Pax Christi USA receives inaugural Dorothy Day Peacemaker award

On June 11, the Dorothy Day Guild, the official body charged with promoting the canonization of Dorothy Day, gave its first Dorothy Day Peacemaker award to Pax Christi USA, in acknowledgement of Pax Christi USA’s commitment to Gospel nonviolence and its exemplification of Day’s vision and legacy. The award ceremony took place during a breakfast held in conjunction with the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ (USCCB) spring meetings, held this year in Louisville, KY.

“So many in Pax Christi USA, myself included, were formed in the Catholic Worker tradition and strive to live out Dorothy’s commitment to personalism, nonviolence and the works of mercy in our everyday discipleship,” said Johnny Zokovitch, Pax Christi USA’s executive director.

Noting that Day was the keynote speaker at Pax Christi USA’s first national assembly in 1973, Zokovitch said, “To be validated for the work that we have done over 50 years by being associated with the life and witness of Dorothy Day couldn’t mean more to us.”

In 2000, after then-Cardinal John O’Connor of New York officially opened the cause for her beatification and canonization, Day was declared a “Servant of God.”

The Guild, established in 2005 and located within Manhattan College’s Dorothy Day Center for the Study and Promotion of Social Catholicism, works to move the process along by amassing evidence of Day’s eligibility for canonization — since the local diocesan review phase was completed in 2021, the Guild has sent along materials such as eyewitness interviews; a biography; theological reviews of Day’s work; and Day’s own writings, arrest record, and FBI file to the Vatican’s Dicastery for the Causes of Saints, which will determine if Day can be named “Venerable.” (It is also possible to be named “Blessed,” which would require proof of a miracle having been performed in Day’s name. Another miracle must be recorded after having been named “Blessed.” Once the second miracle has been confirmed, the pope can name Day as “Saint.”)
It started with an invitation

By Johnny Zokovitch, Pax Christi USA Executive Director

As my time as Executive Director ends, I’ve been reflecting a lot on my journey with Pax Christi USA. Even though I’ve been on staff (either with PCUSA or at the International Secretariat) for 25 years, my first introduction to Pax Christi was over thirty years ago, in 1991, when I was a lay-volunteer-in-mission with Catholic Volunteers in Florida, fresh out of college.

My placement site for my year of service was the newly started St. Vincent de Paul Farm, a farm and residential program for homeless men started by Fr. Bob Baker (most recently the bishop of Birmingham where National Council member James Watts worked with him--small world!) outside of St. Augustine, Florida. It was initially a small effort, taking its inspiration from Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin and the Catholic Worker farms that still dot the U.S. today. I was helping to start something brand new, in a rural area, and living on my own with a few fellows who had spent most of their life on the street or in prison. It was a little overwhelming to say the least.

Having taken a class on spirituality and social justice in college, I knew that a supportive community was one of the anchors that I was going to need if I didn’t want to become buried by the experience. But I had no idea where to look or who to contact. That’s when I found Pax Christi.

One of my supervisors was Becky Stringer, director of the local Catholic Charities office. I think Becky must have intuited my need for connection, my need to find other folks who were asking the same questions I had about what it meant to follow Jesus, to embrace the radical message of the gospel, to struggle with what it meant to be faithful living in a world so contrary to what I believed my faith called me to. Becky asked me if I wanted to attend a retreat with this group of folks called Pax Christi Florida. I had not heard of Pax Christi, and was a little unsure of what I was being invited to. But I had heard of Dan Berrigan from my religious studies in college, and the opportunity to spend a weekend on retreat led by Dan was an easy yes!

Older folks in Pax Christi ask me all the time about how to get younger folks involved (despite the fact that I am, in fact, older folk too now!). I don’t think it’s rocket science. For me, it was that invitation from Becky, and hundreds of subsequent invitations--Pax Christi FL leader John Frank opening up the retreat center he ran to me as a place to come and get away from work when I was struggling; Ambassador of Peace Tom Cordaro inviting me to learn from him as part of his staff when I moved to Miami and needed a job; former Executive Directors Nancy Small and Dave Robinson inviting me to organize a student witness at the School of the Americas or to provide reflections for a Lenten booklet; Pax Christi Anti-Racism Team members Pearlette Springer and Beatrice Parwatikar inviting me to deep conversations about racial injustice and mentoring me in the process; Ron Cruz, Dianna Ortiz, Joe Nangle, Marie Dennis and dare I say most of you reading this, inviting me time and time again to conversation, friendship, public witness, community, leadership opportunities, meals, and more. Just inviting me into relationship with you, inviting me to walk a ways with you. Invitations to support me, to pay for me to attend a conference, or gifting me a book, or, as I have needed so often these past five years, your kind words of encouragement inviting me to keep going on.

