



# The Peace Current

Pax Christi USA  
The National Catholic Peace Movement

Membership Newsletter, Winter 2023

## Statement on celebration of Advent and Christmas in the midst of the war

### *A message from Patriarchs and Heads of the Churches in Jerusalem*

*The Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem is an ecumenical group of Christian leaders which includes Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, leader of the Catholic Church in Israel, Palestine, Lebanon & Cyprus.*

Each year during the sacred seasons of Advent and Christmastide, our Christian communities throughout the Holy Land take great delight in their preparations for the commemoration of the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In addition to attendance in religious services, these celebrations have normally involved participation in numerous public festivities and the large-scale display of brightly lit and expensive decorations as a means of expressing our joy at the approach and arrival of the Feast of the Nativity.

But these are not normal times. Since the start of the war, there has been an atmosphere of sadness and pain. Thousands of innocent civilians, including women and children, have died or suffered serious injuries. Many more grieve over the loss of their homes, their loved ones, or the uncertain fate of those dear to them. Throughout the region, even more have lost their work and are suffering from serious economic challenges. Yet despite our repeated calls for a humanitarian ceasefire and a de-escalation of violence, the war continues.

Therefore, we, the Patriarchs and Heads of the Churches in Jerusalem, call upon our congregations to stand strong with those facing such afflictions by this year foregoing any unnecessarily festive activities. We likewise encourage our priests and the faithful to focus more on the spiritual meaning of Christmas in their pastoral activities and liturgical celebrations during this period, with all the focus directed at holding in our thoughts



our brothers and sisters affected by this war and its consequences, and with fervent prayers for a just and lasting peace for our beloved Holy Land.

Moreover, during this season of giving, we also invite the faithful to advocate, pray, and contribute generously as they are able for the relief of the victims of this war and for those in dire need, as well as to encourage others to join them in this mission of mercy.

In these ways, we believe, we will be standing in support of those continuing to suffer—just as Christ did with us in his Incarnation, in order that all of God's children might receive the hope of a New Jerusalem in the presence of the Almighty, where "death shall be no more, neither mourning, nor crying, nor pain, for the former things have passed away." (Revelation 21:4)

*In solidarity with our colleagues in Palestine & Palestinian Christians in the Holy Land, Pax Christi USA chose to organize our Advent 2023 program in the spirit of this letter. See more at <https://paxchristiusa.org/advent-2023/>.*



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# Urge your bishop to sign onto the Bread Not Stones statement by Jan. 1

Earlier this fall, as part of our ongoing work to challenge the bloated U.S. military budget, we invited Pax Christi USA members to contact their bishops and ask them to endorse the Bread Not Stones bishops' statement, which affirms Catholic Social Teaching's warnings about the dangers of unfettered spending on weapons and preparations for war. You can find the statement, plus talking points and more information, on our website.

*Pax Christi members have contacted more than 50 U.S. bishops, but there is still time to set up in-person meetings and mobilize members of local groups, state chapters, parishes, religious communities and others to write letters or send emails.*

**Deadline for signatures is January 1, the World Day of Peace.**

Some may think that writing to their bishop is a waste of time, but the lack of a response is also a response, information we can use in future work to help nurture the church into the fullness of witnessing to the peace of Christ in the world today. We want to be able to report on exactly how many bishops we contacted AND how many times they were contacted. Multiple contacts of individual bishops isn't just a bonus --

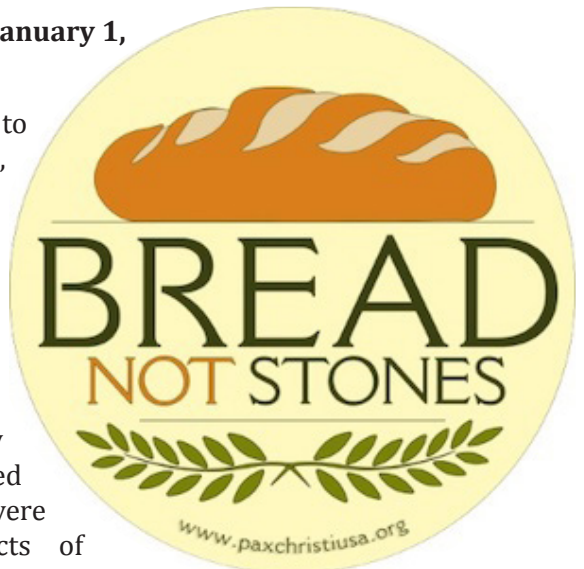
it's essential. We want to be like the persistent widow who seeks justice from an unjust judge (Luke 18:1-8): "For some time [the judge] refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care what people think, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually come and attack me!'"

