



The Peace Current

Pax Christi USA

The national Catholic peace movement

Autumn 2026 edition

Archbishop Wester named Pax Christi USA Teacher of Peace 2026

Earlier this year, the Pax Christi USA national council affirmed Santa Fe's **Archbishop John C. Wester** as the 2026 recipient of the Pax Christi USA Teacher of Peace award, our highest honor.

In 2022 Archbishop Wester, whose archdiocese is located in one of the key locations of the US nuclear industry, issued his courageous and ground-breaking pastoral letter "Living in the Light of Christ's Peace: A Conversation Toward Nuclear Disarmament." The first major statement on nuclear weapons by a US bishop since the 1983 US Conference of Catholic Bishops' "The Challenge of Peace," this document has renewed a sense of shared responsibility in US Christian communities.

"Archbishop Wester is a very deserving Teacher of Peace because he has used his teaching office to remind the Church that the danger of nuclear weapons is still real and something that Christians should resist," said **Bishop John Stowe, OFM Conv.**, bishop president of Pax Christi USA. "Recognizing the historic role of Los Alamos, within his archdiocese, Archbishop Wester considered it critical for him to denounce the continued development of the nuclear weapons first produced there."

In addition to his pastoral letter, in 2024 Archbishop Wester also established the Partnership for a World without Nuclear Weapons with **Archbishop Paul Etienne** of Seattle (another key location of the US nuclear industry) and the bishops of



Hiroshima and Nagasaki. He has participated in peace pilgrimages to Japan, most recently last year on the 80th anniversary of the US atomic bombings, and many consider him the *de facto* leader of the US American Catholic movement for the global abolition of nuclear weapons.

"Archbishop Wester is well-known and deeply respected as a tireless advocate for nuclear abolition, justice for immigrants, and an end to all violence," said **Charlene Howard**, executive director of Pax Christi USA. "He also has a warm, open, pastoral presence, and Pax Christi is proud to consider him a friend. We look

forward to continuing to work alongside him to promote greater understanding of the dangers of nuclear weapons and to spread the good news of Christ's peace."

"I am deeply grateful to Pax Christi for giving me the 2026 Teacher of Peace Award," said Archbishop Wester. "I must confess I feel somewhat embarrassed because I am more of a learner than a teacher when it comes to forging paths to peace. In particular, I have learned from the members of Pax Christi for many years now, especially since I became a member some time ago. I thank Pax Christi for this singular honor. May Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, give us all hearts filled with peace."

Celebrate with us in November!

The Teacher of Peace award ceremony will be held on **Saturday, November 21** at Trinity Washington University in Washington DC. We will also celebrate **Lauren Agresti** as this year's Sr. Dianna Ortiz Peacemaker award recipient (see page 3) at this event. Ticket information will be shared soon.

Visit the Pax Christi USA YouTube channel, <https://www.youtube.com/@PaxChristiUSA>, to watch an interview with Archbishop Wester and Pax Christi Young Adult Caucus member **Ryan DiCorpo**.



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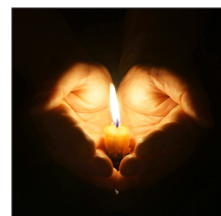
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Continuing our work 25 years after 9/11

The following is an excerpt from a reflection posted on the National Catholic Reporter website, part of its ongoing coverage of the 25th anniversary of the 9/11 terror attacks. Read the entire piece on the Pax Christi USA website at <https://tinyurl.com/25-years-after-911>.

By Bishop John Stowe, Bishop President
Charlene Howard, Executive Director

As bishop president and executive director of Pax Christi USA, the national Catholic peace movement, we are committed to promoting nonviolence and protecting human dignity in our families, neighborhoods, parishes, nation and world. We are carrying on the work and mission shaped over decades by bishops, religious women and lay leaders — work that was sorely tested by the tragic events nearly 25 years ago on Sept. 11, 2001. ...



A generation has passed since that terrible day in 2001, and US citizens and residents of Middle Eastern and South Asian descent along with practitioners of Islam still bear the weight of distrust and humiliation unjustly inflicted upon them. Iraq and Afghanistan are still struggling decades after attacks by the U.S. Our country is now governed by those who have entrenched an ideology which demonizes and dehumanizes Haitians, people whose first language is Spanish, individuals from countries in the global south, transgender people and nearly anyone who has been marginalized.

This corrosive fear of the other, tightly woven into the policy priorities of the current administration, has caused tremendous pain and suffering in the past 18 months: Our neighbors and families endure the chilling intimidation and accelerated crackdowns of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency, which is often supported by local police forces. The deployment of the National Guard to certain cities (currently Washington, D.C.; Memphis; and New Orleans) is seen as a trial run for possible more permanent military presence in the coming months or years. Civil liberties are eroding, freedom of the press is threatened and right-wing militias use excessive force and violence to foment terror.

