The Peace Current

Pax Christi USA
The National Catholic Peace Movement

Membership Newsletter, Winter-Spring 2023

Honoring the legacy: 2022 in review
Mary Lou Kownacki, OSB - ¡Presente!

On January 5, Mary Lou Kownacki, OSB, one of the most influential and foundational leaders of our movement over the past 50 years, passed away in Erie, PA after a long illness.

“My heart breaks at the news of Mary Lou’s passing, yet it also bursts in thanksgiving for everything she taught our movement, all that she gave in witnessing to a world deeply in need of the nonviolence & compassion that were always at the center of her mission,” Johnny Zokovitch, Pax Christi USA's executive director, said. “Mary Lou’s leadership and wisdom are responsible in large part for what PCUSA has been over these past 50 years and the fact that she got to observe this past anniversary year with us—meeting with staff members, addressing the national conference via video—I can't even begin to emphasize what a grace this was.”

Mary Lou’s involvement with Pax Christi USA stretched all the way back to our beginnings. She was present as a participant at the first national assembly in October 1973 in Washington, D.C., and became the national coordinator in late 1984 at the urging of Gerry Vanderhaar, National Council chair. Mary Lou moved the office to Erie, PA where it enjoyed the support of the Erie Benedictines, achieved financial stability, initiated major publishing efforts, grew the staff to 15 members, and doubled our national membership. Over 300 local groups were active when Mary Lou finished her second term as national coordinator in 1991 and a functioning regional network had been put into place to serve the membership.

In the 20th anniversary issue of Pax Christi USA’s magazine, published in 1992, Rev. Doug Dousson, chair of the Pax Christi USA National Council during Mary Lou’s service, praised the progress she made for the movement in that role: “Two significant developments under Mary Lou took place our publications reached an all-time high in quality and quantity, due to Sr. Mary Lou’s personal involvement and leadership. [And...] the Development Office was established and quickly became successful under Jo Clarke's direction, offering the movement sound financial stability.”

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Honoring the legacy: 2022 in review

By Johnny Zokovitch, Pax Christi USA Executive Director

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

In 2022, the primary focus for Pax Christi USA was the celebration of our 50th anniversary, “honoring the legacy” of all who have been involved in building this movement over the last half-century, and “seeding the future” for our work for peace with justice for the next 50 years. I hope you’ll both enjoy and take pride in what we accomplished during Pax Christi USA’s Jubilee.

Honoring our legacy

The highlight of the year was our first in-person conference since 2016, with more than 400 people gathering in Washington, DC for “Seeing through the prism of justice: Pax Christi USA’s 50th Anniversary National Conference.” From the pre-conference showing of “The Berrigans: Devout and Dangerous” with special guest Frida Berrigan; to plenary sessions with speakers like Archbishop John C. Wester, historian Shannen Dee Williams and 2022 Teacher of Peace award recipient Marie Dennis; to workshops on Indigenous solidarity, LGBTQ peacemaking, racial justice, nuclear disarmament and more; to shaking it down at our special 50th anniversary banquet on Saturday night; to Sunday’s closing Mass, Ambassadors of Peace recognitions, and prayer witness at the Pentagon, the weekend was truly an extraordinary event. Videos, photos, text from speeches and more are available on our website, https://paxchristiusa.org/2022/08/23/save-the-date-pax-christi-usa-celebrates-50-years-at-the-national-conference/.

But the conference wasn’t the only way we celebrated our 50th anniversary! Remember these: the 50th anniversary kick-off event on January 1; celebrating Bishop Tom Gumbleton’s birthday and bestowing on him the title of Bishop President, Emeritus; a specially created 50th anniversary prayer card; the naming of 20 new Ambassadors of Peace; long-time Pax Christi icon Marie Dennis being named the 2022 Teacher of Peace; an oral history project of former Teacher of Peace video interviews; a transformative community art project, Weaving Threads of Peace, revealed at the national conference; a video series featuring the history and highlights of local groups and state/regional chapters; and so much more!