So the more letters, emails, meetings, phone calls, the better!

Lastly, we want to tell the whole story of this campaign by highlighting excerpts from some of the letters written to bishops. If you can, please send a copy of your letter to Tom Cordaro at cordarotom@gmail.com. And if you would be willing to speak to the media about your letter, please let him know.

**To summarize:** Anything you can do to boost our outreach over the next few weeks would be helpful! Make a pledge to contact your bishop by January 1, the World Day of Peace, and ask him to sign onto the Bread Not Stones statement, ask others to contact him, too, and don't forget to fill out the reporting form here: <https://cutt.ly/BNS-sign-on>.

**NOTE:** As of December 8, 10 U.S. bishops have signed onto the letter with several others poised to join them. See the growing list on our website at <https://cutt.ly/BNS-sign-on>





# Pax Christi responds to violence in the Middle East

Pax Christi has had a long affiliation with Palestine -- the Arab Educational Institute in Bethlehem is a member of Pax Christi International, and Wi'am, the Palestinian Conflict Transformation Center, is a long-time partner, to name just two connections in the West Bank. In 2015, many members of Pax Christi USA were able to participate in Pax Christi International's 50th anniversary celebration in Bethlehem, which included a profoundly moving pilgrimage to sites cited in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures from Galilee to Jerusalem.

This year, Pax Christi International has awarded its annual peace prize to the Parents Circle-Family Forum, an Israeli-Palestinian program which brings together families who have lost loved ones in the conflict in an effort to create dialogue, reconciliation, and peace.

Advocating for a just peace and nonviolently resisting Israel's oppression of Palestine has been one of Pax Christi International and Pax Christi USA's priorities for many years; as Executive Director Johnny Zokovitch has written, we are "deeply and tragically aware of the U.S. government's complicity in the conflict, its tacit support of the ongoing occupation by frustrating efforts to apply international law, and the unchecked military aid. ... [We] bear a special responsibility to hold the U.S. government to account, to speak out against military aid that will only lead to greater bloodshed, and to demand action on behalf of a ceasefire and the painstaking work to create a just peace rooted in equality, human rights, and dignity for all."

Since Hamas's horrific attack on Oct. 7, Pax Christi USA national staff and members across the country have taken action -- joining prayer vigils and demonstrations, contacting lawmakers, participating in civil disobedience -- to respond to Israel's brutal and grossly disproportionate retaliation against the people of Gaza.

In early November, Religion News Service published an essay by Pax Christi USA's bishop president, Bishop John Stowe, in response to a statement by President Biden that Biden and Pope Francis were "on the same page" about the U.S.'s support of Israel's military actions in Gaza. Bishop Stowe wrote, "We beg to differ. Pax Christi and other Catholic leaders have paid close attention to what Francis has said about war and war-making these past 10 years: his ceaseless calls for an end to the weapons industry and arms dealing; his assertion that there is no such thing as a just war; and his insistence that 'charity



*Ambassador of Peace Judith Kelly attends a demonstration held during the national Christmas tree lighting ceremony at the White House on November 30.*

and nonviolence govern how we treat each other as individuals, within society and in international life.' ...

"Francis has consistently rejected war as a fitting tool for building peace. The killing and hostage-taking, the vicious attacks on civilians, the continued siege of Gaza, the increasing violence in the West Bank and the occupation itself illustrate how violence begets violence.

"This war did not start with the Hamas attacks on Oct. 7 and it will not stop with more rounds of violence. Perhaps these latest horrors will convince the world that a concerted effort to address root causes toward a comprehensive just peace is needed, not more weapons and military aid. ...

"Protection and accountability would also be critically important, as would widespread efforts to address both the deep trauma of the Holocaust and the ongoing trauma of occupation. But creating genuine security for Palestinians and Israelis is the bottom line. Key to this is ending the occupation that dehumanizes Palestinians and reaching a viable political agreement that could lead to just peace. ..."

We encourage all of our groups and members to continue to pray, study and act for a ceasefire in Gaza.

