One month at a time through 2021: The year-in-review inside!
50 years past & 50 years ahead

By Johnny Zokovitch, Executive Director

A belated “Happy New Year!” and so delighted to be embarking upon this 50th anniversary year since Pax Christi USA’s founding with all of you! If you missed any of our initial 50th anniversary events in January and early February, especially our World Day of Peace 50th anniversary kickoff event, you can find links to everything on the website under the menu heading, #PAX50!

This year will be an ambitious one for us, including our first in-person national conference since 2016 happening in August, a new accompaniment program to support intergenerational organizing, the launch of a major campaign to challenge the military budget, an evaluation of our 20+ year commitment to anti-racism and the next steps in that commitment, and so much more. And to accomplish this work and fully celebrate the 50 years that this incredible movement has existed, we’re going to need extra help throughout the year.

Enclosed with this newsletter is an invitation to consider ways you might be able to help us “seed the field” for the next fifty years of Pax Christi USA. When I took this position in 2019, my hope was that we could strengthen this movement and grow this community so that we could assure its vitality for another generation and more. I hope you’ll prayerfully look over the invitation to invest in a special way in our community during this special anniversary year. If you have any questions, please don’t hesitate to reach out to me; I’m glad to talk and share more about hopes for this year and beyond.

We are also thrilled to unveil a special 50th anniversary-themed logo/graphic that incorporates our traditional rose and barbed wire logo and our theme for our 50th anniversary year, “Weaving Threads of Peace for 50 Years”:

Our anniversary year theme invites us to reflect on the intricate tapestry of peace being woven by many: peacemakers who have energized our grassroots movement for decades, newer members, and the God of Peace and Justice who calls us to this work. The open circle of threads around our rose and barbed wire logo symbolize the years of intersectional prayer, study, and action on issues including nuclear disarmament, anti-death penalty, economic justice, climate justice, and the many other issues with which our members are engaged through the lenses of anti-racism and nonviolence. The circle is intentionally left open with the bottom threads reaching out to continue the prophetic work that began in 1972.

And thank you so much for all you do to strengthen, build and nurture the Pax Christi USA community. I am so grateful for you and all you do!
Eileen Egan and Gordon Zahn were two of the many Catholics deeply involved in the peace and social justice movements of the 1960’s. Eileen, an official in Catholic Relief Services and a long-time friend of Dorothy Day, together with several other East Coast Catholics, started the American Pax Association in October of 1962. Inspired by the British Pax Society which had been founded in London in 1936, its principal purpose was to inform Catholics about issues such as conscientious objection, and bring Catholic teaching to bear on the new questions raised by nuclear weapons. In a quiet way this forerunner of Pax Christi USA tried to speak the message of peace with a Catholic accent.

Gordon Zahn, a professor of sociology at Loyola University in Chicago, and one of the few Catholic conscientious objectors in World War II, became an early member of the American Pax Association. In 1971, he and Eileen decided to explore the possibility of the American Pax Association evolving into a Pax Christi section in the United States.

In Europe, Pax Christi worked closely with the hierarchy. A bishop was president of each national section. Eileen wrote to Bishop Thomas Gumbleton in November 1971 to explore the possibility of his becoming an episcopal “moderator” if a Pax Christi section would start in the United States. Eileen was aware that in 1971 Bishop Gumbleton, then the Vicar General of the Archdiocese of Detroit, had initiated the Bishops’ Conference declaration that the Vietnam War was unjust. He responded, “I would be honored to serve as moderator if your board reaches the conclusion that I am the person they want. I am hopeful that I would carry out the responsibilities of moderator in a way that would be satisfactory to all the members.”

With episcopal involvement secured, Eileen began correspondence with Carel Ter Maat, Pax Christi’s International Secretary. Eileen was invited to the next International Council meeting to discuss starting a Pax Christi section in the United States. Eileen’s proposal for a United States section of Pax Christi was accepted.

“That was the founding moment,” she said. Eileen quickly arranged a meeting between officers of the Pax Association—Claire Danielsson, Dennis Keegan, and Joseph Cunneen—with representatives of other Catholic peace groups, including Tom and Monica Cornell, Dorothy Day, Pat Jordan, Jim Forest, Harriet Goldman, and Rachelle Linner. This “Pax Christi Affiliation Discussion”, as Eileen called it, took place at Mount Paul, the novitiate of the Paulist Fathers in Oakridge, NJ, the weekend of June 30-July 1, 1972.