Seeding our future

Since I started as Executive Director in September 2019, our goal was to expand engagement at every level of the organization, from growing and resourcing local groups across the nation to increasing our capacities as a national staff, from reestablishing relationships with members from throughout the arc of our history to beginning new relationships with people attracted to Pax Christi USA as a community where they can live out their commitment to a faith that does justice and seeks peace.

Nowhere is this more true than our commitment to passing this 50-year legacy on to new generations of peacemakers now in their 20s, 30s and 40s. The Pax Christi Young Adult Caucus (PCYAC) held more than 15 events in 2022, including an in-person retreat for young adult leaders in June in Washington, participation at the annual anti-gun violence March for Our Lives, a liturgy for peace outside the Russian embassy following the invasion of Ukraine, a pre-conference meeting and trip...
Calling all Back from the Brink and TPNW supporters!

Take action: Urge your U.S. House representative to co-sponsor H. Res. 77


Pax Christi USA is an organizational supporter of H. Res. 77.

Visit the Back from the Brink website for more information about how to contact your Member of Congress and for additional advocacy resources: www.preventnuclearwar.org.

All the Way In: A story of activism, incarceration, and organic farming

A new book written by Sister Jeanne Clark, OP

Jeanne Clark, OP
“A miracle of wisdom and faith.” —Brian Swimme

All the Way In
A Story of Activism, Incarceration, and Organic Farming

“Jeanne Clark’s collection of inspiring personal stories reveals a faithful journey in response to deeply challenging manifestations of violence and injustice. Clearly, a community of communities — ultimately the beloved Earth Community — provided fertile soil for her repeatedly affirmative and risky responses to the signs of the times.”

Marie Dennis,
Pax Christi USA 2022 Teacher of Peace

All the Way In is the inspiring story of one Dominican sister’s ongoing journey in religious life, moving from conventional ministries to a growing engagement with nonviolent witness, peace activism, and care for the earth.

Jeanne Clark, OP, Pax Christi Long Island’s 2005 Peacemaker of the Year, has long been inspired by the work of Passionist priest and author Thomas Berry and the teachings of his former student Brian Swimme. The recipient of multiple awards for her activism, Sr. Jeanne co-founded Homecoming Farm on Long Island, NY.

>> SPECIAL OFFER! Pax Christi members can use the code PAX23 for a 30 percent discount, either online at the Orbis Books website, www.orbisbooks.com, or by calling Orbis Books toll-free (800-258-5838, M-F 8-4 ET).
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to the Museum of African American History and Culture, monthly dialogues over Zoom on a variety of topics, and an Advent mini-retreat online. The PCYAC leadership team co-authored the 2022 Advent reflection booklet with Bishop John Stowe and offered their reflections at our weekly Pax Christi community Advent prayer services. Most exciting, we launched a new program, Peace Pairs, an intergenerational co-learning program between different generations of peacemakers. Each pair completed a project together for the benefit of the larger Pax Christi USA community. Our leadership development efforts among new generations is also evident by the number of people in their 20s, 30s and 40s who are resourcing our movement on the national staff and National Council.

While the 50th anniversary loomed large in everything we did in 2022, it didn’t keep us from engaging in prayer, study and action on racial justice, nonviolence, nuclear disarmament, Indigenous solidarity, gun violence, economic justice, the climate crisis and more. Just taking it month by month and picking out one highlight, I think you’ll be energized and moved by what we were able to do together:

JANUARY: We began 2022 by partnering with Archbishop John Wester and the Archdiocese of Santa Fe on amplifying, promoting and distributing Archbishop Wester’s pastoral letter on nuclear disarmament. The promotion included a PAX Mass celebrated by Ambassador of Peace Fr. John Dear addressing the promise of the pastoral letter, attended by over 500 folks online, our publishing of the pastoral letter in English and Spanish followed by a three-session study circle on the pastoral letter, and Archbishop Wester’s keynote at the national conference.

FEBRUARY: We joined in the effort to avert war in Ukraine, speaking at the Faith Vigil for Peace on the eve of the war, and responding in the aftermath of the Russian invasion, issuing a statement in the immediate wake of the war while Pax Christi Young Adult Caucus members held the first peace vigil outside the Russian embassy the night the war began.