**Visit the Pax Christi USA website for an extensive list of related resources: prayers, links for webinars, action suggestions, and more.**

# Peace Pair reflection: An immersion in El Paso

*Lai Sam and Ambassador of Peace Scott Wright were matched as a Peace Pair in 2023. Peace Pairs is the intergenerational co-learning program of Pax Christi USA, which connects a young adult peacemaker in their 20-30s with an Ambassador of Peace or other longtime Pax Christi member for a 12-month period. The following reflection was written by Lai after her first day of a five-day immersion trip in November with Scott and Jean Stokan in El Paso, TX.*



[After my first day in El Paso,] I've already had the immense privilege of being a part of the migrants' lives, even if briefly, as they made difficult decisions of leaving their lives, families, and everything they had and knew back home so they could find work to feed themselves and their families. Many of them leave tomorrow on the bus for Chicago, Denver, New York, and Tennessee, with little money in their pockets and no plans of where to go or what to eat, not knowing the language or the country, and their right to be in this country remains uncertain.

Yet in the midst of such suffering, there is so much beauty, resilience, compassion, strength, and optimism - such as stories of migrant families at the shelter pooling together what little money they have to help another family pay for their bus ticket; mothers making difficult decisions such as deciding which one of her children to take as she made the dangerous and arduous journey of three months from Venezuela across the Darien Gap with her newborn child and teenage daughter, in search of work, so she can feed herself, her children, and her five other children back home; children finally being able to be children after the trauma of traveling across the dangerous journey for three months, as they laughed and danced to music with other children at the shelter; an 11-year-old girl named Esperanza (*name changed*) who looked after another mother's infant baby as the infant's mother showered.

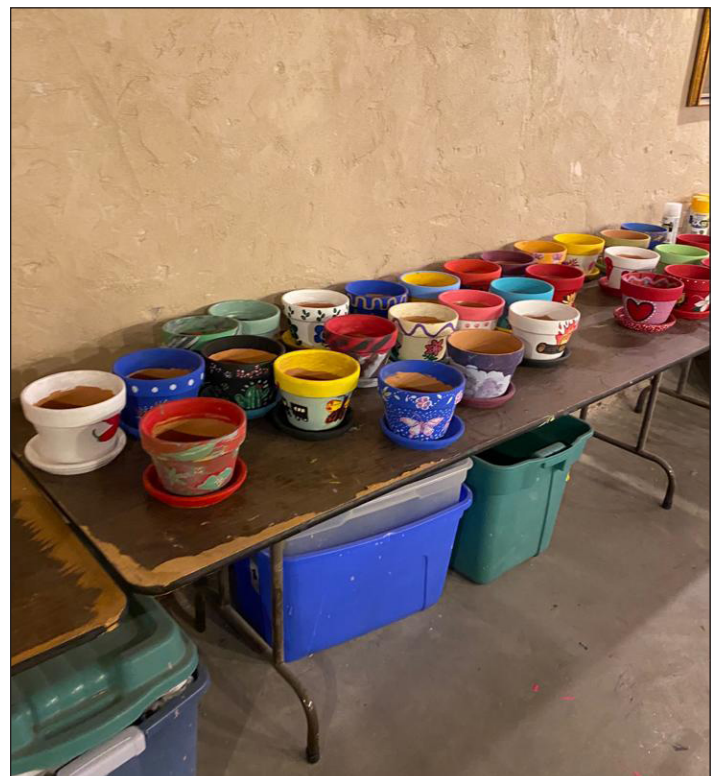
And all the children running to give me hugs as I left tonight; Esperanza telling me there was space if I wanted to stay with them tonight. I have witnessed more generosity and compassion in this short period of time in those who have nothing than in all my life in people who have everything.

May the hearts of people and politicians in the U.S. and across the world soften as they develop empathy and awareness for the difficult choices that migrants have to face, migrants leaving everything they knew behind to a new, unknown world where they fight for the right to exist, to change the narrative around migrants who are fighting for the right to be human. It doesn't matter if they are unskilled or don't speak English. Every human should be entitled to having their basic rights like being able to feed themselves and their family. And may we continue to support people who dedicate their entire lives, like my peace pair Scott and his wife Jean, to fighting for the rights of immigrants and refugees, and for a more peaceful and just world.

For me, this trip is becoming apparent to me that I have been living in my own silo, stuck in my own world of my problems and challenges, and needing to do more than making that 10 percent donation to people who struggle for the right to live and exist in this world.

