



The Peace Current

Pax Christi USA

The National Catholic Peace Movement

Membership Newsletter, Autumn 2023

Celebrating Pax Christi USA's young adults

From Young Adult Forum to Young Adult Caucus: The Pax Christi Young Adult Caucus (PCYAC) history

By Brian Ashmankas, Michelle Sherman, and Robert Shine

Among the new National Council members in 2017 were three young adults, all about 30 years old: Brian Ashmankas, Michelle Sherman, and Robert Shine. We had little knowledge of the then-defunct Young Adults Forum that existed years previously. What we did know is the generational lens that is unique to us and our peers. We had come of age in a Catholic nonviolence movement confronting the “war on terror,” intersectional approaches to social justice linking militarism with racism, anti-LGBTQIA+ discrimination, climate change, and pervasive gun violence. This lens helped us see how Pax Christi USA’s movement needed to adapt to grow into a robust future based on the decades of witness and work by our predecessors and heroes.

Joined by Rachel Schmidt, a young person then on staff, we naturally became fast friends, as well as active, outspoken members of the National Council. Later, Brian was elected the Council’s treasurer and Bob as chair.

What would become the Young Adult Caucus was at first an informal group, a space to provide mutual support, bounce ideas off, and collaborate in our work on the Council. This informal group raised the idea of a young adult retreat to gather and prepare young peacemakers for leadership in Pax Christi. We received a grant to hold such a retreat and scheduled it for April 2020. The pandemic forced us to change plans, and we pivoted like many people. The in-person retreat was postponed for an indefinite period, yet we started holding monthly gatherings on Zoom with those who were planning to join the retreat. These Zoom sessions allowed young peacemakers from across the U.S. to get to know each other, pray together, and share ideas and projects.



PCYAC members gather for their retreat, June 2023

The small group quickly grew, and it now includes active participants from every region in the country, both those who are millennials (those born between 1981-1996) and now Gen Z (born 1997 or later). Pax Christi Young Adult Caucus (PCYAC, pronounced pea-kai-YAK) members have served as co-state leaders, participants in national working groups, national conference workshop presenters, national staff, retreat leaders, and National Council members. Virtually every part of membership and leadership of PCUSA has been affected by PCYAC’s presence within the past few years. And we did finally hold that young adults retreat in June 2022, which has become an annual event.

The monthly gatherings have included guest speakers from members within PCYAC on topics ranging from ecological justice, militarized policing, the Rwandan genocide, Palestinian liberation, Community

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Inspiration and gratitude on the journey

By Lauren Bailey & Michelle Sherman, Pax Christi USA National Staff

Over the last few years, we've had the privilege of journeying to create a movement driven by and for young adults. Echoed over and over again by young adults is a message of gratitude for the labor that built this movement – one that now gets to be shared with future generations.

The heart of Pax Christi USA lies in the souls of every person engaged with the movement. Over the past couple of years, we've been able to witness an intergenerational exchange of experiences through a new program, Peace Pairs. This has revealed so much about points of connection in the peacemaking journey, even when they're decades apart. By watching genuine and intentional relationships form between peacemakers of different ages, who likely would not have met otherwise, we're reminded of the universal search for peace that we all are pursuing.

Inspired by the generations of peacemakers who came before us in building this movement, it's a gift to share in the creation of something new. Over the past couple of years, we've seen the flourishing of Pax Christi USA's Young Adult Caucus – a dynamic community of people in their 20s and 30s who gather monthly to pray, study, and act for peace. We also see Pax Christi USA on high school and college campuses across the country, reaching students in ways that inspire us all to do more.

As the school year begins, we are excited to explore what the next year of youth and young adult outreach will bring to our movement. We hope this special edition of the newsletter gives you a glimpse into the young adult movement that is already leading Pax Christi USA in inspiring ways. If you want to get involved with any of this, please reach out to us.

Thank you for inspiring and trusting us to carry this work alongside you.

In peace,

Lauren and Michelle



Lauren and Michelle by Lewis University's peace pole during a March 2023 campus visit, which included meeting with students and staff from the Brother Jeffrey Gros Institute for Dialogue, Justice & Social Action; Mission and Ministry; Campus Ministry; and a class visit.

PCYAC history, continued from page 1...