I hope each of you will continue extending those invitations. That’s how it all started for me.
Mary Catherine Bunting named 2024 Teacher of Peace

Pax Christi USA has recognized Baltimore activist and philanthropist Mary Catherine Bunting as this year’s recipient of the Teacher of Peace award, its highest honor.

“Pax Christi USA’s Teachers of Peace teach us about peacemaking in a variety of ways which impact our society for the greater good,” said Pax Christi USA Bishop President John Stowe, OFM Conv. “Through a life of service and commitment to justice as well as in her extraordinary philanthropic legacy, Mary Catherine Bunting teaches how to help create a more peaceful world.”

A lifelong Maryland resident, Mary Catherine Bunting first worked as a nurse during her time as a member of the Sisters of Mercy, and then became a nurse practitioner serving impoverished communities in South Baltimore. As a longtime member of Baltimore’s St. Vincent de Paul parish, she has been engaged in work for justice for many years – including as a founding member of the racial justice circle in Baltimore – and has participated in efforts for peace and conflict resolution; against sexism and poverty; for housing justice; for care of the environment; and for universal health care. She has been a consistent volunteer with hospice patients and with programs for those who are homeless.

Ms. Bunting has chosen to direct her financial resources to address social injustice and foster peace, providing significant gifts that have made a difference to many programs and in many lives.

“I was amazed to be chosen when I saw the list of names of those who had been nominated, incredible people who put their life on the line working for peace and justice,” said Ms. Bunting. “I hope and pray that I will continue working for peace and justice for the rest of my days.”

This year’s Teacher of Peace award will be presented to Ms. Bunting during Pax Christi USA’s virtual national conference, to be held September 6-7.

Ralph McCloud to receive Eileen Egan award

Pax Christi USA is proud to announce that Ralph McCloud is the recipient of the Eileen Egan Peacemaker Award, which is given periodically to honor a group or individual who has made a strong and extraordinary prophetic witness for peace in a time or situation of devastating violence or injustice. It was last presented in 2010 to the Leadership Conference of Women Religious.

The award is named for Eileen Egan, one of the co-founders of Pax Christi USA and long-time executive with Catholic Relief Services.

“From his days in city government in Fort Worth, Texas to his leadership role in the Catholic Campaign for Human Development and in everything else he does, Ralph McCloud has promoted the kind of peace that is rooted in justice,” said Pax Christi USA Bishop President Bishop John Stowe, OFM Conv. “The CCHD is the U.S. Church’s signature program for putting the values of Catholic Social Teaching into practice and under Ralph’s leadership many new initiatives were funded to help impoverished communities become protagonists in improving their own futures. He was also instrumental in teaching how CCHD works and transforms lives.”

McCloud served as executive director of the CCHD, a project of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishop (USCCB), for 16 years before resigning in May 2024.

“I am humbled and honored to be recognized by Pax Christi USA,” said McCloud. “I have long admired and respected their courageous and faith-filled work. In today’s world, they truly represent what it means to care. Pax Christi engages people to pursue justice, embrace peace and escort one another into right relationships with God and one another. This is a tremendous honor!”

“It was an easy decision for Pax Christi USA to honor Mr. McCloud for his long commitment in leading CCHD,” stated Johnny Zokovitch, Pax Christi USA Executive Director. “We recognize most importantly that he has persevered in this work despite counter-prevailing winds in our Church and the larger society that have fed polarization, racism, xenophobia, and the demonization of impoverished people.”

Plans for the presentation of the award are currently underway and will be announced at a later date.
Pax Christi endorses open letter on Gaza

Pax Christi USA, the Catholic Advisory Council of Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP), Franciscan Action Network, and the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns are co-sponsors of an open letter from Catholics expressing our anguish over the ongoing violence in Israel-Palestine. As of this publication, almost 6,000 people and dozens of organizations have endorsed the letter.

