



The Peace Current

Pax Christi USA

The national Catholic peace movement

Autumn 2024

Charlene Howard named new Executive Director of Pax Christi USA

The national council of Pax Christi USA is delighted to announce that, after an extensive search, Charlene Howard has been selected as the organization's new Executive Director.

"I am filled with hope at this moment of transition of leadership in Pax Christi USA. It has been a joy to work with Charlene Howard in her role as chair of the National Council [since October 2021] and I now look forward to working with her in this new capacity as Executive Director," shared Bishop John Stowe, OFM Conv., Bishop-President of Pax Christi USA. "Her enthusiasm for the faith that does justice, a gospel-based faith that brings genuine peace, is contagious. Her passion for affirming the dignity of each child of God is impressive and inviting. Her zeal for dismantling racism and cultivating a deep spirituality of nonviolence is compelling."

Prior to her appointment as Pax Christi USA's executive director, Howard worked at Archbishop Carroll High School in Washington, D.C., serving most recently as the Director of Spiritual Life.

"It is my great honor to be selected for this position. Serving on the National Council was an incredibly invigorating and informative experience. In this new role, I look forward to working with all of Pax Christi USA's members to make Gospel peace a lived reality.

"Raised a fifth generation cradle Black Catholic, I grew up learning the importance of the dignity and value of all people. My Catholic education reinforced the values of treating all people fairly and being of service to those in need. My father, an effective and respected advocate with the union at the US Department of Labor, also modeled

for me that one voice can be effective in bringing about positive change for people who feel that their voices are not heard. Above all, it is my Catholic faith and African American heritage that have sustained and pushed me to live by the principles of Catholic Social Teaching - a framework for peace.



"My vision for Pax Christi is for it to continue to bring the hope of peace into our conflicted nation. I believe our movement's response must focus upon:

- Intentional application of our Catholic values and practices to guide all that we do;
- Building relationships with members of grassroots stakeholder efforts working to build peace in diverse communities;
- Implementing civil dialogue and Synodal conversation as effective ways to conduct conversations on challenging topics as a effective peacemaking strategy;
- Continuously evaluating the extent to which Pax Christi USA, including its regional and local membership, reflect diverse ages, cultures, genders, etc. in their leadership and programs.

"Our faith tells us that we must resist war, genocide, racism, and all forms of violence through prayer, study and action. I believe that Pax Christi is necessary to maintain peace and nonviolence ever in the front of our country's collective consciousness, as we have for more than 50 years. At the same time, we must look ahead to a future where our movement elevates the voices of marginalized stakeholders with whom we align to bring about the beloved community to which we ascribe in order to increase our membership.

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Pax Christi USA National Staff

Charlene Howard
Executive Director

Judy Coode
Communications Director

Daniel Francis
Development Director

Rosalyn Jackson
*Operations and Database
Assistant*

Stephen Niamke
National Field Organizer

Michelle Sherman
*Project Director,
Nonviolence and Campus
Outreach*

Iyana Turner-Vance
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Ronnie Fellerath-Lowell
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Hearing “Ephphatha”: Bishop Stowe’s homily from national conference

The following homily was given by Pax Christi USA’s Bishop President John Stowe, OFM Conv., during the closing Mass of the virtual national conference, September 7.

It is when we recognize and deeply appreciate our role as the Body of Christ, gathered in worship around the table of the Word and the table of the Eucharist, that we can find the strength and wisdom to resist the polarization and enmity so prevalent in our time. We remember Jesus, who spanned the chasm between divinity and humanity and reveals both most perfectly. He who reveals most perfectly the very love that is the source of our creation also, in love, accepts the harshest consequences of our rejection of that love. In the polarized religious and political context of his day, Jesus did not resist a death by capital punishment which required cooperation between his own people and the Roman government. He went to his gruesome death begging forgiveness for those who were killing him and he rejected the suggestion that he take the easy way and demonstrate might and power; he was faithfully resolute in taking the harder way of love that it might lead to true reconciliation.



