



The Peace Current

Pax Christi USA

The national Catholic peace movement

Autumn 2025

Pax Christi USA holds national conference in Detroit





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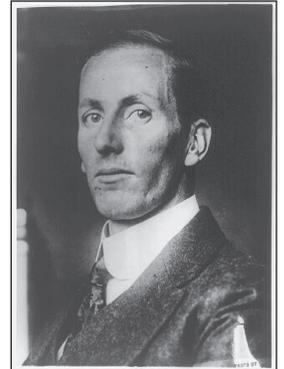
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New registry available for Catholic conscientious objectors

In keeping with a long tradition of Catholic war resisters, and in the midst of politically turbulent times, Pax Christi USA announces the launch of the **Ben Salmon No Just War Registry for Conscientious Objectors**, the first nationwide initiative to support young Catholics who, due to their faith-led belief in nonviolence, object to participating in war. This registry was first conceived by members of Pax Christi New York State out of a deep concern for the possibility of another military draft.

Named in honor of **Benjamin Salmon** (right), a Catholic layman and World War I conscientious objector who was imprisoned for refusing to fight, the registry provides a designated pathway for Catholics ages 16–35 to document and witness their conscientious objection to war in advance of any potential draft or call to military service.



Conscientious objection was a key focus for **Eileen Egan** and **Gordon Zahn**, Pax Christi USA’s founders. It was considered one of the four priorities of Pax Christi USA in the mid-1970s, and it was through the contribution of Pax Christi USA that support of conscientious objection was listed in the 1983 US bishops’ pastoral, “The Challenge of Peace.”

“As a Catholic Vietnam era conscientious objector, I applaud Pax Christi USA for establishing [this registry],” said **Mike Moran**, a member of Pax Christi Massachusetts. “My own experience of defending my application for conscientious objector status in 1969 to my local draft board, three Catholic World War II veterans who couldn’t understand how a Catholic could be a conscientious objector, even though I had letters of support from one of my parish priests and two of my teachers at the high school and college levels, both well known and highly respected Catholics in their communities, shows how helpful it would have been for me to have such a Registry as a resource. This initiative will ensure that no American Catholic is ever in such a vulnerable position again.”

The registry is open to residents of the US between the ages of 16 and 35 who are willing to sign a faith-based statement rejecting war as incompatible with the teachings of Jesus. Three signed copies of each Conscientious Objector Proclamation Document will be kept: one by the CO, one in their local parish with their sacramental records, and one on file at the Pax Christi USA national office in Washington, DC. In the event of another draft, these documents will serve as strong personal evidence of long-standing conviction in nonviolence.

Pastors, bishops, and friends of COs are also invited to participate by signing on as witnesses to statements, storing copies, and/or offering spiritual support to COs.

To learn more, or download resources for parishes and young people, visit: <https://paxchristiusa.org/2025/06/18/pax-christi-usa-announces-conscientious-objection-registry/> (or use <https://bit.ly/CO-registry>).

Community and commitment: National conference report

In late July, almost 300 peacemakers from across the country gathered in Detroit for Pax Christi USA's national conference, "Reclaiming the power of nonviolence in a broken world." The event officially started with an opening ritual and land acknowledgement of the area's Indigenous peoples led by **Mary Beth DiMarco**, **Andrea Pierce**, and **Carrie Hansen** (right), followed by a procession to celebrate the 73 state parties to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. **Maria Stephan** gave a powerful address on Friday evening on democracy, nonviolence, and resistance, and on Saturday morning **Jonathan Kuttab** spoke passionately on the crisis in Gaza and the struggle for Palestinian rights. Workshops were offered on Saturday on issues such as the conflict in Sudan; the dangers of unethical AI; legislative advocacy as people of faith; solidarity with immigrants; and much more. Music and prayers were led by **Vallimar Jansen** along with her husband **Frank Jansen**, with special guest **Santiago Fernandez**.