Initial signers include San Diego’s Cardinal Robert McElroy; Archbishop John Wester of Santa Fe; Pax Christi USA’s Johnny Zokovitch, executive director, and Charlene Howard, national council chair; Marie Dennis, former co-president of Pax Christi International, leader of the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative, and Pax Christi USA’s 2022 Teacher of Peace; Pax Christi USA’s Teachers of Peace Mary Catherine Bunting, Fr. Joe Nangle, OFM, Fr. Brian Massingale, Art Laffin, Colleen Kelly, MJ Park, and Shelley Douglass; Mary Yelenick, Beth Begley, and Abigail Absyalh Metzger of the Pax Christi International UN team, in addition to many Ambassadors of Peace and other Pax Christi regional and local leaders; plus hundreds of theologians, women religious, ordained clergy, and many notable Catholic academics, activists, and lay leaders.

“As U.S. Catholics,” the letter states, “we recognize our country’s contribution to the present violence and to the ongoing systemic injustices in Israel-Palestine. We call on President Biden, a fellow Catholic, and other U.S. and international leaders to do everything possible to ensure a permanent end to hostilities, including halting additional shipments of U.S.-funded offensive weapons to Israel, a return of all hostages and the immediate distribution of robust humanitarian aid to Gaza.”

Going beyond the current crisis, the letter speaks to the longer-term injustices in the Holy Land, including Israel’s military occupation and illegal settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and the blockade imposed on Gaza. The letter notes that many of the signers have seen these realities firsthand and express their prayer that “a political solution can be achieved which ensures justice, equality, peace, security, and freedom for two peoples.”

The signers also lament that U.S. Catholics have often overlooked the situation in the Holy Land, specifically the plight of Palestinian Christians. At the same time, they affirm their concern for “Jews, Muslims, and others who suffer in Israel-Palestine.” The signers also commit themselves to “opposing antisemitism, Islamophobia, and anti-Arab discrimination,” acknowledging that “Christians have often failed in this regard.”

“For years, Pax Christi has condemned the U.S. government’s complicity in the Israel-Palestine conflict, its tacit support of the ongoing occupation by frustrating efforts to apply international law, and the unchecked military aid provided to Israel,” said Zokovitch. “Our faith requires us to speak out against weapons 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.”

Pax Christi USA holds prayer service for ceasefire outside White House

On Friday, May 3, Pax Christi USA national council members, staff, members, and members of the wider Catholic and ecumenical faith community gathered in Lafayette Park outside the White House to pray for a speedy and just resolution to the conflict in Gaza and Israel and to commemorate the 41st anniversary of the U.S. Catholic Bishops’ pastoral letter, “The Challenge of Peace.” The service included reflections from scripture, prayer, song, and the reading of an open letter from U.S. Catholics on the urgent need to end the devastation on the people of Gaza. (See above.) After the prayer service, several participants knelt and prayed at the White House fence; Bishop John Stowe offered them his blessing.
Local and regional group updates

**Pax Christi Metro New York** held their annual Peacemaker Awards celebration on June 8. They honored Eileen Chan with the Sister Christine Mulready Peacemaker Award, John Amidon with the Mark Scibilia-Carver Award, Jack Gilroy with the Fr. Richard McSorley Award, David Maloof with the Eileen Egan Peacemaker Award, and Camryn Mejia, of Marymount School of New York, the Maloof Family Young Peacebuilder Award. Ms. Mejia wrote a beautiful letter about her devotion to peace and justice, referencing Pope Paul VI’s 1972 message in which he stated, “If you want peace, work for justice.” It was an excellent event!

**Pax Christi Massachusetts** encourages everyone to watch the YouTube recording of the January 27 forum, “Building a World Without Nuclear Weapons: An Urgent Imperative.” The video has had more than 1,000 viewers, and the numbers continue to grow. (Find the link on the Pax Christi Massachusetts and Pax Christi USA websites.) They continue to reflect on their study of examples of nonviolence in the book “Choosing Peace: The Catholic Church returns to Gospel nonviolence” by Teacher of Peace Marie Dennis.

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### Report from Iowa: Pax Christi visits the Hawkeye State

From May 19-27, Pax Christi USA and Pax Christi International staff traveled to Iowa for visits with supporters and colleagues. Former development director John Noble, a native of Des Moines, IA, planned the trip, which included visiting religious sisters’ communities, college campuses, two bishops, parishes, diocesan offices, Catholic Worker communities, and Pax Christi members. Along with John were Marie Dennis, senior director of Pax Christi International’s Catholic Nonviolence Initiative, and Pax Christi USA staff members Stephen Niamke and Michelle Sherman.