Our response to the incivility and outward violence of this moment in history cannot be to take another shortcut and pretend all is well, or to wait it out, or even to act as if all is well. It is nothing new for us to have to choose between two flawed individuals or two political parties that have strayed from the pursuit of the common good and who fail in very significant ways to affirm the value and dignity of human life, especially the lives most in danger.

Nonetheless, choose we must. And a false equivalency between the danger that each presents is indeed a danger itself. While the Church as a body does not endorse candidates nor tell members how to vote, we have failed mightily as teachers of the faith if we think that someone convicted of sexual violence and a host of other felonies, who seems incapable of speaking the truth in nearly any circumstance, who mocks and ridicules vulnerable human beings and who thinks the concept of laying down one’s life is for “suckers and losers”... to think that such a person could be the leader of the free world and is a viable candidate. When the opponent works valiantly for the expansion of abortion rights, we have reason to be conflicted and saddened that a serious and complex moral issue can be the source of a rallying cry - but we have to choose to ignore and deny too much to forge an equivalency between the two.

What does the Word of God say to us to enlighten and challenge us on the path of discipleship, as we re-commit ourselves to pursue the way of peace? A deaf man with a speech impediment is brought to Jesus, way off in the borderlands - there are crowds seeking Jesus, even in these out of the way places where pagans lived, they are still bringing people to encounter Jesus, to be healed by his touch. We know well that hearing and speech are

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Charlene Howard, continued from page 1

“To accomplish this I ask your help in upgrading our resources to reach and reflect the needs of new and emerging audiences; being open to new ways of engaging with people on difficult topics; and committing to be an authentically anti-racist movement on all levels. In turn, I will foster open communication with the membership through regular emails, in person and virtual visits, and our programs. In addition, I will work to continue our financial stability through maintaining our relationships with current donors, responding to grants for our programs and making sure our Finance Committee contains members who are innovative and effective in connecting the movement with new resources to meet

our needs. Finally, much of my focus will be on having a wider base of young and diverse people join Pax Christi in its peacemaking efforts. As staff, National Council members, Young Adult Caucus members, working group members, etc., this means inviting more and different people to work with us in various ways as well as joining them in their conferences, civic actions and events. In this way, we build a sustainable movement overtime.

“Finally, I want to express my excitement and eagerness at becoming your Executive Director. It is an honor and opportunity God has provided to which I will lend all of my gifts and talents so that Pax Christi USA will continue its legacy of being the peace making movement of the Catholic Church. *‘Let’s build peace together.’*”

Pax Christi Korea visits Washington, DC office

Anselmo Lee, co-founder and co-president of Pax Christi Korea, visited the US in July and spent two days with the Pax Christi USA national staff in Washington, DC.

He invited Pax Christi USA Executive Director Charlene Howard and Bishop-President John Stowe to provide video messages for the inaugural Nagasaki Catholic Peace Forum (NCPF), held August 10 in Japan. (These videos are available to watch on Pax Christi USA’s YouTube channel, www.youtube.com/@PaxChristiUSA.)

The NCPF, which included about 40 participants in-person from Korea, Japan, and the United States, coincided with

the 79th anniversary of the atomic bombings and the first anniversary of the Partnership for a World Without Nuclear Weapons, formed by Archbishop Peter Michiaki Nakamura of Nagasaki, Bishop Alexis Mitsuru Shirahama of Hiroshima, and Archbishops Paul Etienne of Seattle and John Wester of Santa Fe.

The Nagasaki Appeal for Peace, introduced at the forum, calls for stronger unity among Catholic peace organizations and youth, with particular attention focused on World Youth Day 2027 which will be held in Seoul. The appeal will be presented to Pope Francis this month.



L-r: Iyana Turner-Vance, Pax Christi Young Adult Caucus leader Jessica Sun, Charlene Howard, Johnny Zokovitch, and Pax Christi Korea co-president Anselmo Lee in the Pax Christi USA Washington, DC office on July 19.