After 25 years, our grief has not been eased or vindicated by years of war, or the unbounded, blasphemous increase in military spending. After 25 years, we still have an overabundance of weapons of war, including nuclear weapons which are an existential threat to God's creation. We watch in horror as shipping boats are attacked off the coast of Venezuela; the populations of Gaza and Sudan face genocide; and Yemen, Lebanon, Iran and too many other locations endure ongoing violence.

After 25 years, we mourn the opportunities for reconciliation and peace that have been lost; the individuals and families who have been harmed; the communities that have been divided; and the civil liberties and human rights which have been compromised.

But we continue to choose to move forward in faith. In the face of violence and despair, our belief in the message of the Resurrection compels us to act with justice and compassion. As Catholic people whose faith by its name is universal, we must unceasingly uphold the dignity and value of all human beings. ...

Lauren Agresti receives second annual Sr. Dianna Ortiz Peacemaker award

Pax Christi USA has named **Lauren Agresti** as the recipient of this year's Sr. Dianna Ortiz, OSU Peacemaker Award. Until recently, Lauren was Senior Counsel and Director of Legal Services for the Torture Abolition and Survivors Support Coalition (TASSC),

This new annual award, now in its second year, is given to a young adult (under 40) whose life and work exemplifies the commitment to justice, contemplative presence, faith-based activism, compassion, and prophetic, nonviolent witness of 2000 Teacher of Peace awardee and former staff member **Sr. Dianna Ortiz, OSU**, who died in 2021.



In selecting her for this year's award, the Pax Christi USA national council was impressed that Lauren's commitment to justice is not merely professional but also rooted in a faith. In 2025, a year of significant challenges, she led a team of five dedicated legal professionals to represent 105 survivors of torture and their families. In an environment where asylum eligibility is continuously narrowed, Lauren remained steadfast, securing with the help of her team 16 asylum grants that restored survivors' safety and reclaimed the futures of dozens of their family members.

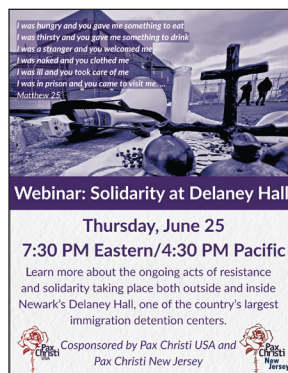
"Sr. Dianna survived torture and spent the rest of her life refusing to let anyone else face that darkness alone," said Lauren in response to the news that she had been named this year's award recipient. "To receive an award in her name, doing the work she helped make possible, means more to me than I can fully convey. The survivors I've represented rebuilt their lives after everything was taken from them, and they did so with a measure of courage and resilience I will never match. My job was to ensure the legal system heard their stories, so they could become the peacemakers our nation so desperately needs. I share this honor with them."

The award ceremony, when we will also celebrate **Archbishop John Wester** as this year's Teacher of Peace (see page 1), will be held on **Saturday, November 21** at Trinity Washington University in Washington DC. Ticket information will be shared soon.

Pax Christi USA webinars on immigration detention, "Magnifica Humanitas" & AI, and gun violence

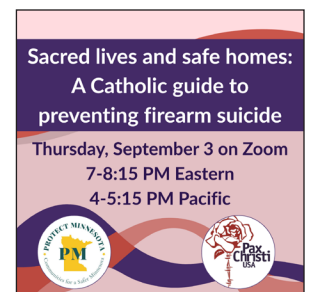
The video recordings of the following webinars are available on the Pax Christi USA YouTube channel, <https://www.youtube.com/@PaxChristiUSA>

On June 25, Pax Christi USA hosted a webinar on **the current situation at Delaney Hall in Newark, NJ**, the largest immigrant detention center on the East Coast. The focus was particularly on the role that faithful Catholics are playing in the solidarity movement in support of our neighbors who are being targeted by ICE. Speakers, including **Kathy O'Leary** from Pax Christi New Jersey; **Sr. Susan Francois**; longtime volunteers **Monica Aguilar** and **Sally Pillay**; **Fr. Alex Gaitan** from the Archdiocese of Newark; and nonviolence expert **Maria Stephan** shared about the activities at Delaney and discussed how the presence outside Delaney is a nonviolent witness to the country's inhumane and racist carceral system.



On July 14, Pax Christi USA held a webinar focused on Pope Leo's encyclical **Magnifica Humanitas**, its messages and lessons, and artificial intelligence. Panelists **Jessica Sun**, **Eli McCarthy**, and **Prasad Venugopal** discussed Catholic Social Teaching, just peace, war, labor and economic justice, education, and more.

Most recently, on September 3, Pax Christi USA's Gun Violence Prevention working group teamed with Protect Minnesota for a special online event focused on **preventing suicide by firearm**, with speakers **Kathleen Anderson**, **Melissa Borgmann**, and **Christian Bentley**, who addressed the Church's updated teachings on mental health and who provided practical, life-saving prevention strategies.