Meetings were held with Archbishop Thomas Zinkula and the Archdiocese of Dubuque; staff members of the Diocese of Davenport; the Iowa Catholic Conference; Bishop William Joensen (Des Moines); Dubuque Franciscans; Sinsinawa Dominicans; Franciscan Sisters of Clinton; the Franciscan Peace Center; Congregation of the Humility of Mary; Blessed Virgin Mary Sisters; Clarke University; Loras College; Des Moines Catholic Worker; Iowa City Catholic Worker; St. Thomas More Parish; Des Moines Intentional Eucharistic Community; the Catholic Peace Ministry; many family members of John Noble; and a Trappist uncle of Michelle Sherman!

Deep gratitude to all who received us with warmth and hospitality over the eight-day trip. The Pax Christi visitors were moved by the prophetic witness of the Sisters’ communities, inspired by the leadership of (arch)diocesan offices, and grateful for the ongoing commitment of everyday people building peace all throughout Iowa.

Pax Christi USA hopes to continue this model of regional visit in the future. (A similar visit was held last year in Ohio.) If you would like to welcome a group from Pax Christi USA and Pax Christi International to your local area, please contact us!
When I first received my copy of David Cochran’s *The Catholic Case Against War: A Brief Guide*, I felt my usual unease whenever the words “the Catholic case” appeared anywhere. What does it mean to make a Catholic case? The question of authority and Catholic identity is never as tidy as apologists claim .... Most Catholics in the peace and justice movement have long held the authoritative, magisterial nature of the hierarchical church in tension with a reform-hearted tradition that recognizes a kaleidoscopic reality in which all the baptized live out a priestly call.

Early in this serviceable book’s introduction, we learn what Cochran means by a Catholic case against war—he means the popes! True, Cochran qualifies his choice, stating “that while thinkers, activists, and national bishops conferences have made significant contributions to developing Catholic teaching about war, in the interest of concision, he decides “to only use formal Vatican documents and papal statements.” ... As someone new to Catholic peacework, I am struck by how sharply the popes, largely in the 20th century, see the full antiwar vision.

... [In] the 20th century, the popes began to issue statements of varying authority doubting the possibility of a just war altogether, specifically as modern warfare tested its theoretical limits. In each chapter after that, Cochran expounds on overarching themes from critiques of war regarding death, destruction, and dehumanization, to alternatives like nonviolence, prevention, global governance, economic and political justice, and finally, abolition.

Cochran extensively quotes papal documents denouncing the harrowing realities and false promises of war, as well as Vatican advocacy for nonviolent alternatives — including, to my astonishment, abolition. ... Cochran unspools the theological threads and doctrinal contexts sustaining papal calls for abolition. The popes—chiefly Benedict XVI, John Paul II, and Francis—have each called us to hope for the abolition of war without denying the reality of the sins that wage it.

In other words, the church’s recent antiwar teachings are anything but only so much moral sentimentality, worthy of waving away. Yet, in a sense, *The Catholic Case Against War* is less a book about the Catholic case against war as much as a slim compendium of growing empirical research that confirms nearly every antiwar and nonviolent conviction undergirding Christian peacebuilding, including the full extent of war’s destruction, the power of nonviolent practices and global cooperation, the need for pairing peace with justice, and the historical evidence for anticipating a war-free future.

... *The Catholic Case Against War* rages against charges of sentimentality, naivety, and false utopianism that our broader culture lodges so reflexively at antiwar convictions, particularly abolition. Cochran’s brief guide is a stark look at the horrendous absurdity of war and a pragmatic offering of solutions that could render war a relic of a wicked past ...

The current crisis in Darfur, Sudan  
Written by Dr. Mawa Mohamed and Dr. Ron Pagnucco  

According to the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns, April 15 marked one year of fighting in Sudan between the military and rebel forces, each appearing to be loyal only to power and profit. The war in Sudan between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) has left tens of thousands dead, 10 million displaced inside and outside the country, and 18 million food insecure.

Darfur, in western Sudan, has a diverse history shaped by its indigenous tribes. The size of France with 80 nomadic and sedentary tribes, “Darfur,” from Arabic, means “the land of the Fur,” the tribe that ruled the region until 1916. Following Sudan’s independence from British and Egyptian rule in 1956, Darfur’s significance within the nation increased.

During colonial rule, Darfur suffered economic and political marginalization, increasing tensions between tribes, particularly Arab nomads and non-Arab settled farmers. After independence, Darfur continued to have sporadic unrest.