Peacemaker Teams, and more. Some months have been prayer services that have included reflections on a generation of war on the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, praying with the “Saintly Six” African American Catholics who are candidates for canonization, and a group of DC-based PCYAC members who held a liturgy for peace outside the Russian Embassy the evening of the Russian invasion of the Ukraine. PCYAC held a five-week reading group on *Subversive Habits: Black Catholic Nuns in the Long African American Freedom Struggle*, the author of which, Dr. Shan-nen Dee Williams, joined for the last Zoom call. At the last two National Conferences, PCYAC sponsored “Dream of Tomorrow: Building capacity by looking at peacemaking through an intergenerational lens” (2021) and “Being an LGBTQ Inclusive Peace Movement: Past, Present, and Future” (2022). Most recently, in July 2023, several members of PCYAC were present at the PCUSA Anti-Racism Summit, a gathering to evaluate 20+ years of our anti-racism commitment and to plan for the next 20 years.

Given its impact and activity, it is sometimes hard to believe that the Pax Christi Young Adult Caucus was only formalized a couple years ago and wasn’t even a notion a decade ago. We look forward to a bright future as PCYAC continues to be both a voice for young adults and a path to their leadership in the Pax Christi movement!

Fear must not silence our testimony

By Sr. Annie Killian, OP

Ed. Note: The following is an excerpt from a homily offered by Sr. Annie Killian, OP, a member of the PCYAC leadership team, at the PCYAC retreat held in June in Chicago.

The prophet Jeremiah had reason to be afraid, but he did not allow fear to silence him. In today’s reading we hear Jeremiah experiencing profound crisis. He had just denounced the leaders of Judah for sacrificing their children to a false god. Because they had offended God’s justice, he warned them, the Babylonians would invade, lay waste to their land, and deport the people of Israel into exile. These weren’t the words the powerful wanted to hear. They had Jeremiah arrested, beaten, and publicly humiliated. They looked for an excuse to denounce him. Still, Jeremiah persisted ...

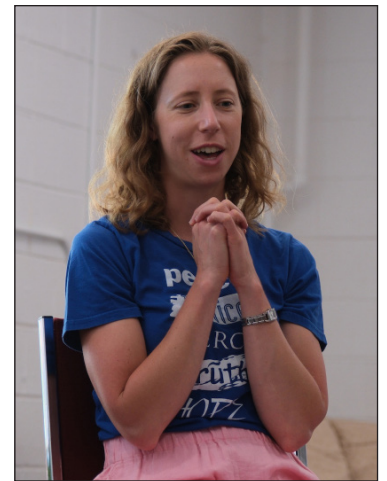
[This] persistence reminds me of peacemakers today who have faced denunciation, surveillance, and persecution, yet they have entrusted their cause to God. I think of the nonviolent resisters we’ve heard about in our PCYAC gatherings over the past year. Jessica told us of peacebuilders in Palestine who are creating sanctuaries in the midst of apartheid; Honorine lifted up the witness of Rwandans who are speaking out against genocide and practicing restorative justice; Michelle walked with activists in the Philippines who are documenting human rights abuses at great personal risk. Call to mind your own examples of peacemakers who have endured the terror of state violence without letting fear silence their testimony.

We live in times that seem to be going from worse to worse, and I’m not optimistic that things will get better anytime soon. In this country, we see too many lives sacrificed to the false gods of the second amendment, border security,

and white Christian nationalism. We have reason to fear for the future of our children and of our planet. The temptation is to believe that our voices won’t be heard or heeded. But there is no relief in falling silent. The poet and Black lesbian feminist Audre Lorde

wrote that when facing her own mortality, she realized what she most regretted were her silences: “I was going to die, if not sooner than later, whether or not I had ever spoken myself. My silences had not protected me. Your silences will not protect you.” But every time Lorde tried to speak the truth that she was seeking, she connected with others who were also searching for language to transform the world. Lorde reminds us that silence kills the soul. Speaking yourself, your truth, honors your own conscience and brings you into circles of resistance to the “tyrannies of silence.”