*For more information on Peace Pairs, please visit the Pax Christi USA website and explore the "Programs" tab. A new cohort will be starting early in 2024. Check out the website for information on how to apply.*

*Lai will be sharing more on her immersion in El Paso in the coming weeks. The migrant center Lai visited has a "paint-it-forward" program, where people paint pots to be sold; the proceeds go back to the migrant community.*





# Pax Christi USA's campus connections



Welcome to **Detroit Cristo Rey High School**, which became our latest high school campus chapter on the International Day of Peace, September 21. Club moderator Kim Redigan is a member of Pax Christi Michigan and Meta Peace Team. They have held their first nonviolence training (right) and have started weekly prayers for peace and an end to violence at the campus peace pole (left).



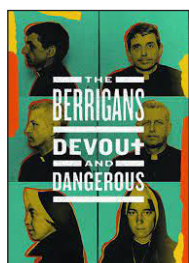
## “Boundless and Beloved” The Ignatian Family Teach-In for Justice (IFTJ)

In October, National council member Josephine Garnem, Pax Christi Metro DC Baltimore member Lauren Bailey, and national staff member Michelle Sherman led a workshop on “Nonviolence and the Beloved Community” at the annual IFTJ conference, which hosts thousands of high school and college students from around the nation for a weekend of prayer, workshops, and advocacy. Ignatian Volunteer and Metro DC Baltimore member Ronnie Fellerath-Lowell also helped table during the weekend. It was especially exciting to meet members of the high school and campus chapters that came by the Pax Christi table, including Pax Christi Seton High School with moderator Joy McCarthy (left) and College of the Holy Cross Pax Christi with advisor Marty Kelly (right).



## Called to Care: Nonviolence and Care for Creation Fall series

This five-week webinar series for college and university students, held each Monday in October, explored the crucial connection between violence and the climate crisis, and emphasized the importance of nonviolent strategies in achieving sustainable ecological integrity. The series reached more than 180 students, 80 faculty members, and will be used at campuses spanning the U.S., Canada, Philippines, South Sudan, and Switzerland. The program was a collaboration of Casa Esther Catholic Worker House (Omro, WI), Pax Christi International's Catholic Nonviolence Initiative, Pax Christi USA and EcoCareNow. Special thanks to organizers David Mueller, Eliane Lakam, and Michelle Sherman. All the recordings and study guides are now available at: <https://cnifallseries.info/>



## Bowdoin College Film Night

Pax Christi Maine members Mary Ellen Quinn and Mary Kate Small, together with friends Maureen and George Ostensen from Smilin' Trees Disarmament Farm, facilitated a film showing and discussion of "The Berrigans: Devout and Dangerous" to a group of Bowdoin College (Brunswick, ME) in November. Thank you, Mary Ellen and Mary Kate!



# Pax Christi member organization from El Salvador receives prestigious human rights award in DC

On October 12, the legal aid organization Tutela Legal Maria Julia Hernandez, a Pax Christi member group based in San Salvador, El Salvador, received the prestigious Letelier Moffitt Human Rights Award at a ceremony held in Washington, D.C. The following day, members of Pax Christi USA and partners from other faith-based advocacy groups met with Tutela Legal MJH's representatives to hear more about the current reality in El Salvador.

In the late 1970s, during his country's violent civil war, Archbishop Oscar Romero opened the human rights office in the Archdiocese of San Salvador; this office has since developed into Tutela Legal Maria Julia Hernandez (Tutela Legal MJH; *tutela legal* translates to legal protection). Maria Julia Hernandez worked closely with Mons. Romero and was the longtime director of the human rights office, which, over the past four decades, has investigated hundreds of cases of political violence, massacres, and assassinations, including that of Mons. Romero. After Maria Julia's death in 2007, the organization added her name to its own.

The Institute for Policy Studies (IPS) has presented the Letelier Moffitt award since 1976; the award was created in honor of Chilean diplomat Orlando Letelier and Ronni Karpen Moffitt who were assassinated by the Pinochet regime for their work to defend democracy and human rights in Chile.

Every year, IPS awards one group from the U.S. and one from Latin America and the Caribbean in order to



*L-r: Ambassador of Peace Jean Stokan; Roxana Bendezú; Tutela Legal MJH's Vidalina Morales, Alejandro Diaz, and Ovidio Mauricio; Judy Coode*

recognize those who fight for economic, cultural, social, and civil rights. Awardees have gone on to become progressive presidents in Brazil, Colombia, and Chile, overthrow Chile's Pinochet-era constitution, win landmark unionization campaigns against corporate powers, and stand strong against multinational companies trying to displace Indigenous peoples from their lands. Previous Pax Christi-affiliated groups to receive the award include DHUMA, a human rights group from Peru.