Hearing “Ephphatha,” continued from page 2

closely related and it is not uncommon for those who are unable to hear to also be unable to speak or to speak with difficulty.

Deafness, like blindness and other disabilities, in the Bible are often more than physical realities. Although Jesus rejects the idea that such disabilities are a result of one’s sinfulness, this doesn’t mean that those who have such disabilities are immune to sin. Remember the story of the paralyzed man who was carried by his friends on a stretcher and lowered through the roof into a house where Jesus was? Jesus scandalized the witnesses by proclaiming the man’s sins pardoned before healing his paralysis. The gospel makes no suggestion of the deaf man’s sinfulness, but physical, mental, emotional and spiritual well-being are very inter-related in the biblical world - and we continue to discover their interrelationship even now.

Because the gospel pericopes are never only about a story from the past, I think we are meant to reflect on our own deafness and speech impediments. In fact, I believe we are living in a world plagued with hearing problems, or better yet, listening problems, which often renders our speech unintelligible. On multiple occasions, Pope Francis has called us to be a listening church: he told us that we cannot be a teaching church if we are not first a listening church; without hearing our words of instruction are impaired. In the synodal process which the church is still learning, the first step and a step that must be repeated again and again, is the step of listening

How many parents have heard the refrain from their teenagers, “Are you even listening to me?” And of course the parents ask their kids the same question. The Church is often accused of having lots of answers to questions no one is asking. And when we wonder why have not been more effective at evangelizing, or in implementing our social teaching, or in proclaiming God’s mercy—it comes down to a certain deafness.

Think about our treatment of transgender persons or any of the LGBTQ community, we have pronouncements about intrinsic disorder before we have encountered the person, the story, the experiences that the person has and their longing for love and fulfillment.

As members of Pax Christi we know very well how the gospel of nonviolence goes unheard as we opine about what Ukraine or the Palestinians need in time of attack and war. People who are working for the prevention of suicide, who have designate this weekend as the time when churches are asked to discuss the issue and make a plead for people to find help, know that too often a person who takes their own life feels unheard, unloved, or even

invisible. While the single most effective way to prevent a suicide is for a struggling person to hear that he or she matters to somebody, that somebody cares about them. Our deafness sometimes creates the speech impediment that makes it difficult to say those basic words.

With touch and gestures for the deaf man, Jesus lets out the loud groan “*Ephphatha*” – “Be opened” – and of course the man’s ears were open and his speech impediment removed.

- Do we hear Jesus calling out “*Ephphatha*” when it comes to our unwillingness to hear the gunshots in classrooms and our inability to enact sensible gun control?
- Do we hear Jesus’ “*Ephphatha*” when people of color can’t seem to be heard in the legislature like when asking for the restoration of voting rights or in the courts when asking for justice or in society when asking for an even playing field?
- Do we hear Jesus’ “*Ephphatha*” when we are unable to hear the cries of those escaping violence, crushing poverty and death and pleading for asylum at our borders?
- Do we hear Jesus’ “*Ephphatha*” when it comes to people who are crying out for healing when medicine and healthcare are priced beyond their reach?
- Do we hear Jesus’ “*Ephphatha*” when we can’t hear the cries of wounded and dying children and suffering people in Ukraine, in Gaza, in Sudan, in Israel, in Myanmar, in Congo?
- Do we hear Jesus’ “*Ephphatha*” as we seem indifferent and unaffected by the expulsion of priests and sisters from Nicaragua?

Jesus is trying to place his fingers in our ears and to loosen our tongues.