Jesus imparts similar counsel in today’s Gospel as he prepares the disciples to carry on his mission. He’s up front with them about the dangers. As Jesus’ solidarity with the poor brought him into conflict with the powers of Empire, so would his disciples face opposition and persecution. Yet they were not to allow fear to silence their witness: “Fear no one,” he tells them. “What I say to you in the darkness, speak in the light; what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops.” Jesus wants the disciples to remember what he taught them when they gathered around the table or journeyed on the road, and



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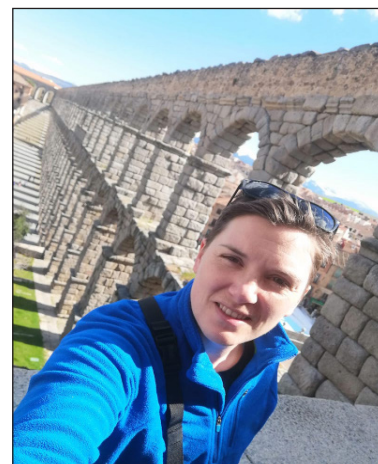
Reflections from former Youth Forum members, interns

Allison Frederick Harteis: A few of us started a Pax Christi chapter on the campus of Mary Washington College, in Fredericksburg, VA in the late 1980s. We were then invited to be a part of the PCUSA Young Adult Forum. PC Young Adult Forum gave me the opportunity to meet many others who valued peace and justice from a Catholic perspective. We prayed together, participated in different actions and frankly, laughed a lot. It is important to build community together and we did this through retreats and through the annual assembly. When the Young Adult Forum was started, veteran PC members were welcoming and valued our perspectives. It helped me to feel valued and to share my voice as a young adult. It gave us an opportunity to learn from them and challenged us to be a part of a larger movement of prayer and peacemaking. My thoughts about creating a more just world led me to become a Montessori teacher ... I believe that creating an environment of peace and learning for the youngest amongst us, helps children to grow into healthy and compassionate people, helping to create a more peaceful world.



Eirik Frederick Harteis: The Young Adult Forum gave me access to people who had a vision on how to make the world better. Being a part of Pax Christi USA was an antidote to the disillusionment of a young person becoming aware of the world in which we live. Through the Young Adult Forum (early-mid 1990s), I met people and participated in campaigns, both nationally and internationally, that turned me on to different and better ways. I studied the lives of role models and learned the value of truth, justice and patience. These lessons have been central to me as a parent, high school social studies teacher and a citizen. The lessons of the Pax Christi USA and my time as a member of the Young Adult Forum still guide me and challenge me today.

Beth Kenyon: Currently I am self-employed in Brussels. I was an intern with PCUSA for two years, 2010 and 2011. I also interned at Pax Christi International in 2007 and 2010. I look back on my years at PCUSA and Pax Christi International as some of the most formative experiences to my personal development. The people I met and worked with continue to inspire me. Pax Christi brought me in touch with stories and struggles that I never would have otherwise seen. From stories of women in the DR Congo, the Pax Christi anti-racism training, immigration forum meetings with other NGOs in DC, among so many others, these moments touched my life and taught me so much. I am very grateful for my years there.



Isaac E. Chandler: Pax Christi help me to expand my perspective about what "peace" actually requires. Peace work is not about being "passive" or being quiet. In order to have peace, one must WORK for justice. Actively pursuing knowledge, engaging fellow activists, and praying in order to remain gospel-centered and focused. Being involved with the Young Adult Forum (1996-1999) allowed me to connect with other like-minded individuals who were my contemporaries in age. I have remained active in Pax Christi, due to their commitment and willingness to build a movement through the double lens of the spirituality of nonviolence and antiracism. My hope for young adults today is that they raise their collective voices to help build this movement and to help this movement continue this important work.

Amy Finn-Shultz: [Active in the Youth and Young Adult Forum from 1996-2005.] I was on the Pax Christi Young Adult Forum Server Committee, 1997-2000, attended the Pax Christi International Route in Ireland the summer of 1998, was very involved in PC Florida and have served on the State Council multiple times in the last 20 years. I am the Executive Director/Community Leader of L'Arche Jacksonville. Being introduced to Pax Christi as a college student and young adult offered me a place of belonging and connection that I had not found elsewhere in the church or in school. I was deeply challenged and inspired to orient my life towards peace, nonviolence and social justice. I met models of justice, prophetic witnesses, mentors and peers who would support and encourage me and

Sr. Annie's homily, continued from page 3...

to preach that Good News fearlessly to the world. Do not be afraid, he tells them. Every hair on your head is counted. You are seen, you are loved.

We disciples of Jesus today hear his whispered teaching when we enter the silence at the center of our being. In prayer we listen attentively for the voice of conscience. The Second Vatican Council taught in *Gaudium et Spes*, the pastoral constitution on the Church in the Modern World, that the Christian conscience is a person's most secret core and sanctuary where one is alone with God and enlivened by the Holy Spirit. Conscience is where the Spirit of Truth speaks within us, assuring us of our inviolable worth and sacred dignity. When you are true to your conscience, you receive the grace to testify to God's mercy active in your life. Fear must not silence your testimony.