MARCH: We rebooted our Bread Not Stones campaign to redirect military spending to address the root causes of conflict, injustice, inequity, and environmental catastrophe. Actions and resources throughout 2022 included a new prayer card, lobby work on the People Over the Pentagon Act, participation in the Catholic Nonviolence Days of Action (more in September below), a PAX Mass on the theme of the campaign, the “Stopping Economic Exploitation: Building a World of Peace and an Economy for All” webinar, and a fun action for Advent to help us build (bake?) a better world.

APRIL: We celebrated Easter and the culmination of the Lenten season with reflections, weekly PSAs and prayer services, a Lenten retreat with Bro. Mickey McGrath on disarming our hearts, and a special Easter message from Bishop Stowe.

MAY: As has become all too prevalent in our culture of gun violence, we responded with two statements in May to the mass shootings in Buffalo (connecting it specifically to the rise of white nationalism) and Uvalde, with our statement on Uvalde being picked up and featured in The New York Times. (Later in the year, we’d have to cry out again in the wake of the Club Q mass shooting in Colorado.)

JUNE: We co-sponsored the Poor Peoples’ Campaign Moral March in Washington, DC, with a delegation of Pax Christi USA leadership and local members, connecting the themes of the march with our Bread Not Stones campaign, as well as featuring a new video series on our website called “The Color of Peace,” highlighting the contributions of African American Pax Christi leaders in celebration of the Juneteenth holiday.

JULY: As we prepared for the 50th anniversary conference in August, we launched a new oral history project with video interviews of our Teachers of Peace from throughout our 50-year history, including interviews with actor Martin Sheen, author and anti-death penalty activist Sr. Helen Prejean, and author Sr. Joan Chittister, osb.

AUGUST: Our 50th anniversary conference was the main highlight of August, but we also incorporated a prayer service in remembrance of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki anniversaries at the conference, in solidarity with local groups observing the anniversaries across the U.S., and a prayer witness at the Pentagon at the conclusion of the conference attended by more than 100 people.

SEPTEMBER: We elevated and amplified our Bread Not Stones campaign during the Catholic Nonviolence Days of Action, September 21-October 2, with more than 25

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groups from around the nation participating in legislative visits, parish outreach, educational efforts, and actions. Additionally for the days of action we held our biannual nonviolence training with Meta Peace Team.

OCTOBER: Assemblies and gatherings were held across our grassroots network, including: Pax Christi Southern California’s regional assembly with Archbishop Wester and Sr. Simone Campbell and a dialogue on nonviolence and its intersections with poverty, military spending and nuclear weapons, race, and the climate crisis; Pax Christi St. Louis’ event with Bishop Stowe on, “How can the Church be prophetic in a time of great polarization?”; our National Council meeting with Pax Christi Little Rock; Pax Christi Michigan’s 28th annual retreat with Pax Christi USA’s 50th anniversary coordinator Michelle Sherman and Nick Rademacher; Pax Christi Northern California’s conference and 2022 Tom Webb Memorial Peacemaker of the Year reception, with Vivian Zelaya, a local Catholic organizer; and a joint regional assembly of Pax Christi Massachusetts, Pax Christi Maine, and Pax Christi Rhode Island celebrating significant anniversaries for each.

NOVEMBER: Our Advent program of prayer, study & action began with our best-selling Advent reflection booklets highlighting Bishop Stowe alongside young adult voices in our movement, continuing through the end of the year with weekly reflections and PSAs, an Advent retreat on gospel nonviolence, weekly Advent prayer services, an Advent mini-retreat online for young adults, a special Advent message in support of our work from Martin Sheen, and a closing PAX Mass celebrating the season and the end of our Jubilee year.

DECEMBER: A number of Pax Christi members, including representatives from our staff, national council, Teachers of Peace and Ambassadors of Peace, participated in the Pax Christi International conference in Rome on “Pope Francis, Nonviolence and Pacem in Terris.” Pax Christi USA members contributed to the conference by submitting a document on how an authoritative teaching on nonviolence could impact our work and Michelle Sherman from our staff wrote a full report at the conclusion of the conference.