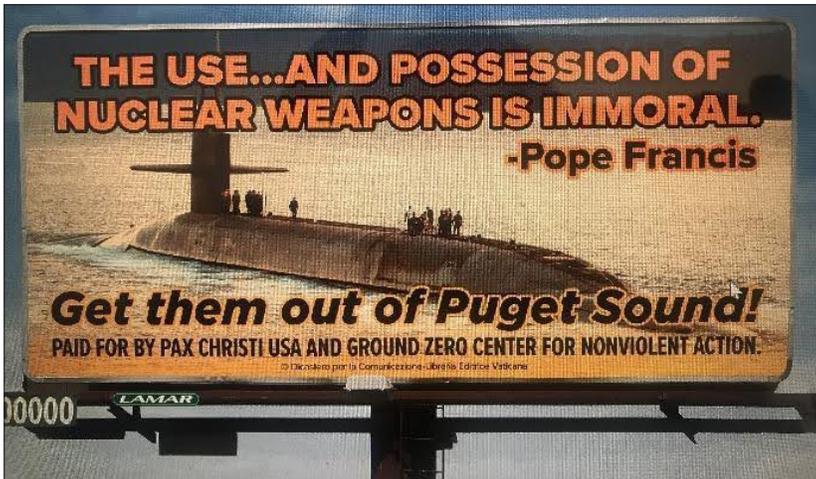
The prophet Isaiah described the saving action of Jesus in today’s Gospel centuries earlier when describing God’s vindication of the suffering and God’s recompense.

While the concepts of vindication and recompense may sound punishing, harsh and violent to our ears, God’s vindication is with healing love, with inclusion, with mercy.

Let us long for that healing strength and peace that casts out fear. Let us heed the instruction of the Apostle James and pay less attention to the man with gold rings and fine clothes, including the one from Mar-a-Lago, and pay attention to the ones in shabby clothes, whose voices are drowned in the noise, whose homes have been destroyed by bombs and armies, whose children have been silenced by AR15s.

May we hear the prophetic message to those whose hearts are frightened: ***Be strong, fear not, here is your God!***

On the line: Updates from local, state and regional groups



Pax Christi Pacific Northwest, with the support of Ground Zero Center for Nonviolent Action and Pax Christi USA, launched a billboard campaign starting on August 19 for a four-week period in Puget Sound, designed to raise awareness of the hazards and danger of nuclear weapons. The five billboards, which showed a message from Pope Francis declaring that “the use and possession of nuclear weapons is immoral,” are intended to remind residents of the massive nuclear arsenal in the Puget Sound region and the imperative to abolish nuclear weapons. (Lamar, the billboard company, wanted assurance that the quotation from Pope Francis was accurate and that it had been

approved for use. Pax Christi Pacific Northwest contacted and received written permission directly from the Vatican to post the pope’s quotation; the print at the bottom of the billboard contains the notation from the Vatican itself: © Dicastero per la Comunicazione-Libreria Editrice Vaticana.) Thanks to Deacon Denny Duffell and Pax Christi Pacific Northwest for organizing this creative and effective outreach effort.

In April, Jack Gilroy, an 89-year-old member of **Pax Christi Upstate New York** and Veterans for Peace, was arrested for trespassing after attempting to deliver a document entitled the “Five Broken Laws Letter” to BAE Systems in Endicott, New York; the letter urged employees to disavow themselves from arms transfers to Israel. Gilroy was tried in June at which time he stated: “This trial is not about me. It’s about a war industry that has become as acceptable to the American people as the building and use of crematoria in Germany. It’s a chance to educate the public that factories like BAE Systems, which people think make consumer goods like electric buses, rely on military contracts for 96 percent of its revenue.” He later added, “We’ve won even before the verdict comes back because we have exposed BAE Systems, the sixth largest Merchant of Death weapons manufacturer in the US and its number one in all of Europe!”



One of the principles of Kingian nonviolence is, “Accept suffering without retaliation for the sake of the cause to achieve the goal.” The power behind the suffering is the fact that it is self-chosen, demonstrates courage, and publicizes injustice. Thank you, Mr. Jack Gilroy, for your witness.



On August 8, **Pax Christi Little Rock** volunteers, along with families from Christ the King Catholic Youth Ministry, met at the St. John Catholic Center Campus to pack 332 backpacks with school supplies for all of the children at Washington Magnet School in Little Rock. The group enjoyed pizza and fellowship beforehand, completing the project in just a little over an hour.

