

Prayer Witness at the USCCB Spring Meeting, Louisville, KY – June 12, 2024

Yesterday, Pax Christi USA was honored to be the inaugural recipient of the Dorothy Day Guild's Dorothy Day Peacemaker Award.

Almost 60 years ago, Dorothy stood with 19 other women outside the meetings of the Second Vatican Council in Rome, appealing to the leaders of the Church to break "the awful silence" on issues of peace and justice.

Today we stand as Dorothy did almost 60 years ago witnessing by our prayer and our presence in asking our bishops to raise their voices on behalf of the peace that does justice.

In February, 20 U.S. bishops boldly asserted a commitment to the Church's social vision, calling the U.S. government to redirect military spending to overcoming poverty, mitigating the climate crisis, healing the sick, dismantling racial injustice, and protecting the dignity of all.

We stand here today in thanksgiving for the 20 bishops that signed the Bread Not Stones statement and we invite their brother bishops to join them in this prophetic call.

Nowhere has our Church's commitment to the justice that leads to peace been more evident than in the efforts of the **Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD)**, offering the necessary support to raise up and develop leaders from impoverished and marginalized communities to exercise their rights on the issues that impact their lives, their families, and their communities.

Pax Christi USA joined with a number of community organizers, lay faithful, supporters, friends, partnering communities and organizations who have been deeply impacted by the work of CCHD in issuing a letter of unwavering support for their work and asking the U.S. bishops to continue to fund this "beacon of hope for impoverished and vulnerable communities across the United States."

We stand here today because we know that "if you want peace, work for justice." Our work for peace is dependent on the work of fostering justice that is at the heart of the mission of CCHD. We stand to say: **We support justice. We support CCHD.**

When Dorothy and her co-conspirators gathered outside the Vatican on October 1, 1965, their prayer was simple: the Lord's prayer, the peace prayer of St. Francis, the Beatitudes, the rosary, some readings from scripture. So will ours be today. We begin with the same prayer that they did, the prayer of the Church, the prayer that Jesus gave us.

ALL: Our Mother, Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name; Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory now and forever. Amen.

Reader One: *A reading from the gospel according to Matthew.*

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, and after he had sat down, his disciples came to him. He began to teach them, saying:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land. Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven. Thus they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

The word of God.

ALL: Thanks be to God.

~ A few moments of silence ~

Reader Two: *From the Bread Not Stones Bishops’ Sign-on Statement, signed by 20 U.S. Bishops this past February*

In the preamble of Jesus’ teaching of the Golden Rule, He asks his followers, “Which of you, if your child asks for bread, will give them a stone?”

The growing gap between the rich and the poor is compounded by a growing gap between our nation’s spending on weapons and preparations for war and our commitment to end poverty. Our poor and marginalized brothers and sisters cry out for the bread of compassion and justice. Shall we continue to offer them stones?

We are told that our military spending secures peace for our people and the Church recognizes the legitimate need for the adequate defense of nations. But our reliance on unfettered military spending is rooted in a mistaken notion of peace and an erroneous understanding of what constitutes true security for our people. ... We cannot remain silent while our nation squanders hundreds of billions of dollars every year on weapon systems that add little to our nation’s national security while neglecting the poor and marginalized in our dioceses and around the world. ... If we want genuine peace, we must seek justice for the “least of these” by beating our swords into ploughshares, and our spears into pruning hooks.

ALL: Lord, make us instruments of your peace: where there is hatred, let us sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; and where there is sadness, joy.

O divine Master, grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console, to be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.

~ A few moments of silence ~

Reader Three: From “An Open Letter to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops on the Future of the Catholic Campaign for Human Development,” signed by more than 640 Catholic leaders and 59 organizations and religious communities

As an historic anti-poverty initiative CCHD has been a beacon of hope for impoverished and vulnerable communities across the United States. Over the past 53 years, it has awarded over 9,000 grants, fostering leadership development, systemic change, and poverty alleviation. ... We are writing to you to let you know of our prayers and conviction to support the continuing work of CCHD for the next 50 years.

CCHD has served as a vehicle for collaboration among people of different faiths and has been successful in bringing people to the Catholic faith. CCHD supports transformative education on Catholic Social teaching and has formed hundreds of interns that have served around the country assisting dioceses to advance the social mission of the Church, many of whom have become lay ministers, women religious, and clergy.

In this time of polarization and distrust of institutions, CCHD has proven to be a solid program that transcends traditional differences promoting subsidiarity and solidarity. ... The economic disenfranchisement and continuing exploitation of the poor and most vulnerable are pressing issues that require our collective action. Without CCHD, many of the grassroots initiatives that bring hope and tangible change to these communities would be at risk.

Reader Four: Loving God, as we celebrate 55 years of the gift of the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, we pause with grateful hearts, full of the recognition that all good gifts come from you. We recognize that the good work accomplished over these years is done through the power of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit which rouses us from our cynicism, stirs us out of complacency, and moves us to respond to injustice. It is your love which moves us to dismantle systems of oppression and illuminates the path forward for our families and communities.

We pray in gratitude for these years of solidarity, motivated by that same Spirit, calling us to lift up the weary, to love our neighbor, and to welcome the stranger. We pray in gratitude for these years of prophetic leadership, especially those leaders who have shared the Gospel message in both word and deed, leading others by their joyful examples.

We pray in gratitude for the years of “yes” that comes from myriad of leaders in our communities, each one stepping up to lead when called by the Spirit, when called by their communities, when called by the need they saw in their neighbors’ eyes.

Let us stand proudly upon the shoulders of each of these leaders who have come before us. Let us move together to continue a legacy of standing together. Let us be alive in the Spirit that will bring forth communities filled with true peace and your justice. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

ALL: Amen.

~ A few moments of silence ~

Closing words...