Other items of note:

- We met with the Vatican embassy on the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons
- The Pax Christi Anti-Racism Team asked us to reconsider our white Christmases
- Local and state groups held activities such as the PC Michigan’s webinar with Fr. Fred Thelen on Pax Christi’s history of nonviolence; PC Florida’s anniversary retreat; PC Metro DC-Baltimore’s ad in NCR urging diplomacy, clean energy and disarmament; a tour of PC South Dakota groups; and so much more

- We held a PAX Mass for Pride Month following our statement expressing support for the community at the Nativity School of Worcester, which showed solidarity with Black, Brown, and LGBTQ+ students
- We offered webinars on “(De)Facing White Supremacy; Exploring White Nationalism”; “Hidden Mercy: AIDS, Catholics, and the Untold Stories of Compassion in the Face of Fear”; “Today’s Refugees, Tomorrow’s Deportees: When Forced Migration and White Supremacy are Public Policy,” and more
- We were featured, quoted and mentioned in The New York Times, The Nation, The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, and elsewhere. In the Catholic press, we were featured in NCR, America magazine, Our Sunday Visitor, US Catholic, Religion News Service, Crux, The Tablet, numerous diocesan newspapers and websites, and more. Find a complete list on our website.
- Our social media presence continues to grow with 12,225 followers on Facebook, 7,420 on Twitter, and 1,480 on Instagram.

It was hard to keep this pace during the 50th anniversary year, but we are so grateful for everyone in our national community who shows up for peace and justice, whether you started 50 years ago or yesterday. I cannot express enough what it means to me (and I hope to you) to be part of this community pledged to being the peace of Christ, “Pax Christi,” in our world today. And I hope you’ll continue to journey with us, companions together, in prayer, study and action.
Some quick updates from the National Office

Staff members represent Pax Christi USA on international delegations: In February, two national staff members joined international delegations on behalf of Pax Christi USA. Thirteen people from six countries, with Pax Christi USA being represented by Roxana Bendezú, participated in the Pax Christi International-led delegation to Palestine, with the goal “to reconnect with Pax Christi partners; see first-hand the facts on the ground; meet with religious leaders, activists, and those providing direct service; and to speak with those affected by the [Israeli] occupation. Most importantly, we wanted to reaffirm our steadfast commitment and solidarity with our Palestinian sisters and brothers in their legitimate demand for freedom, justice, and equality.” A report for that delegation has been issued and can be found on Pax Christi USA’s website.

From late February to mid-March, Michelle Sherman represented Pax Christi USA on an ecumenical delegation to the Philippines related to human rights work. As part of the visit, Pax Christi USA staff met with Dr. Loreta Castro, Pax Christi Philippines and Program Director of the Center for Peace Education at Miriam College, and founding member of the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative. (Photo above with Michelle, Loreta, and Roxana.) A report on the visit is forthcoming, so stay tuned!

Peace Pairs: Year Two! The Peace Pairs program, launched last year, is now in our second year; the 2023 cohort includes 11 new pairs. Peace Pairs is organized to connect seasoned peacemakers, like Pax Christi USA’s Ambassadors of Peace, on a one-to-one basis with a younger peacemaker (in their 20s and 30s). The program is co-coordinated by Pax Christi USA staff members Lauren Bailey and Michelle Sherman with the hope that it strengthens and grows Pax Christi USA’s “witness to reciprocal learning between the first-generation of our movement and upcoming generations.” As the year continues, we’ll share updates and their projects!

Campus outreach efforts: Pax Christi USA staff have prioritized outreach to college campuses this year with several calls and visits already taken place. Pax Christi USA Executive Director Johnny Zokovitch is participating in a weekly Lenten series at St. Louis University. In late March, staff members Lauren Bailey and Michelle Sherman visited Lewis University in Romeoville, IL. They were invited by Dr. Christie Billings, Director of the Gros Institute for Dialogue, Justice & Social Action. The Gros Institute is grounded in Lewis University’s Catholic and Lasallian heritage and brings together ecumenical, interfaith, and secular collaborators to advance action toward social justice. Former Pax Christi USA national council member Nancy Oetter was greatly instrumental in connecting staff to Dr. Billings. Additional contacts have been facilitated by other state and local groups. If you have ideas for outreach, let us know!

