just society."

John Noble has joined our staff as Director of Development, the first person we've had in this position in almost a decade. John's previous work included time as a digital organizer with Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement, where he was a proud union member of CWA Local 7102. Before his return to Iowa, John earned his M.Div at Brite Divinity School in Fort Worth, Texas and worked for Pastors for Texas Children, where he mobilized faith leaders to support robust public school funding. John has extensive experience with Catholic, ecumenical, and interfaith organizations, and his volunteer work includes participation in Catholic movements for racial justice, LGBTQ+ inclusion, and gender equity at all levels of church leadership.



"I am looking forward to connecting with Pax Christi USA's generous donors and supporters so that I can learn more about our movement's rich history and build a sustainable future for the next generation of Catholic peacemakers," John stated. "For me, all social justice work, whether it's fundraising, communication, or on-the-ground organizing, centers on the power of narrative: the story we tell together. As an organizational fundraiser, I see my work as story-telling: supporting Pax Christi USA's story, and connecting our donors to the new stories of peace, justice, and liberation we're telling together."

Order this year's Advent booklet with 40+ years of great reflections

This year's Advent booklet is an historic retrospective, gleaned from the past 40+ years of Advent reflections published by Pax Christi USA and featuring authors who speak to the yearning we have for peace with justice. A companion piece to the 2021 Lent booklet, these reflections remind us of what we stand for as we head into our 50th anniversary in 2022. Visit the Pax Christi USA website and order yours today!



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

PC NO. CALIFORNIA CELEBRATES EARTH DAY

Pax Christi Northern CA celebrated Earth Day by partnering with Sacred Heart Church community in Oakland (*photo below*). They helped to revitalize a community garden in back of the church, celebrated Mass together, and then planted a Habakujumoku tree, a sapling from a tree that survived the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. This tree was purchased from Japan by Fr. Jack Lau, priest at Sacred Heart Church. Fr. Lau led



the group of Pax Christi members and residents from the parish and community in planting and blessing the tree which was put in a prominent place along with a plaque in front of the church. They also hung messages of peace around the tree that were written on strips of cloth by a Catholic student group. They were fortunate to have a survivor of the Hiroshima bombing, Takashi Tanemori, with them for the ceremony.

PC DALLAS PROMOTES THE TPNW

Pax Christi Dallas is raising awareness around the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), in a highly visible way (*see photo on the right*). On April 10th, 2021, members of Pax Christi Dallas gathered to project a message on the side of Dallas City Hall. The message on City Hall read “Nuclear weapons: always immoral, now illegal.” Across the street, members stood holding a banner that gave information about the expansiveness of the TPNW.

PC MI, FL HOST STATE CONFERENCES

Pax Christi Florida and Pax Christi Michigan both hosted state conferences this spring. Pax Christi Florida’s conference was titled “The Beatitudes: A Prescription for Nonviolent Living in our Violent

World” and Johnny Zokovitch was the keynote speaker. Pax Christi Michigan hosted Jean Stokan and Ken Butigan, who spoke to the theme of “At the Crossroads: Active Nonviolence in a Time of Crisis and Opportunity”.

PC TEXAS ADDRESSES BLM, ISSUES OF RACE

Pax Christi Texas held a mini-conference in partnership with the Holy Cross Institute at St. Edward’s University. Dr. R. Khari Brown was the keynote speaker at the event and presented on “Religion and Black Lives Matter.” Dr. Brown is affiliated with the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan and with the Pew Research Center and he has co-authored a volume due to be published this September, *Race and the Power of Sermons on American Politics*.

PC METRO DC-BALTIMORE JOINS FAST FOR FREEDOM

Pax Christi Metro DC-Baltimore led a prayer service on the first evening of the Fast for Freedom. In partnership with the Vincentians, Friends on the Periphery, and Pax Christi USA, supporters from the community were able to join with PCMDCB to pray for those fasting. The Fast for Freedom was a collective call for Congress to create a path to citizenship within the jobs and infrastructure budget.