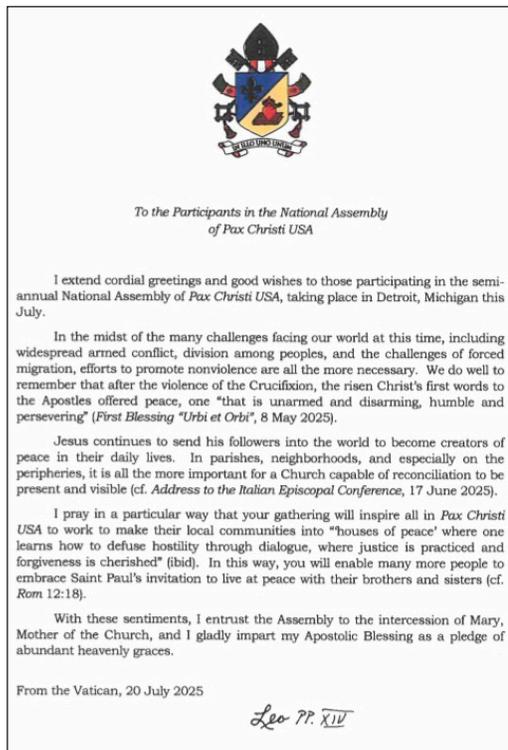
Pre-conference events on July 24-25 included tours of Detroit with the Pax Christi Young Adult Caucus (left), strategy meetings with state and regional Pax Christi leaders, and a screening of the documentary "The Palestine Exception," which was made possible in partnership with the Friends of Sabeel North America (FOSNA) Michigan chapter.

During the weekend, we celebrated **Meta Peace Team** as the 2025 Pax Christi USA Teacher of Peace, and bestowed the Eileen Egan Peacemaker Award on **Ralph McCloud**, former director of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops' Catholic Campaign for Human Development. University of Notre Dame Ph.D student **Joryán Hernández** received the first Sr. Dianna Ortiz, OSU Peacemaker Award (celebrating young adults under 40), and **Joan Tirak**, **Fr. Tom Lumpkin**, **Pat Valaer**, **Nick Mele**, and **Abigail Abysalh Metzger** were named our newest Ambassadors of Peace.

Saturday evening's entertainment was "Pax Christi's Got Talent," a wonderful showcase of Pax Christi members' singing, poetry, and more (including **Fr. Joe Mattern's** flute skills!)



On Sunday morning, we were honored that **Archbishop Ed Weisenburger** of the Archdiocese of Detroit was able to join us to celebrate our closing liturgy. After Mass, dozens of participants processed to the Spirit of Detroit statue for a **solemn prayer service of lament and reconciliation**, organized by Pax Christi Michigan.



One exciting moment was when we received a special message from **Pope Leo XIV**: "I pray in a particular way that your gathering will inspire all in Pax Christi USA to work to make their local communities into 'houses of peace' where one learns how to defuse hostility through dialogue, where justice is practiced and forgiveness is cherished."

Visit the Pax Christi USA Flickr account (www.flickr.com/photos/paxchristiusa/) to see photos from the weekend and the Pax Christi USA YouTube channel (www.youtube.com/paxchristiusa) to see several videos, including the plenary sessions from Friday night, Saturday morning, Saturday evening, and Sunday morning.

It was an incredible time of community – we were able to pray, laugh, learn, grow together, and strengthen our commitment to work together to resist injustices and to build up what is life-affirming, Gospel-centered, and joyful. Thank you to everyone who made the weekend possible!

Book review: *Atomic Pilgrim: How walking thousands of miles for peace led to uncovering some of America's darkest nuclear secrets*

By Michelle Sherman

Pax Christi USA national staff, Pax Christi Young Adult Caucus (PCYAC)



This new memoir from Pax Christi USA member **Jim Thomas** leads readers through his experience of the Bethlehem Peace Pilgrimage of 1982-1983, but it does not stop there. The book is also an indictment of the United States' addiction to violence and unwillingness to acknowledge the harm not only inflicted on the country of Japan, but also on the people of this country.