Fr. Ed Guinan, an enthusiastic Paulist priest ordained the year before, offered to undertake the administrative tasks of the new Pax Christi organization. He would get help from the Community for Creative Nonviolence, which he had organized in Washington, D.C. Fr. Guinan also organized Pax Christi’s first national assembly, which took place the weekend of October 5-7, 1973 at George Washington University, D.C. Dorothy Day agreed to give the keynote address.

That founding assembly seemed something of a miracle. Its theme was “Gospel Nonviolence: A Catholic Imperative”. More than 120 people were there from different parts of the country, including a person who would later serve as national coordinator, Mary Lou Kownacki, OSB, from the Pax Center in Erie, PA.

Joyful surprise filled the air at the opening session as people began to realize what was happening. So many were there from so many different places, sharing a desire for peace, a Catholic background, Vietnam anti-war activities, and hope for the future...
The 2021 Year-in-Review: From the TPNW to the Caravana

By Johnny Zokovitch
Executive Director, Pax Christi USA

Ed. Note: See a version of this year-in-review on the Pax Christi USA website with links and more.

Last year continued to present many challenges, much like 2020, and yet I think you’ll be proud of what we were able to do together in 2021. Just a quick survey of the year shows that we were able to 1) hold our first national conference since 2016 (albeit virtually) with nearly 500 people joining us for all or part of the conference; 2) we held 3 study circles as part of our new program, #LoveIsPolitical: Literary Circles for Liberation, exploring through prayer, study, and action racial justice, nonviolence, and nuclear disarmament with nearly 800 people participating in one or all three of the study circles; 3) despite the restrictions placed on us by the ongoing pandemic, we were able to co-organize the Caravan of Mothers of Disappeared Migrants (pictured top right), reaching hundreds in person with events from Texas to Boston, advocating at the Capitol, and involving thousands through media stories and online events; and 4) we organized a powerful response to Archbishop Gomez’s mischaracterization of today’s social movements that was signed by over 100 Catholic parishes, Pax Christi local groups, schools, and ministries, catching the attention of tens of thousands on social media and our website and featured in two pieces published in The Washington Post.

Here are a few more highlights from 2021...

CONFRONTING WHITE NATIONALISM, ADVOCATING FOR RACIAL JUSTICE: In July at the Pax Christi USA national conference, we presented the 2021 Teacher of Peace award to Fr. Bryan Massingale who challenged us in his speech to see “white nationalism as the gravest threat to peace”. Earlier we listened to the opening keynote from and conversation with Olga Segura, author of Birth of a Movement: Black Lives Matter and the Catholic Church, a book over 300 in our movement read together as part of our second study circle this past year. The Pax Christi Young Adult Caucus hosted a pre-conference event which looked at policing and the movement for abolition. We issued a statement and call to action following the Chauvin trial in May. The Pax Christi Anti-Racism Team resourced us with Prayer-Study-Action alerts (PSAs) for MLK Day and Juneteenth and articles addressing white privilege, celebrating that Black Lives Matter, and highlighting work for racial justice through the year.

WORKING FOR A WORLD FREE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS: From the very outset of 2021, we were continuing our 50 year history of lifting up the cause of nuclear disarmament and abolition, beginning in January with our support and mobilization for the TPNW, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, entering into force. We co-hosted a Mass with our Bishop-President Bishop John Stowe marking this significant achievement, while mobilizing our community for prayer, study and action flowing from a new organizational statement. Our local groups and state chapters continued to push for resolutions as part of the “Back from the Brink” campaign. Pax Christi USA’s Nuclear Disarmament Working Group led our work on many levels, most notably as organizers and facilitators of our third study circle, “The Gospel and Nuclear Disarmament”, with around 200 individuals and local groups studying together Pax Christi USA Teacher of Peace Art Laffin’s book, The Risk of the Cross: Living Gospel Nonviolence in the Nuclear Age. We also joined with Pax Christi International in “The Double Threat of Nuclear Weapons and Climate Change” campaign, addressing the connections between these two paramount issues.