However, hundreds of hours of work went into the purchasing and organizing of the school supplies prior to the “backpacking party.” In addition to providing the supplies in individual backpacks for Washington, requested bulk supplies were also sent to St. Theresa’s Catholic School and North Little Rock Catholic Academy. This was the

eighth year Pax Christi has organized this project and it gets better every year.

PCYAC Fulbright scholar to study music in El Salvador

Pax Christi USA congratulates Pax Christi Young Adult Caucus (PCYAC) member Anna Nowalk (she/her) from Arlington, VA for her Fulbright Scholarship award. Below, she describes her research, which will take her to El Salvador to study the music of the Salvadoran martyrs.

On the recent PCYAC retreat [August 23-25], we were asked what we were coming full of, what we carried with us in our hearts and minds as we began the retreat. I was, as I have been for the last several months, full of El Salvador. In mid-September, I'll be leaving to go to El Salvador for 10 months on a Fulbright award. During that time, I'll be researching music written about Catholics killed during and around the time of El Salvador's civil war [1980-1992].



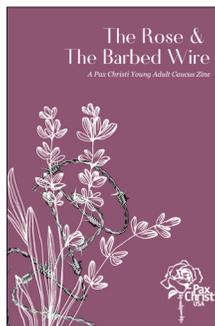
written about the martyrs, exploring the songs and how they function/ed: Did they act as eulogies? Journalism? Protest songs? Hymns? My project will culminate in an article with my findings, helping to fill the El Salvador-shaped hole in ethnomusicology, as well as hopefully painting a more detailed picture of the role of martyrs in El Salvador.

The 1970s saw the rise of liberation theology and its spread of El Salvador, which empowered impoverished people to stand up for their rights and other Catholics to support them in their fight. As a result, the Catholic Church faced repression and those working for justice in it found themselves targeted. St. Oscar Romero is one famous martyr of this time; there are many others, both members of religious communities and lay, well-known and anonymous. My research is based around music

Since receiving this opportunity, I've come to realize the responsibility that carrying out a project like this through this program brings. At the same time, I'm not sure what concrete good will come from it. And so, I move forward with the hope that G-d will use this work, somehow, to promote healing and peace. If nothing else, discussing these songs — and of course, singing as well — will renew the stories of these martyrs, stoking the fire of their memories, and opening the door for reflection on those who gave their lives for justice.

Pax Christi USA Young Adults publish inaugural zine

The Young Adult Caucus is excited to share the work of six young adult contributors and one editor in our inaugural issue of our new zine, "The Rose and the Barbed Wire"! Special thanks goes to editor Lasya Priya and contributors Eliane Lakam, Michael Martin, Vivian Mieta Ourand, Kasha Sanor, Jessica Sun, and Cathy Nguyen.



From the letter from our editor, Lasya Priya (from PCYAC leadership team and newly-elected National Council PCYAC representative):

Our desire in bringing this together is simply to share with you the voices and visions of young prophetic peacemakers, in the hope that you will be energized as you continue to work for peace and justice. We join the many before us who have committed themselves to following the radical and nonviolent way of Jesus of Nazareth. This collection of art, poetry, and prose that is included in this inaugural PCYAC zine invites us to explore the many ways young adults in our movement reflect on "What is peace? What is nonviolence?" Their contributions provide glimpses of nonviolence as the power of love in action resisting and

disarming violence; illuminating human dignity; and fostering reconciliation, justice, and peace. Our hope is that this collection inspires readers to deepen their own exploration of nonviolence as a spirituality, a way of life, a method for change, and a universal ethic.