Mary Lou Kownacki, OSB, continued from page 2

After serving as national coordinator, Mary Lou was named a Pax Christi USA Ambassador of Peace, and was honored as the recipient of the Pax Christi USA Teacher of Peace award in 2006. She served as the co-chair of Pax Christi USA’s 50th anniversary committee in 2022.

In addition to Mary Lou’s work with Pax Christi USA, she was a respected writer and teacher on contemplative activism, nonviolence, and spirituality. She served as the coordinator for Monasteries of the Heart, director of Benetvision Publishing, and as executive director of Inner-City Neighborhood Art House.

She was the author of numerous books, including Between Two Souls: Conversations with Ryokan; A Monk In The Inner City: The ABCs of a Spiritual Journey; Love Beyond Measure: A Spirituality of Nonviolence; Mary Wellspring of Peace: A Contemporary Novena; and The Nonviolent Moment: Spirituality for the 21st Century.

Pax Christi USA gives thanks for Mary Lou’s life and witness and our thoughts and prayers are with the Erie Benedictines, Mary Lou’s family, friends and admirers. Mary Lou Kownacki, OSB – ¡PRESENTE!
On January 16, Pax Christi San Antonio supported the city’s 36th annual Martin Luther King, Jr. March and Celebration. Pictured at left is Arthur Dawes, coordinator of Pax Christi Texas.

Pax Christi Upstate NY (the Ben Salmon Chapter) and friends gathered on Ash Wednesday at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Syracuse to encourage parishioners to consider the nonviolent gospel of Jesus, resist drone warfare, end the U.S. shipment of weapons, and call for peace negotiations in Ukraine. To educate parishioners about these demands, members leafleted with informational brochures outside of the parish.

Pax Christi New Jersey held two actions on Ash Wednesday, bringing together faith leaders, community members, and people who were formerly detained to lament the continued suffering that occurs in detention centers. (Rev. Gene Squeo pictured right.) The morning service was held at Liberty State Park in sight of the Statue of Liberty. The evening vigil took place outside the Elizabeth Detention Center, New Jersey’s last migrant jail. Following the evening action, members gathered for a soup supper and to hear testimony from people directly affected by this injustice.

Pax Christi Long Island was among the list of endorsers for the “Protest to End US Complicity in the War on Yemen” on March 1. Supporters of local peace and justice groups gathered to seek Congressmember Andrew Garbarino’s help to end U.S. support for the war in Yemen. The group’s demands were: 1) End U.S. complicity in the humanitarian crises in Yemen, 2) Pass a war powers resolution, 3) Stop weapons sales to Saudi Arabia and the UAE, 4) Call on Saudi Arabia and the UAE to lift the blockade and fully open airports and seaports, 5) Support the Yemeni people, and 6) Assemble a Congressional hearing to examine the U.S. role in the war in Yemen.

Pax Christi Southern California co-sponsored a Lenten Series, “Jesus’ vision for living the Good News In 2023.” Featured speakers during the six-week series were Pax Christi USA Teachers of Peace Marie Dennis and Megan McKenna, along with Sr. Simone Campbell, SSS; Cecilia Gonzalez-Andrieu; Fr. James Martin, SJ; and Rev. Alexia Salvatierra.

Pax Christi Little Rock is hosting a three-part series on global migration. On February 16, the group welcomed Rev. Guillermo Campuzano, C.M., Vice President for Mission and Ministry at DePaul University, who spoke on the topic of understanding global migration. The second speaker was Sr. Norma Pimentel, MJ, Executive Director for Catholic Charities of the Rio Grande Valley, who spoke on “Humanity and security at the southern border.” The final speaker in the series will be Ingrid Castrillo, Immigration Specialist with the Catholic Charities of Arkansas, who will close out the series on April 20, speaking on “The reality of immigration in Arkansas.”