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JANUARY 6TH INSURRECTION RESPONSE AND ELECTION 2020 FOLLOW UP: Despite the 2020 election having happened in November and finalized in December, we had to continue aspects of our campaign around the 2020 national elections, especially in response to the insurrection at the U.S. Capitol on January 6. Bishop Stowe’s Inauguration Day reflection was read by over 4,000 people. Our PSA alert unmasking the easy allegiance between our Church, white supremacy and the effort to undermine the 2020 election aimed at preparing people for Inauguration Week, with over 12,000 people reading it on our website and email network and the social media post for it resulting in over 24,000 people reached, 14,000 engagements, 633 comments, 760 likes, and over 200 shares (our greatest level of engagement ever on social media). Our media statement the day of the attack drew over 5,000 readers and was picked up by numerous media outlets including CNS, NCR, America, et al.

DEEPENING THE SPIRITUALITY OF NONVIOLENCE AND PEACEMAKING: Our Lenten campaign included reaching almost 4,000 people with copies of the Lenten 2021 booklet, weekly PSA alerts, reflections, and more. Over 3,000 from our community and beyond participated in our weekly Lenten prayer services, our first virtual Peace Mass, our Young Adult Lent Retreat, and in the “Advancing Nonviolence” study circles; and over 10,000 folks engaged in prayer, study, and action through the weekly Lenten reflections and PSA alerts. Our Advent 2021 campaign was built around the theme of “decolonization”, and we reached nearly 3,000 people each week with our Advent PSAs, with Sunday and Holy Day reflections readership between 3,000-4,500 on the website and email listserv. Our Advent weekly evening prayers gave folks a chance to gather together virtually, reflect, pray and connect, with over 400 people joining throughout the season on Zoom and over 800 views on Facebook Live. Nearly 3,000 people reflected together with this year’s Advent booklet. Each month we sponsored a virtual #PAXMass, joining together to celebrate our communion and lift up the connection between the gospel message of Jesus and the issues affecting our world every day. Over 1,000 people registered throughout the year for these Masses as we focused on migration, nuclear disarmament, nonviolence, and more, with attendance on Zoom and Facebook Live ranging between 200 and 700 people at each Mass. And we partnered with the Meta Peace Team to offer 2 trainings in nonviolence for our membership.

Pax Christi USA state chapters, regions and local groups continued to witness to the “peace of Christ” at the grassroots:

> Pax Christi Illinois held a major statewide conference addressing the social upheaval and reckoning happening within the U.S. over the past few years.

> Pax Christi New Jersey joined activists to mark Ash Wednesday by highlighting the immorality of ICE’s brutal treatment of immigrants.

> Pax Christi Metro New York explored “Peacemaking through the Arts” at a special event.

> Pax Christi Rhode Island celebrated the TPNW and promoted nuclear disarmament with a messaging campaign to the public and their elected officials.

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A reflection for Palm/Passion Sunday, April 10

Ed. Note: The reflections in this year’s Lent booklet represent the full arc of our 50 years. Each reflection (as well as the photographs!) was written by a former Pax Christi USA General Secretary, National Coordinator or Executive Director (the title changed over time!). Some—like Joe Fahey, Sr. Mary Lou Kownacki and Sr. Mary Evelyn Jegen—were there at the very birth of our movement. And their work was built on by Sr. Anne McCarthy, Jo Clarke, Nancy Small, Dave Robinson, Ron Cruz, Sr. Patty Chappell, and Sr. Anne-Louise Nadeau, all who served as full-time or interim directors of our movement. Each of them brings a different facet of our story into the reflections they offer in this year’s booklet, but taken together, they “weave threads of peace” into a tapestry that captures so much of what we have been and done together these 50 years. The reflections are all new, written specifically for today, with the exception of the week by Sr. Mary Evelyn who passed in 2014. Not wanting to leave her voice out, we drew upon her words and writings to address the moment in which we find ourselves in 2022. The booklet is available in print and digital versions at the Pax Christi USA website. (Photo to the right and below by Jo Clarke.)