“Gatherings with friends and family this Christmas are a time to look back and realize how our communities have changed. Perhaps they’ve expanded to include new people, shrunk with the loss of loved ones, been found in surprising new places, or been hard to find when we’re surrounded by so much violence.

“No matter what joys, hopes, griefs, and anxieties crossed your path this year, you always have a community of hope in Pax Christi USA. **This Christmas, I am proud to support Pax Christi USA’s work for peace, and I hope you’ll do the same by making a generous financial donation.**”

~ Sr. Helen Prejean, CSJ  
Pax Christi USA Teacher of Peace

*We hope you’ll make a year-end donation and support Pax Christi USA’s important work for peace. Use the envelope enclosed with this newsletter or visit us online. Thank you!*

# On the line: Updates from local, state and regional chapters



**Pax Christi South Dakota** celebrated their 30th anniversary with a special online event with artist Brother Mickey McGrath on November 18. Br. Mickey led a spiritual workshop, sharing his own art and stories focused on Servant of God Nicholas Black Elk and Native spirituality. Sr. Gabriella Crowley and Leona Wieland were honored for their extraordinary contributions as artisans of peace. *(Photo at left)*

**Pax Christi El Paso**, under the leadership of Pat Delgado, helped to organize and host meetings in mid-October in El Paso (TX) for the Pax Christi USA National Council and staff. The local group arranged meetings with Bishop Mark Seitz and Bishop Anthony Celino of the Diocese of El Paso, as well as a

meeting with Pax Christi USA Teacher of Peace Ruben Garcia at Annunciation House to learn more about their efforts on behalf of new immigrants. All parties enjoyed a special meal and presentation at the Columban Mission Center, hearing first-hand of the efforts of the diocese and local group members to serve and be in solidarity with immigrants and the special witness they have by virtue of being on the border.

**Pax Christi New York State** with the Dorothy Day Guild and others organized a special celebration of the Eucharist on the 43rd anniversary of the death of Dorothy Day on November 29 *(pictured at right)*. The Mass included a special call for the abolition of nuclear weapons with a homily delivered by Archbishop John Wester of the Archdiocese of Santa Fe (NM) and Msgr. Kevin Sullivan presiding.



**Pax Christi Texas** hosted Ruben Garcia, who has been honored as a Pax Christi Teacher of Peace, with Sr. Norma Pimentel, MJ, the author of this year's Advent reflection booklet, at a special "social justice public forum" over Zoom in mid-November to discuss immigration. The speakers shared their thoughts and perspectives on what is happening at the border.

**Pax Christi Florida** launched a new campaign – PC-FLAC'24 – to map their journey through the coming months as the Florida Legislature convenes in the spring of 2024. They seek to dialogue with legislators both locally and in Tallahassee as they advocate for public policy on issues that can build a more just and equitable society in our state. The effort also includes a dialogue with Florida Catholic bishops to encourage their prophetic leadership within the Catholic community. The effort has included opportunities like a recent online conversation about Pope Francis's newest letter on the environment, *Laudate Deum*, considering the implications of the letter for Pax Christi Florida's policy agenda as it relates to its "creation in crisis" issue.

**Pax Christi Metro DC-Baltimore** chose Susan Gunn, director of the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns, as its 2023 Peacemaker of the Year. Susan was honored at an award ceremony on Saturday, November 4. As a longtime friend and colleague of Pax Christi, both the national and DC offices, Susan has taken a leading role in Catholic peace advocacy, with a strong focus on just peace, care for those who are poor, environmental stewardship, and gospel nonviolence.

**Pax Christi Maine** held a fall retreat focusing on the transfiguration of Jesus and exploring the question, "Who is Jesus to us?" ... **Pax Christi Southern California** hosted their Fall 2023 Assembly in September, facilitating an in-depth discussion on gun violence awareness and possible solutions. ... **Pax Christi Illinois'** annual gathering in September offered an opportunity to learn about Bread Not Stones, the Pax Christi USA national campaign to cut military spending and fund human needs. ... **Pittsburgh Pax Christi** led a rally and march to "Give peace a chance in Ukraine," including a silent prayer for peace at St. Paul Cathedral in September.