Competition for resources led to deepening divisions and conflicts. Arab militias targeted non-Arab communities. Armed conflict became severe in 2003 when rebels attacked the government because of its neglect of Darfur and its non-Arab population. The Khartoum government responded brutally, organizing Arab Janjaweed militias to target sedentary groups. Many Janjaweed members later joined the RSF. Conflict in Darfur continued into the second decade of the 21st century.

In 2019, a mass nonviolent pro-democracy movement, the RSF, and the SAF overthrew Sudanese dictator Omar Bashir. A short-term interim government with civilian, RSF and SAF participation was formed, but a military coup took place in October 2021; the SAF and the RSF then ruled the country. In April 2023, the RSF and SAF began fighting over control of the country. The fighting spread from the capital of Khartoum to other parts of the country, with the RSF and its allies attacking groups in Darfur. While the RSF and the SAF are the main belligerents, today around 70 armed groups are fighting. Human rights groups allege that while both the RSF and SAF are committing atrocities, the RSF may be committing genocide in Darfur.

For further info, see the Sudanese organization Keep Eyes on Sudan, the coalition Sudan Unlimited, the statement on Sudan by PAX Netherlands and the special August 2024 issue of the free online Journal of Social Encounters on Darfur and Sudan:

- Keep Eyes on Sudan: https://eyesonsudan.net
- Sudan Unlimited: https://www.sudanunlimited.com/sudan-eventsandanalysis
- PAX Netherlands, “All eyes on Sudan”: https://paxvoorvrede.nl/ -- choose EN (English) and search for “All eyes on Sudan.”
- Journal of Social Encounters: https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/social_encounters/

Welcome to Pax Christi USA, Stephen Niamke!  

In February, Stephen Niamke, a longtime community organizer and nonviolence trainer from Roanoke, VA, joined the Pax Christi USA staff as National Field Organizer. “The staff and leadership of Pax Christi USA have wisely and graciously brought me through an orientation process that has allowed me to warm up to the tremendous undertaking that is before me, for which I am grateful,” Stephen said. “[They] are devoted to sharing the peace of Christ, which shows in their spirit and in their work ethic.”

“We’re excited to have Stephen with us, to bring his skills in nonviolence training and community organizing and more into our work to grow our grassroots network,” stated Johnny Zokovitch, executive director of Pax Christi USA. “This work happens at the local level for most of us – in our homes, schools, parishes, religious communities and cities. Fostering that work and building strong relationships between our local groups as well as facilitating consistent open communications throughout our network are priorities and I think Stephen will be an excellent facilitator of that work.”

Contact Stephen at sniamke@paxchristiusa.org with your welcome message & your own Pax Christi story.
The importance of open dialogue: A Peace Pair reflection
Written by Tiffany Hunsinger, Peace Pair with Janice Vanderhaar

Janice and I began our Peace Pair journey almost two years ago, and throughout that time, we had numerous riveting conversations. Janice had so much wisdom to share, and one of the common denominators of our discussions was the importance of having open dialogue. As political changes took place and we witnessed increased polarization in our own daily lives, we thought our contribution should do something to address that. We realized that dialogue is a social antidote to the ensuing turmoil.

Another common denominator of our conversations involved Gerard Vanderhaar, Janice’s late husband, who deeply influenced her and all those around him. Janice sent me a couple of his books, and after reading them, I knew we should spread his message of peace in daily life and conversations. Thus, we found a basis for our “Challenging Conversations: Intergenerational Nonviolent Peacemaking in Difficult Times” program.

Reading the chapters more thoroughly and discussing with Janice and Michelle Sherman (a huge help in our organizing) allowed me to reflect on how I utilized nonviolent discussion in my own life. While I shared and prepared my thoughts on the chapters from Beyond Nonviolence: In the Spirit of the Nonviolent Christ, I thought about practical ways to incorporate nonviolence. I thought about Gerard’s emphasis on roundtable decision-making in which one strives for unanimous decisions, even in meetings where one might want to get a general consensus. Reflecting on this, I decided to practice thinking about consciously asking myself why I am aggravated and realizing that the aggravations I feel towards another result from something within me.

Over the past two years, I have cherished the gift of intergenerational conversations and the wisdom I gained, which allowed me to realize that one can commit one’s life to nonviolence in the long haul. Janice’s life and Gerard’s words show me that a nonviolent life is possible and I have truly enjoyed learning about their lives and gleaning Janice’s continual wisdom. I am also thankful for the delightful conversations that resulted from our program and pray that we all might have more grace in our challenging discussions going forward, especially in light of this current election season.

Interested in knowing more about Peace Pairs? Check out the Pax Christi USA website!