By Anne McCarthy, OSB


Having said this, Jesus went ahead with the ascent to Jerusalem (Lk. 19:28)

In Luke’s gospel, Jesus’ high-profile entry into Jerusalem begins a day of action initiating a well-orchestrated, strategic nonviolent campaign that ends with Jesus’ arrest and execution.

As Pax Christi USA celebrates our 50th anniversary, the first day of Jesus’ Jerusalem campaign is one to ponder. Jesus’ range of emotions on this long day of action challenge us to risk the emotional intensity of any struggle for liberation.

Jesus’ dramatic entry into Jerusalem on a colt is in direct contrast to the Roman leadership’s shows of military power. The massive, noisy procession into Jerusalem, the seat of the Roman government and center of religious ritual and authority, must have felt exhilarating, giving a taste of God’s reign. Caught up in the energy and emotion of the crowd, everyone can taste the promise of a new day. Today, our “hosanna” chant is “The people, united, will never be defeated; El pueblo, unido, jamás será vencido!” We know the power of this energy to fuel the long, hard work that is to come.

Yet in the midst of that intoxicating energy, Jesus stops, overcome with grief when he sees the city. Jesus weeps for the coming destruction and for the blindness of the people to the ways of peace. His tears are for the present, and the future he realizes is bleak. Surely powerlessness and despair are mixed in with his sadness. How often have we experienced that emotional soup? Without fake consolation or the false pretense of a happy ending, Jesus gives space to the painful, emotional experience.

Jesus then enters Jerusalem and goes directly to the Temple and begins throwing out the vendors. His righteous anger is at religious systems whose collusion with empire has turned a beloved, sacred house of prayer into a place of corruption chewing up those in poverty. Jesus intervenes in a violent system, dismantling the tools of oppression. Jesus’ anger is fueled by grief and also by hope, but especially love. His compassion for those suffering, his grounding in religious tradition, and love of God were at the root of his prophetic action. Jesus channels anger into energy and courage to disrupt oppression and protect the vulnerable.

It’s easy to find an exhilarating procession to join and stop there. It’s more difficult to engage at the heart-level long-term. Perhaps in this anniversary year we can go to that scary place which Jesus dared to embrace.

Can you relate now with any of Jesus’ emotions on his entry into Jerusalem? If so, which ones? Are there gifts from those emotions in your work for justice?
On the line: News from Pax Christi groups around the U.S.

PC METRO DC-BALTIMORE WELCOMES CARAVAN

Pax Christi Metro DC-Baltimore welcomed the Caravan of Mothers of Disappeared Migrants partway through their speaking tour across the country. Local Pax Christi members, friends of the community, and faith leaders joined one another in welcoming the mothers. The picture below was taken at the conclusion of the reception; the tapestries being displayed contain the names of missing migrants.

PC MAINE HOSTS GOSPEL NONVIOLENCE RETREAT

In November, Pax Christi Maine hosted their annual retreat. The theme was “Living Gospel Nonviolence Day to Day: Challenges & Choices.” Through prayer, music, scripture, presentation, silent reflection, and sharing, participants explored Jesus’ resurrection story, his invitation to his disciples, and how they experience the transforming power of the Risen Jesus. Jack Seery, a member of Pax Christi Maine, served as the retreat facilitator bringing years of experience and wisdom to the weekend’s program.

PC ILLINOIS REFLECTS ON TIME OF RECKONING

PC Illinois was joined by Bishop John Stowe for their annual gathering: “A Time of Reckoning.” During his keynote, Bishop Stowe reflected on how we move forward from the collective hardships communities have experienced in recent years. To watch the full event, visit the Pax Christi USA YouTube channel.

PITTSBURGH AREA PC TAKES ON PNC BANK

Pittsburgh Area Pax Christi held back-to-back events to reflect on the past and call for action for a more nonviolent future. On December 2nd, the group hosted the event “The Martyrs of El Salvador Inspiring Us To Act For Justice.” The gathering encouraged reflection about the martyrs’ lives and deaths, while remaining centered in acting to uphold their legacy for justice and solidarity. The following day, members of Pittsburgh Area Pax Christi supported the “PNC Stop Banking the Bomb” campaign. This puts pressure on PNC Bank to divest from financial investments in nuclear weapons and weapons technology via bi-monthly pickets and leafletting at local branches and at PNC’s main headquarters in Pittsburgh, through an online petition and a shareholder resolution. To find out more information, visit: www.abetterpncbnk.org.