Massingale: “White supremacy is a soul sickness...” (cont’d from p. 5)

the odds against us – even despite the near certainty of short term failures and defeats. For religious hope assures us of a just-filled and peaceful future by grounding it in the reality and promises of God. In faith we are assured that even though human beings can *delay*, they cannot ultimately *deny* the fruition of God’s purpose. We can endure failures and defeats – and risk insecurity, mistakes, and halting efforts toward new ventures and ways of being – because from a faith-filled contemplative stance, temporal failures, though real, are not final, decisive, or ultimate.

My enslaved ancestors sang, “We’ve come this far by faith, leaning on the Lord.” Our hope lies not in what is of our own doing. Our hope stems from a quiet, deep, even if at times dark and obscure, trust that the God of *Shalom* accompanies us, guides us, and will not abandon us. For me, this hope is made real today by you, and by this award with which you honor me.

Let us continue to be pioneers for making a world of *shalom*, a world of radical love and inclusive justice for all. I accept this award as an act of rededication and recommitment to what Martin Luther King, Jr., called “the long and bitter – but beautiful – struggle for a new world.” I invite you to do the same, and to recommit yourselves and this organization to the long, bitter, painful – yet beautiful – struggle for a new world and a new church. A world and church of *shalom*.

Once again, my deepest thanks! Let the Church say, Amen!

Pax Christi USA commissions four new Ambassadors of Peace

In the nearly five decades of Pax Christi USA’s history, at key moments we have identified and honored extraordinary and experienced leaders within the Pax Christi USA community and commissioned them to represent our movement through ongoing outreach efforts. These “Ambassadors of Peace” promote the mission of Pax Christi USA through word and witness, sharing our programs and campaigns with new audiences, serving as our representatives in coalitions, and generally carrying the message of Pax Christi USA wherever they go. They serve as living embodiments to our community and beyond of what it means to live a life rooted in the “peace of Christ”.

At July’s National Conference, the National Council chose to recognize four new Ambassadors on the cusp of our Jubilee, our 50th anniversary, in 2022. The new Ambassadors of Peace are:

Phyllis Turner Jepson of West Palm Beach, FL, a long-time peace activist who has served as the coordinator of PC Palm Beach and PC Florida and on PCUSA’s National Council. In 1996, Phyllis was hired by the national office to serve as director of Local/Regional Development and later assumed the position of Program Director. Phyllis was instrumental in establishing Holy Ground PBC, a shelter program for homeless young mothers and their children in Palm Beach County.

Adrienne Alexander of Chicago, IL, is a former member of the Pax Christi USA National Council, past speaker at Pax Christi USA National Conferences, and promoter of student and young adult organizing within Pax Christi USA. Adrienne has made her career working as Director of Intergovernmental Affairs for AFSCME Council 31, a (mostly) public sector labor union and currently serves on the boards of Arise Chicago & Catholic Labor Network.

Donna Grimes of Washington, DC is a former member of the Pax Christi USA National Council and authored PCUSA’s 2005 Advent reflections book. Donna has worked for the USCCB since 2000 in social justice education with the Catholic Campaign for Human Development and the Secretariat of Cultural Diversity in the Church, staffing the Subcommittee on African American Affairs. She is a JustFaith facilitator, author, and catechetical leader.

Tom Cornell of New York is a long-time Catholic Worker, beginning with the CW in 1953. He was one of about a dozen people present at the meeting in July 1972 known as the “Pax Christi Affiliation Discussion” which gave birth to Pax Christi USA. Tom also served as one of PCUSA’s first National Council members, served as managing editor for The Catholic Worker newspaper, and has been part of Peter Maurin Farm in Marlborough, New York.

Find the video of their commissioning on the Pax Christi USA website and more of their bios on the Ambassadors of Peace webpage. Thank you Tom, Donna, Adrienne & Phyllis!