I may not be optimistic about the state of our world, but what brings me here, what keeps me from despair, is the witness of peacemakers impelled by their conscience to act. I think of my peace pair and Pax Christi USA Ambassador of Peace, Beatrice Parwatikar [who recently moved to Missouri]. Upon arriving in a state where the death penalty is still legal, she heard in her conscience a call to action. Over the past six months, Beatrice has stood witness with fellow activists at each of the five executions carried out in Missouri. This woman has spent decades advocating for debt relief, racial justice, and the eradication of childhood poverty. Although she

may not see the day when the death penalty is abolished in this country, still, she persists. Beatrice embodies the hope that writer and activist Rebecca Solnit describes:

Hope locates itself in the premises that we don't know what will happen and that in the spaciousness of uncertainty is room to act. When you recognise uncertainty, you recognise that you may be able to influence the outcomes – you alone or you in concert with a few dozen or several million others. Hope is an embrace of the unknown and the unknowable... It is the belief that what we do matters even though how and when it may matter, who and what it may impact, are not things we can know beforehand.

Our elders in the peace movement have believed that their work mattered even when they haven't seen their dreams realized. Today as we take up the work, the peace movement faces an uncertain future. So many of us here, who are in major life transitions, are uncertain about how our future will unfold. What if we could embrace that uncertainty, not as reason for fear, but as the premise for our hope. It leaves us room to act even as we entrust our cause to God. As bad as things may look now, the future is undecided. What we do know is that things won't get better without us, laboring with God to bring forth more abundant life for all Creation. We gather at this Eucharist to receive the Bread of Life, food that can truly sustain us for the work ahead. Become what you have will receive: the gift of God's nourishing, re-creating presence in the world.

be companions on the journey. I am incredibly grateful for these experiences, opportunities, learnings and relationships that were created or nurtured through the Pax Christi Young Adult Forum and PCUSA.

Heather Navarro: [Active in the Young Adult Forum from 2001-2004.] Pax Christi USA helped me channel my passion for justice by sharing a path for personal and societal transformation through nonviolence. As a college student I was active on many issues and it was the leaders and resources of PCUSA that showed me what it means to live the gospel as an activist and advocate. Today, I work to connect people and organizations working on the climate crisis and I'm grateful for this community for giving me the strength and hope needed to do this work over the years. My hope for young adults in Pax Christi today is that they see nonviolence as a way to sustain and restore themselves as they do the difficult and complicated work of dismantling racism and pursuing justice.

Amy Watts-Padilla and Manuel Padilla: Our internships with PCUSA (2010-2011) were very formative for

us. We had the opportunity to further solidify our understanding of our faith's call for peace and justice with advocacy and collective action in the nation's Capitol. The mentorship



and support we received from staff and members of Pax Christi was a deep inter generational experience of community—being welcomed in, truly cared for, empowered to be new leaders, and learning from those whose spiritual commitment to justice had decades of lived experience behind it. Many, many amazing memories. [Currently, Manuel is doing collaborative governance work as Project Manager at Oregon Solutions with the National Policy Consensus Center at Portland State University; Amy coordinates the victim-offender dialogue program as Program Coordinator at the Center for Mediation and Dialogue in Beaverton, Oregon.]

Peace Pairs, an intergenerational Pax Christi USA initiative

In February 2022, Pax Christi USA launched Peace Pairs, a program initiated by PCYAC as a mutual co-learning program between generations of peacemakers. The intergenerational program was crafted to incorporate and embody Pope Francis's message for the 2022 World Day of Peace, *Dialogue between generations, education and work: Tools for building lasting peace*.

Some of the hopes and goals for the program include mutual co-learning and accompaniment; an opportunity to meet and grow closer with someone who has more experience in peace and nonviolence work within Pax Christi USA; intentional pairing around geographic location or issue; and a shared project between the pair. (See Brian and Marie's example below.) If you are interested in participating, please email Lauren Bailey at lbailey@paxchristiusa.org.