PC FLORIDA YOUNG ADULTS GATHER OVER ZOOM

Pax Christi Florida hosted a conversation for young adults about “Following the Compassionate Jesus.” This dialogue invited participants to ask questions like “How do we discern a faithful response to the Gospel in this day and age?” and “How can this response help us find integrity in our social activism?” This was the first event of Pax Christi Florida’s Young Adult Outreach Initiative (YAOI); it was a great success with young adults from across the nation participating.

Pax Christi Young Adult Caucus plans for online & in-person activities in 2022

The Pax Christi USA Young Adult Caucus (PCYAC) looks forward to the possibilities of the new year. After a year and a half of building community from a distance, PCYAC will be coming together in 2022 for an in-person retreat, pre-conference gatherings, and more.

Through monthly events, PCYAC has been able to reflect and act upon some of the most urgent social justice issues, pray for peaceful paths forward, and discern ways to respond to injustices. Each month, young adults in their 20s & 30s are invited to join our monthly gatherings. Join PCYAC for our next event on the third Wednesday of the month at 8pm ET/5pm PT on Zoom.

As Pope Francis expressed during his World Day of Peace message, intergenerational relationships are what hold possibilities for the future of the peace movement and the Church. Pax Christi USA’s legacy of building peace across generations is an incredible gift to witness and as we enter our 50th anniversary year, we are excited to continue centering this hope.

If you want to get involved with PCYAC, email PCYAC@PaxChristiUSA.org and a member of the leadership team will reach out to you.
2021-in-review (cont’d from p. 5…)

> Pax Christi San Diego held a major conversation on immigration and the Catholic approach to it.

> Pax Christi Little Rock took a novel approach to get city directors to sign the Back from the Brink resolution.

> Pax Christi Metro DC-Baltimore recognized Kim Lamberty as their Peacemaker of the Year, lifting up her work in Haiti and on a number of issues throughout the years; and they launched a major sign-on ad on nuclear disarmament.

> At the national conference, we commissioned 4 new Ambassadors of Peace from IL, NY, Washington, D.C. and FL.

> The Pax Christi Young Adult Caucus continued to grow, with monthly events, retreats and a special lead-in event for young adults at the national conference.

> Over the course of the year, we held regular video conferences with nearly 50 local group leaders and 25 state and regional chapter leaders to share best practices and news, encourage communication, and create strategies for the entire movement.


We increased the traffic to our website by over 10% from 2020, with nearly 125,000 unique visitors to the site and over 225,000 page views. Our post following the January 6th insurrection and leading up to the inauguration, “This week, let us demonstrate what we stand for,” garnered over 9,000 views on the site; and our statement following Archbishop Gomez’s speech was viewed nearly 5,000 times on the site.

Our social media presence grew with 12,000+ followers on Facebook, 7,350 on Twitter, over 1,300 on Instagram.

Our staff continues to grow, with a new Development Director, John Noble joining us in July; Hadley Stocker, who helped us launch a new database, became a regular member of the staff in April as our database coordinator; and Michelle Sherman and Ronnie Fellerath-Lowell joined us in September as our 50th anniversary coordinator and Back from the Brink organizer respectively. We have an incredible staff of 9(!) people who are working hard every day to lift up the message of peace with justice and grow Pax Christi USA’s presence and capacity at almost every level.

Believe it or not, this really is just SOME of what we did together during 2021. I hope you’ve been checking out the website regularly, following us on social media, reading the emails we send out over the network, and looking through the seasonal newsletter The Peace Current to keep up with everything that is going on and get a sense of the incredible breadth and depth of our common work. I am so proud and honored to be part of this community. I cannot say THANK YOU enough.

It is now our 50th year. We have walked this way and this far together, hand-in-hand, arm-in-arm. Through prayer, study and action, we strive to be for the world what our name says, “the peace of Christ”, Pax Christi. Thank you so much for all you did in 2021. And we are looking forward to celebrating this Jubilee year, 2022, with each of you, in whatever ways we can!