A zine, a take on "magazine," is usually a small-circulation self-published work of original or appropriated texts and images. Historically, zines have provided community for socially isolated individuals or groups through the ability to express and pursue common ideas and subjects. For this reason, zines have cultural and academic value as tangible traces of marginal communities, many of which are otherwise little-documented. Zines present groups that have been dismissed with an opportunity to voice their opinion, both with other members of their own communities or with a larger audience. [Wikipedia]

You can download an electronic version on the Pax Christi USA website. We have a limited number of paper versions available. Please email Michelle Sherman at msherman@paxchristiusa.org if you would like a copy.

Pax Christi USA sponsors young adults at peace conference

In July, Pax Christi USA sponsored three young adults to attend the "Teresa of Ávila and Peacemaking in a Nuclear Age" conference at Saint Mary's College in Notre Dame, IN. The conference asked, "How can a 16th century mystic help people in the 21st century in making peace?" by integrating the work of Vilma Seelaus, OCD who believed that Teresa's spirituality could be a resource for creating peace today. PCYAC members Lasya Priya and Anna Nowalk, and young adult Gus Fuller (l-r in the photo below) were awarded scholarships to attend by the national office. Below are Anna and Gus's reflections.

Anna Nowalk: I got emotional at the beginning of the conference, when an attendee described St. Teresa of Avila as someone who was a friend to many of her friends, and someone who she was looking forward to learning more about. The conference reminded me of our continued relationship with the dead, a theme evident in the group's intentional study of both the writings of St. Teresa and the late Sr. Vilma Seelaus, OCD, the connections I was making to Henri Nouwen's writings on peace, and to the group's remembering of the peacemakers who came before us. This relationship isn't a passive thing, but can be active and yield great fruit. Of the "cloud of witnesses," the Catholic Catechism says:

"The witnesses who have preceded us into the kingdom, especially those whom the Church recognizes as saints, share in the living tradition of prayer by the example of their lives, the transmission of their writings, and their prayer today ... Their intercession is their most exalted service to God's plan. We can and should ask them to intercede for us and for the whole world." (CCC 2683)

Peace building - especially in the context of nuclear disarmament - is too big a task to do alone. How wonderful it is, then, that we not only have communities around us with which to work, but also the wisdom, friendship, and intercession of the saints.

St. Teresa of Avila, pray for us!

Gus Fuller: Despite being the only non-Catholic attending a conference on one of the most famous Catholic saints, I've found that St. Teresa of Avila and the nonviolent interpretation of her by Vilma Seelaus was amazingly refreshing for me. As a Quaker, I was at first uncertain how such an intensely monastic subject could be applicable to me and my own faith, and yet, through reading St. Teresa in preparation for this conference, and through academic and spiritual close readings of St. Teresa and Vilma, I felt like I have gained a richer understanding of peace, which for both Quakers and Vilma's St. Teresa is an inner and outer sanctification brought about by the believer's

humble and expectant waiting for God. More importantly, however, even as a Religion and Peace Studies major, it has completely changed how I think about the practice of religious peacemaking, which I believe to be the most important talent God has given God's creatures.

Before this conference, the only contemplative spiritualities and practices which I correlated with action were the ones which were linked with the active life from the outset, such as in Franciscan, Ignatian, and Quaker mysticisms. Through this

conference, however, I feel as if the speakers and fellow participants not only equipped me to see Peace (God) as that which is at the heart of the Interior Castle - that is, the inner place of mystical encounter with that of God within us, which one can only retreat into through a deeply prayerful and spiritually nuptial relationship with God - but that I feel finally able to read "pure contemplation" in the language of peace and peace in the language of "pure contemplation." This is because the conference organizers managed to transform, through Seelaus's concept of the "compost heap," which remixes a 16th century mystic into fresh fertilizer for the signs of our 21st-century times, into an unexpected peacemaker in an age of unexpected violence. In fact, I am not sure I can do otherwise than equate peace with contemplation anymore. I am convinced that nobody can have peace without prayer, nor prayer without peace. As Quakers have a deep-seated prejudice against "non-active," monastic spiritualities (although no faith tradition is more vulnerable to the accusation of quietism than Quakerism), this as a pretty significant paradigm shift for my understanding of contemplation/nonviolence; I am beyond grateful for Pax Christi in recognizing the transformative power of this conference, too.