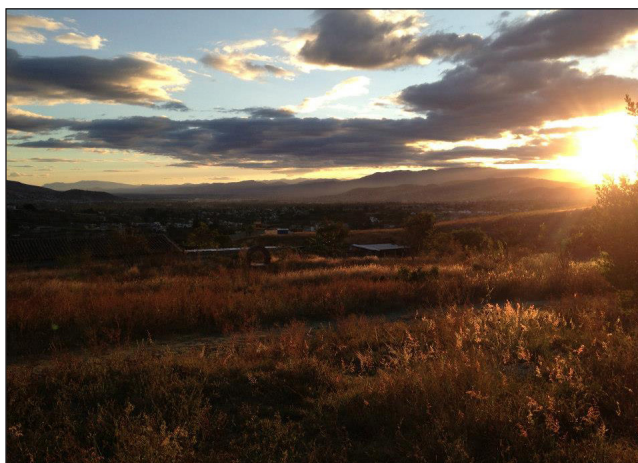
# A reflection for Christmas, December 25

Written by Sr. Norma Pimentel, from *Radicalizing Tenderness: Reflections for Advent and Christmas 2023*

After walking for days traveling from Nazareth to Bethlehem, the Holy Family did not find any place that would let them enter. There was no room at the inn. Mary gave birth to Jesus in a manger because no one offered them a place to stay.

Today, we see a comparable situation with many families who travel for days if not weeks with hopes that someone will offer them a place to stay. The holy families of today travel long distances, are exposed to so many dangers, and risk their lives in the hope of arriving at a place where they will be safe.

I asked a pregnant mother who arrived one night with her little girl at the Humanitarian Respite Center, "When are you due?" She said: "Ya!" meaning, now! I asked, "Why would you travel being so far along in your pregnancy?" She showed me her hand. It was disfigured. She said she was unable to get medical care after a man



entered her home and tried to kill her little girl. She put her hand out to save her daughter. Staying in her country was no longer safe for them. So she decided to risk traveling even though she was advanced in her pregnancy.

When they arrived at the border there was no place for them to stay. They ended up homeless in the streets of the border cities in Mexico. They

risked their lives crossing the river with hopes that they would make it safe to the other side. This family and many like them today are looking for a place at the inn, a place where they are welcomed into the hearts of people of goodwill.

You have an opportunity to welcome into your heart the good news of immense joy Christmas brings to us. Reflect on how this will happen in your life. Rejoice! The angel will sing praise to God, "Peace on earth and good will to all humankind."

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## 2024 Lenten reflection booklet, by Frida Berrigan, available for pre-order

It is still Advent, but the print version of next year's Lenten reflection booklet is now available for pre-order in the Pax Christi USA Store with shipments starting in early January. The special pre-order price is \$4.00 a copy (with further discounts of 10 percent on orders of 10-99 or 30 percent for 100+).



Frida's Lenten reflections are personal and political, provocative in the questions they raise and beguiling to any of us who are trying to make our way in the world as people of peace, compassion and justice. Her words challenge and amuse, rooted in the experiences of her everyday family life and a long history with the peace movement.

This year's booklet, *A Fast That Matters: Reflections for Lent 2024*, features reflections for every day from Ash Wednesday through Easter Sunday written by Frida Berrigan, a writer and community organizer who lives with her family in Connecticut. She is the author of *It Runs In The Family: On Being Raised by Radicals and Growing into Rebellious Motherhood*, the story of how she tries to apply the lessons of her parents, Pax Christi USA Teachers of Peace Phil Berrigan and Elizabeth McAlister, and the community of Jonah House they helped found, to her own mothering and life.

**Order copies now for yourself, your parish, religious community, school, and family to assure reception in time for the start of Lent, Ash Wednesday, Feb. 14.**

The booklet is available for pre-order now in the hard-copy print version. After January 15, the electronic version will be available as a download for your e-reader. (Photo of Frida by Ed Hedemann)

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**And while you're visiting the Pax Christi store online, at <https://cutt.ly/paxchrististore>, check out:**

- *The updated version of Sr. Helen Prejean's prayer card, A Prayer to Abolish the Death Penalty*
- *The last 100 copies of Peacemaking Day by Day, vol. 3*
- *The Vow of Nonviolence prayer card*
- *English and Spanish versions of Archbishop Wester's pastoral letter calling for nuclear disarmament*
- *Pax Christi buttons, t-shirts, and more...*