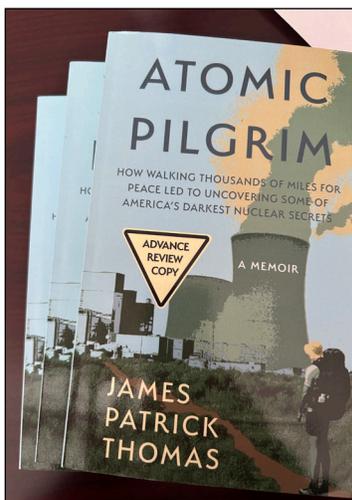
This book is many things: a moving memoir of the Bethlehem Peace pilgrimage, with descriptions and details of the participants; a historical account of the decisions, places, routes, and people along the journey; a narrative of the US's nuclear commitments, specifically in Hanford and the drastic effects on children who were exposed to radioactive fallout; and ultimately, an invitation and motivator to all those concerned with the future of our world and the imminent threat of nuclear weapons. Thomas' book is especially a powerful read as we collectively mourn the 80th anniversaries of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki this year.

Thomas provides readers with an overview and explanation of the two sections, which he refers to as "trails" of the book: "Trail one - Searching for peace from Bangor to Bethlehem" (which narrates the Bethlehem Peace Pilgrimage) and "Trail two - Pursuing the truth about Hanford" (which is the fruit of Thomas' meticulous research of declassified documents, online repositories, interviews, court transcripts, newspaper accounts, historical books, and 25 personal notebooks).

The author begins each of the 21 chapters with helpful titles that help the reader enter the emotional and physical journey. Several include the location, significant moments that occur there, and an archival photograph. For example, "Italy: The Fateful Decision, Papal Snub, and a Wedding" tells of the travels through Italy; the stress and community conflict while making the decision

to travel to Bethlehem through Turkey, Yugoslavia, or Egypt; the disappointing lack of acknowledgment from Pope John Paul II in Rome; and how the communal and joyful wedding of two pilgrims brought the community of Cassino together, thanks to "the generosity of strangers." The anecdotes and human portrayals in each chapter helped me experience all the emotions as Thomas describes them - from the freedom to "believe in peace and do something about it," to meeting both support and opposition along the way; to the interpersonal struggles, mishaps, and frustrations in the group.

The second part of the book accounts another pilgrimage, but one that spans decades of the author's quest for answers in his home state of Washington and where he continues to work for nuclear disarmament.



This book will be a welcome companion to:

- Fellow downwinders, who, like Jim Thomas and his sister, bear the effects and health challenges from being exposed to radioactive waste.
- Young adults and those newer to Pax Christi USA, who will encounter names in the larger peace movement, through brief introductions to people such as Thomas Merton; the community of Taizé; Jim Douglass; Fr. George Zabelka; *hibakusha* Setsuko Thurlow; Fr. Jack Morris, SJ; Archbishops John Wester of Santa Fe and Paul Etienne of Seattle; Daniel Ellsberg; and more.
- Campus ministers and spiritual directors, who accompany those who are seeking to "pray with their feet," and who have a grasp of the importance of international solidarity through pilgrimage.
- Ultimately, this book is for anyone who desires hope in our world today. In the dedication to the book, Thomas acknowledges three groups of people: his fellow pilgrims, his fellow downwinders, and "to the people this book will inspire to join the pursuit of the truth, to seek answers to the remaining questions, and all who persist in demanding a full accounting of what nuclear weapons have cost the human family."

Thomas' book is ultimately about hope even as the darkness is insurmountable - for as long as there are people like him who join others and collectively unmask the idolatry of war, the darkness cannot overcome the vision of the nonviolent Jesus who compels us to build a world where humanity and creation flourish.

Pax Christi USA Young Adult Caucus: Peace Pairs, year four!