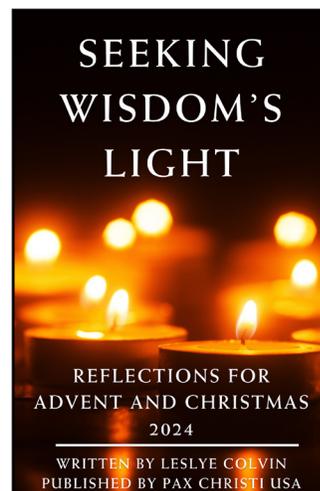


Advent 2024 reflection booklet available for pre-sale!

“*Seeking Wisdom’s light*,” this year’s Pax Christi USA Advent reflection booklet, is written by Leslye Colvin, a writer, spiritual companion, and contemplative activist. Leslye’s poetic and creative reflections will be a welcome part of your daily prayer life during the Advent season, and can lead to rich and meaningful sharing within your prayer community.

Leslye’s writings have been published by the Center for Action and Contemplation, National Catholic Reporter, and US Catholic. She weaves in her lived experience as an African-American Catholic from Alabama (home of the Muscogee) with a deep commitment to social justice.

The booklet is \$5.00 a copy (with further discounts of 10 percent on orders of 10-99 or 30 percent for 100+). Visit our website, www.paxchristiusa.org, or call the office, 202-635-2741, to order your copies now for yourself, your parish, religious community, ministry, school, and family to assure reception in time for the **start of Advent, December 1**.



Excellent for individual reflection and prayer or in small groups, this booklet is available for order now in the hard-copy print version. After November 18, the electronic version will be available as a download for your e-reader.

Welcome to Pax Christi USA, Daniel Francis!

Pax Christi USA is excited to announce that Daniel Francis joined our staff earlier this summer as our new Director of Development. So far, he’s had a busy few months, engaging with all levels of our movement, from colleagues at Pax Christi International to many of our individual donors, and diving in to assist with the national conference a few weeks ago.

Daniel is a development professional, with years of experience and successful fundraising with the Redemptorist Office of Mission Advancement. He served in ministry as a member of the Redemptorist community



-- and was an active Pax Christi member! -- before leaving the priesthood and marrying his wife Alice. They live in Tampa, Florida.

We are fortunate to have his executive leadership, writing, speaking, and ministry skills -- including his experience with health and wellness programs -- as part of the national office! We know Pax Christi USA supporters will enjoy getting to know Daniel

-- he has already demonstrated a deep sense of service and commitment to our members. **Welcome, Daniel!**

Pax Christi USA holds virtual national conference



On September 6-7, Pax Christi members from across the country logged onto Zoom to join in this year’s national conference. More than 200 people were online for the opening plenary, a conversation between **Charlene Howard**, Pax Christi USA’s new executive director, and **Jack Jezreel**, founder and executive director of JustFaith, about the prophetic role of the Church in the US today. Saturday’s plenary panel was an insightful and thought-provoking discussion with **Dr. Cynthia Bailey Manns**, a participant in the Synod on Synodality; **Ruben Garcia**, executive director of Annunciation House; and **Jordan Denari**

Duffner, a theologian and scholar of Muslim-Christian relations and interfaith dialogue. Participants then joined one of six breakout sessions on topics ranging from Kingian nonviolence; gun violence prevention; Palestine; war tax resistance; disavowing the Doctrine of Discovery; and the death penalty and restorative justice. We ended our time together with Mass and the **celebration of Mary Catherine Bunting as the 2024 Pax Christi USA Teacher of Peace**. Plus, we had a special announcement about next year’s in person conference, which will be held in Detroit, Michigan! Watch video recordings of the plenary and breakout sessions on our YouTube channel: www.youtube.com/@PaxChristiUSA. **Mark your calendars and join us in Detroit, July 25-27, 2025!**