Current participants share their reflections on their Peace Pairs experience:

- **Cindy Emenalo:** Meeting and speaking with my peace pair, **Olga Sarabia**, in-person was such a fulfilling experience. We connected on the importance of intergenerational exchange to further peace-building and how to continue the work of anti-racism in a new world. The foundation that was set by previous generations is what the new generation of peace builders have the privilege of both standing on and changing to meet the world's current needs.
- **Mary Hanna:** I've loved getting to know my Peace Pair partner, **Elliott Barnhill**, and what (and how) he



thinks. We started out by sharing our favorite books, films, and insights. We've each read books that the other recommended, then talked about our reaction to them. It's so interesting to discover the common ground we have, but also how different things resonate with each of us and why. Those insights are really important in building bridges to a larger community, and makes me really value the candor we can share while starting out with something that feels, comparatively, pretty safe: literature. It's been a good foundation to creating a true friendship. I appreciate PCUSA creating this opportunity!

- **Mary Yelenick:** While I cannot speak for **Lasya [Priya]**, I would say that our conversations (both in writing and in person) have been quite absorbing. We are both deeply concerned with the lives and wellbeing of people who come from, or live, outside the US, yet who are harmed by US policies. We are concerned about racism and the political and social oppression of women, which is often coupled with a growing "religious nationalism" in the US and other countries. And we resist outmoded gender binaries and stratification.
- **Beatrice Parwatikar and Sr. Annie Killian:** Bea and Annie practice peace-making by accompanying folks who are incarcerated. In December 2022, they presented a webinar to the Catholic Prison Ministries Coalition on grieving in prison and finding peace. On January 3, 2023, Annie visited Bea in St. Louis, and together they bore witness as the State of Missouri executed Amber McLaughlin, the first openly transgender woman to receive the death penalty.



A Peace Pairs project: Intentional communities and homelessness

Over the course of several months, Pax Christi USA Peace Pair Marie Dennis and Brian Ashmankas conducted a number of interviews, hoping to discover what role intentional communities can play in helping to address the ongoing crisis of homelessness in the United States. Marie co-founded and lives in an established intentional community, known as Assisi Community, in Washington, DC. Brian is an aspiring intentional community co-founder in central Massachusetts.

The interviewees included a recovery coach who works closely with the homeless community in Worcester; a formerly homeless man who lived for extended periods in a Catholic Worker house and in a community for

returning citizens; a staff member of the Douglass Community Land Trust in Washington, DC; and a current intentional community member who experienced homelessness in the past.

One recurring theme was that intentional community living is not necessarily appropriate for those without some time for recovery and mental health stability. There seemed to be a general consensus among those interviewed that intentional community could be a great "step three" for those moving out of homelessness, after passing through a shelter and other programs, which equip people with the interpersonal and basic life skills, sobriety and rehabilitation, and mental stability

necessary to participate in community.

Intentional communities do provide much value for those in early recovery and while basic stability is needed to participate, having “everything figured out” is not. The structure, community support, example of healthy living, and opportunity to contribute work and resources as able were all identified as valuable to those looking to continue and stabilize sobriety and housing. It was identified as not just a transition to individual living, but often a good permanent living situation.

Additionally, intentional communities can provide a great alternative to some of the more standard routes to recovery and stable housing. Interviewees indicated that flexible and gratuitous rents ensured greater stability and things like mandatory or encouraged meal times were “a better drug test” than the laboratory version. Also identified were several obstacles that would need to be resolved for an intentional community to meet the needs of unhoused people. One of these is the need to have a critical mass of community members with stable income to ensure affordability for those without. Another was the ability to provide a high level of mental health and other support for unhoused people who often have a high need for these. Both could potentially be resolved with the help of government funding, but this creates an additional obstacle. Because state, local, and especially federal funding have criteria that assume non-communal living, housing vouchers and other funding can often run into trouble when applied to communal living situations. In the absence of such government support, intentional communities could still thrive but would need to seek alternative means for providing stable funding and support, either through community members themselves or outside funders and volunteers.

Intentional communities often have other strengths and assets that make them better equipped to serve the recently unhoused. Intentional communities and the wider intentional community movement have effective tools for conflict resolution and extensive experience putting those tools into practice, an asset that can be very helpful in addressing conflicts emerging from mental health concerns and unhealthy habits. Both of these include consensus-based decision making, active listening, assumptions of equality and dignity, and a desire to resolve conflict rather than exclude those contributing to it.

Even with such benefits, the people we interviewed were clear that living in intentional communities, although rewarding, does require a certain amount of patience and understanding, as well as the desire to live in community and to make it work. A common purpose and openness to spirituality among the community members can help foment this desire, patience, and understanding. Individualist and materialist thought patterns, on the other hand, would detract from it. In general, the interviews indicated that many people have a desire for communal living in some form.