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



Now in its fourth year, the program connects seasoned peacemakers, like Pax Christi USA's Ambassadors of Peace, on a one-to-one basis with a younger peacemaker (in their 20s and 30s). Our hope is that it strengthens and grows Pax Christi USA's "witness to reciprocal learning between the first-generation of our movement and upcoming generations." At the end of the year, each pair will produce a project to share with the wider community.

This year, we are happy to have 24 individuals who make up 12 pairs. Below are just a few of the insights from this year's cohort.



Amy Echeverria (paired with **Kathryn Blanco**): The beauty of being part of Peace Pairs is both the co-learning that happens but perhaps more importantly the co-creating that it inspires. The space for intergenerational discovery and dialogue encourages me to keep faithful and accountable to my life choice and spirituality that is nonviolence.

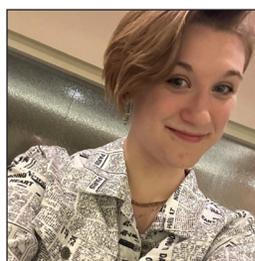


Tom Cordaro, Pax Christi USA Ambassador of Peace (paired with Mack Swenson): [In this experience,] I find that I am more a student than a teacher. I am grateful for the chance to get to know some of the life, dreams, fears and hopes of the young people who are participating in this program. I am thankful for the reminder that the future of building intergenerational solidarity within Pax Christi will not be through clever social media postings but through one-on-one relationships.

Rosemarie Pace (paired with **Kirin Taylor**): Being

chosen to be a Peace Pair seemed divine providence because Kirin and I already knew each other, and becoming a Peace Pair was a kind of happy reunion for us. Our monthly Zoom meetings are an opportunity to catch up with each other personally, professionally, emotionally, and spiritually, a way to support each other through the hopes and challenges of our lives.

Jo Clarke, Pax Christi USA Ambassador of Peace (*fourth from right in above photo*) (paired with **Dani Jiménez**): Being Dani's peace partner has been a joy and delight. We have had so much fun! It gives me great hope to see a young woman who has the same interests in peace and justice as I do. I wish I could find enough money to bring her to the US to study the history of art. She's an incredibly talented artist. Go to her website, <https://store.andhersaints.com>.



Mack Swenson (paired with Tom Cordaro): Peace Pairs has truly been a novel experience for me to receive guidance in my faith, morality, and more as I transition into post-college life. I look forward to my almost-weekly calls with Tom for clarity as well as thought-provoking questions.

Kim Redigan (paired with **Anna Nowalk**): It has been a joy walking with my peace partner, Anna, these past months to share, dream, discern, and reflect on God's presence in our broken and beautiful world, exploring what it means to embrace a faith that does justice in the midst of so much cruelty and oppression. Our meetings have created a sacred, liberatory space big enough to hold grief, wonder, and creativity as we discuss our shared vocation as peacemakers who follow the Nonviolent Jesus.



The applications for Peace Pairs 2026 will open in the late fall. For more information on the program, contact **Camila Perez**: cperez@paxchristiusa.org.

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

Pax Christi New Jersey Since late 2024, immigrant rights groups in New Jersey have mobilized against the reopening of Delaney Hall, a privately run immigration detention facility in Newark. Despite a 2021 state law banning private detention contracts, federal courts struck down the measure in 2025, siding with private prison giants CoreCivic and GEO Group. By May, Delaney Hall began detaining migrants under a 15-year, \$1 billion contract with the Trump administration.

The reopening triggered daily protests, vigils, and community organizing led by Pax Christi New Jersey along with Movimiento Cosecha, Faith in New Jersey, and dozens of allied groups. Organizers warn that Delaney Hall symbolizes a national escalation of immigrant detention, with the administration seeking billions in new funding to expand capacity.



Conditions inside soon matched the grim reputation of other ICE sites. Families reported loved ones denied medication, forced to sleep without bedding, and receiving irregular, inadequate meals. Faith leaders and community groups now maintain near-daily vigils, offering legal referrals, food, shade, and children’s supplies to visiting families.

What began as resistance to one facility has become a broader moral campaign. From prayer circles to art builds, activists insist they are keeping “Eyes on ICE” to expose abuses and defend the rights of immigrants. For them, Delaney Hall is not just a building—it is a battleground over the country’s future.

Community vigils at Delaney Hall are ongoing, and supporters are needed to provide presence, prayer, and solidarity. To learn more or connect with Pax Christi New Jersey, **contact Kathy O’Leary at kathy@paxchristinj.org**.

Pax Christi Northern California Kim Vanderheiden is developing a new strategy for engagement called **Active Love**. In the context of the violence we are witnessing and a response often framed as “nonviolence,” Active Love is a refreshing and timely approach consistent with a call for action in the Catholic social justice and peace movement. From Kim: “Active Love has been developing from three intertwined explorations: the connections between love and justice, the study of nonviolence, and moving with creative energy. Active Love uses ‘positive flow’ language, naming where you want things to go, rather than what you want to stop, because words have creative force.”

The program’s guiding principles are:

- **Love is based in relationship:** A community of justice is one in which beings are in healthy relationship with each other.
- **Violence separates relationships:** Violence includes physical harm, condemnation, accusation, systemic divisions, and building fear or contempt towards a being or group.
- **Restoration heals violence:** Self-opening, witnessing, accountability, compassion, reparation, and reconciliation are tools for justice and peace.
- **We are interdependent beings:** We are meant to work together in order to live our best lives. Interdependence, not independence, offers freedom.
- **Spirituality connects us:** Active Love is a spiritual practice, conscious of our relationship with each other and all Being.
- **Creativity expresses love and freedom:** Creativity is the generative expression of love. It can form a new path. It can change the story and vision of the collective culture.
- **Love is a practice:** Working through trauma, emotions, and conflict are part of growth. Acceptance of imperfect outcomes is a component of justice to self and others.

All organizers need an effective approach that creates cohesiveness within the group throughout the campaign. Multiple approaches or strategies should be explored. Active Love builds upon and expands several notable nonviolence strategies and should be part of the training for any peace and justice-oriented campaign. **Contact Kim for more information: kim@justiceconversation.org**

PCAN conducts nuclear weapons survey of US, Canada

By Linda Taylor, Mike Moran, and Peter Metz
Pax Christi Massachusetts

just a few weeks before the 80th anniversary of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

In the spring of 2024, PCAN (the Pax Christi New England Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons) was searching for a follow-up initiative to its successful online forum held the previous January. PCAN member **Dr. Ira Helfand**, who helped start and serves in the leadership of two organizations that have won Nobel Peace Prizes, said a staff member at the Vatican's Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development had recently told him the dicastery would welcome messages from North Americans on nuclear weapons.



We had more than 900 respondents, and we think their stories provide a rich and deep snapshot of how Americans are feeling right now about the issue. Addendum A, a compilation of a wide variety of work experiences from advocates, is especially compelling reading, and the Executive Summary is a good starting point.

PCAN members accepted this “invitation.” How could we collect such messages? We settled on an online survey.

Executing the survey was a team effort: The drafting team crafted questions to draw out both long-time advocates and “the Catholic in the pew.” The distribution team reached out to our nearly 70 co-sponsors from the January forum, others in our networks, and every diocese in the US and Canada. (Pax Christi USA distributed an invitation—we are grateful for the many members who responded!) Finally, the reading team lifted out the most relevant open-ended responses, and the draft team picked up to write the report.

The survey report was finalized in July and introduced at the Pax Christi USA 2025 national conference in Detroit,

Key findings include:

- Nearly half of the respondents have worked, or are willing to work, to achieve the global elimination of nuclear weapons;
- Almost 85 percent of them felt great concern over the existential threat of nuclear weapons; and
- There is significant potential to mobilize this action with effective leadership from Church religious and lay leaders; people have responded positively to teachings from **Pope Francis, Archbishop John Wester**, and Pax Christi.