While intentional community could be a viable option for a diverse number of people experiencing homelessness, interviewees identified certain sub-categories of people for whom it might be a particularly good fit. These include individuals and couples in early but sustained recovery, those without any history of substance abuse, those who have only experienced homelessness in the short term but are otherwise well-established, those fleeing from domestic violence, and returning citizens.

Ultimately, intentional communities are a great option for those currently and recently unhoused individuals and families who desire to live in such a way. Our limited research suggests that organizations, agencies, and individuals assisting people experiencing homelessness to achieve housing should include intentional communities in a portfolio of options offered to those who have met a very basic level of stability and sobriety.



Brian Ashmankas is an ecumenical catholic priest living in Worcester, MA with his wife Samantha. He has served on the national council and PCYAC leadership team and currently serves as the chaplain of the Worcester County Jail and House of Correction.



Marie Dennis is senior program director of Pax Christi International's Catholic Nonviolence Initiative. She was co-president of Pax Christi International from 2007 to 2019 and was named Pax Christi USA's 2022 Teacher of Peace. Photo by Nancy Wiechec.

A transformative retreat with PCYAC

By Michael Martin, originally published by Pax Christi Florida



I want to express my gratitude to Pax Christi Florida for inviting me to the Pax Christi Young Adult Caucus retreat in Chicago. Arriving at O'Hare airport, I did not know what to expect, but upon meeting PCYAC members, I saw that I would be among brilliant and dedicated peers. The Holy Spirit seemed surely at work gathering us for a weekend themed on hope through the Cantic of Zachariah.

On day two we participated in a powerful street corner vigil for victims of gun violence, standing with local mothers and women religious. We prayed for the victims of June by name, including "unnamed" victims—a reminder that there are still people among us who die unnoticed. We also visited the Precious Blood Ministry of Reconciliation, witnessing their work in restorative justice and radical hospitality despite impossible odds. Through their practice of neighborhood peacemaking circles, they have shown what mercy looks like in action.

Later, Michelle Sherman from Pax Christi USA led us in a contemplative exercise to explore the pillars of Pax Christi: prayer, study, and action. This introspective time allowed me to embrace my new role as a hope-filled peacebuilder. On Sunday, we discussed future priorities, emphasizing the need for anti-racism efforts and support for the LGBTQA+ community in the face of harmful legislation. Study groups on various topics were planned, including one on the intersection of resistance and art.

We closed the retreat with a humble Mass highlighted by PCYAC's own Sr. Annie's powerful homily on hope, peace, and action. Throughout the weekend, the presence and contributions of women religious became an unplanned theme, reminding us of their longtime courageous role in peace and justice work.



A heartfelt thanks once more to Pax Christi Florida for allowing me to be part of this transformative retreat with PCYAC. It has not only

inspired me to serve Pax Christi faithfully but also gave me the network I needed to keep living out my faith as I believe God desires.

What has PCYAC and Pax Christi USA meant to you?

Honorine Uwimana, PCYAC representative on the Pax Christi USA National Council

Being part of the Pax Christi Young Adults Caucus (PCYAC) has been truly church to me. I found a community of dedicated to living their faith in individual and collective prayer, reflection, and action. Our monthly gatherings are a sacred table where we get to share our experiences, our disappointments, our rages, our hopes, and sometimes our silence in a nonviolent and affirming way, it is a space I come to, with the awareness that things might not get better but always leave with the certitude that I am getting better at renouncing on the prejudices in me and denouncing the inequities around me. In this wonderful community, I am challenged to listen and to let myself be vulnerable in the face of what I ignore about other people's lived injustices, to take action and truly be church with/to others.



Heidy Villalva Rendon, Pax Christi USA 2023 summer intern

I enjoyed every second of [the PCYAC retreat] and was able to meet amazing individuals who all had a different story. It was beautiful to see that these young people will continue to uplift and strengthen the Pax Christi legacy of peacemaking. ... I hope to continue to have future opportunities to work alongside individuals like the ones I met in Pax Christi USA. They're amazing and dedicated to their calling, and they will do great things. I learned that an issue is something that you have to continuously work on, it requires your time, dedication, and passion. I plan to apply it to my everyday life. The community of Pax Christi USA is made up of exceptional people!