We hope our work is a jumping off point for more discussion and illumination of the need to abolish nuclear weapons. We are working to distribute this report as widely as possible, and we look forward to more dialog with the dicastery soon.

The report is available at the Pax Christi Massachusetts website, www.paxchristima.org/pcannuclear-weapons-survey-spring2025/

Pax Christi New York State The play “Reap What You Sow, Don’t Lose Heart!,” written by Pax Christi member **Jack Gilroy** and **zool Zulkowitz**, tells the story of a mother and daughter wrestling with the meaning of war, patriotism, and conscience: Jennifer, a decorated Air Force pilot and drone operator, lost her Marine husband in Iraq. Now raising their teenage daughter Ellie, she struggles to reconcile her own service with Ellie’s growing admiration for peace activists she sees protesting outside the base. Their morning conversation spirals into a confrontation about history, morality, and the question that lies at the heart of Catholic social teaching: Can war ever be just?

“Reap What You Sow, Don’t Lose Heart!” is more than theater—it is a tool for movement-building. Rooted in the Gospel call to be peacemakers, it reminds us that the struggle for justice begins in our homes, our faith communities, and our conscience.

The New York City-based Rising Together Theater Company, a nonprofit producing original, short plays as “prompts” for civil discourse and civic engagement, invites groups to host the play as a fundraiser and membership-building event. Catholic peace communities, parish justice committees, and Pax Christi groups are encouraged to bring the performance to their area as a way of sparking dialogue, raising awareness, and sustaining the work of peacemaking. **For information on booking the show, contact zool@rt.theater.**

Celebrate the Catholic Nonviolence Days of Action 2025



Pax Christi International's **Catholic Nonviolence Initiative** commemorates the **Catholic Nonviolence Days of Action (CNDA)** each year from September 21 (the UN's International Day of Peace) to October 2 (the International Day of Nonviolence), a time to come together in solidarity to promote and celebrate nonviolence.

The CNDA -- this year with the theme "Building bridges for a nonviolent tomorrow" -- are aligned with Pape e Bene's **Campaign Nonviolence Days of Action**, the **Week of Prayer for Peace in Palestine and Israel**,

and the **Season of Creation**. Find resources on our website, bit.ly/CNDA2025.

Entering the night of peace: Reflections for Advent and Christmas 2025

This year's Advent and Christmas reflection booklet, "Entering the night of peace," is co-written by two young adults, **Cameron Bellm** and **Flora x. Tang**. Based in Seattle where she lives with her husband and children, Cameron (top photo) is a writer whose prayers, poems, essays, and devotionals link our modern lives with our ancient faith, especially at the intersections of creativity, spirituality, mysticism and activism. Flora (lower photo) is a doctoral candidate in theology and peace studies at the University of Notre Dame, where she writes and researches about post-traumatic theology, queer theology, and decolonial Asian theology.



Excellent for individual reflection and prayer or in small groups, the hard-copy version of the booklet is available for pre-order now for **\$5.00 each** (with discounts for bulk orders). After November 22, the electronic version will be available as a download for your e-reader. Visit our website, www.paxchristiusa.org, or call the office, 202-635-2741, to order copies now for yourself, your parish, religious community, ministry, school, and family to assure reception in time for **the start of Advent, November 30**.

The future of Pax Christi USA needs your support!

Please remember Pax Christi USA in your will, and consider being a monthly sustainer.

Contact Daniel Francis for more information:
dfrancis@paxchristiusa.org



Are you able to share your skills with Pax Christi USA?

We welcome volunteers who can assist with fundraising, grants and marketing, provide occasional legal advice, share photo or video skills at events, web design, or help with liturgies or prayer services. Or let us know how you feel called to share your gifts!

Please send your contact information to info@paxchristiusa.org