On the line: Local, state, and regional group updates

Pax Christi Northern California put on a special memorial event on Sunday, August 9, to commemorate the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the end of World War II. The event started with Mass at Sacred Heart Church in Oakland where the pastor wove together the contrasting themes of Jesus's message of peace with the unspeakable violence of the atomic bombs. After the Mass everyone came into the church hall for refreshments and to make red paper lanterns, complete with votive candles. After the lanterns were made each person came into the "peace garden" in front of the church where they hung their lanterns by our *hibakujumoku* tree (a tree whose seeds survived the atomic bomb) and joined in a prayer service for peace.



Pax Christi Florida is following up on the recent Pax Christi USA *Magnifica Humanitas* webinar (see page 3) with a statewide Zoom conversation. We are considering an in-person gathering in Daytona Beach, while recognizing that we may not currently have the momentum or personnel needed to make that gathering workable. We have also been encouraging advocacy for local and state resolutions supporting a just transition away from fossil fuels, speaking out against immigration raids, detention, and family separation, and continuing our opposition to executions and the death penalty in Florida. At the same time, we are discerning next steps for a leadership transition and looking for practical ways to involve more people in taking responsibility for specific projects and areas of work. For more information, contact **Michael Martin** at paxchristiflorida@gmail.com.

Pax Christi Maine is working on the last session in a series of "mini retreats" focused on "the Way to Peace - Living a Nonviolent Life." These gatherings nurture our spirituality of nonviolence, so critical during these times of horrendous acts perpetrated with no semblance of humanity, justice or accountability. Regional groups are studying **Pope Leo's Magnifica Humanitas**, a worthwhile sharing among members. For the anniversary of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, we networked with other peace/justice groups to demonstrate against nuclear weapons and war. The murder of **Johan Sebastian Guerrero** in Biddeford ME by federal ice agents on July 13 has shattered the lives of our immigrant neighbors and brought hundreds of allies into the streets calling for justice and accountability. We look forward to the work of the Pax Christi USA Immigrant Working group along with Catholics in Communion focused on developing comprehensive support for people imprisoned in detention centers across the country. We are trying to support, from a distance, the efforts of Pax Christi New Jersey and the others at Delaney Hall detention center. Their witness is inspiring. For more information, contact **Mary Ellen Quinn** at memquinn@peoplepc.com.

Pax Christi New York State held its annual gathering on August 14 at the St. Kateri Tekakwitha National Shrine. Keynote speakers were Pax Christi USA 2022 Teacher of Peace **Marie Dennis** and Pax Christi USA Ambassador of Peace **Tom Cordaro** who addressed the theme "Living Nonviolence in a Violent World." Marie focused on nonviolence from an international perspective, and Tom's focus was more domestic, but both had similar messages when it came to actions we can all take. They each offered a variety of recommendations and challenges: Read. Listen without being in control. Take time, take classes, and take photos at actions. Sign up. Show up—and don't be anonymous; report back. Stand up in solidarity with others, being who we are, both strong and weak.



Participants were also invited people to add the names of children killed in Gaza to a large shroud as part of the **Shroud of Gaza Project** sponsored by Doctors against Genocide and Priests against Genocide. (See photo.) The shroud signed by Pax Christi New York State will be added to numerous others from across the country to be exhibited at the UN in September and Washington, DC later in this fall. Read more about the Shroud of Gaza at <https://www.gazachildrenshroud.com/>.

Pax Christi Illinois commemorates 250-year experiment in democracy

On July 25, members of Pax Christi Illinois gathered at the Bicentennial Park in Joliet for a special Mass with the Eucharistic Prayer for Gospel Nonviolence, presided over by **Fr. Bob Colaresi, O. Carm.**, to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the founding of the United States. The theme was taken from the prologue of the constitution, “We the people, in order to form a more perfect union ...” It was a time of rededication to the founding principles and values of our democratic republic and to the teaching, life, passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.



Pax Christi Illinois regional representative **Nancy Oetter** said, “We come together at a time when many of us feel that our country is currently not living up to our ideals. We couldn't just wave the flag and feel comfortable. Yet 250 years of our republic needed to be recognized, so celebrating in an alternative way was important.”

Pax Christi USA's “Truth-telling for the 250th” campaign provides resources for prayer, study, and action, including a liturgical aid, statements from the working groups, and information on the upcoming four-session study circle on The Land is Not Empty by Sarah Augustine with the Indigenous Solidarity Working Group and PCART. See the Pax Christi USA website to access the materials and to find out more about the study circle, which starts September 15.

Pax Christi USA Anti-Racism Team gathers for retreat

The Pax Christi USA Anti-Racism Team (PCART) retreat, held in early July in Chicago, provided an important opportunity for reflection, relationship-building, and envisioning the future of anti-racism work within Pax Christi USA. The gathering provided space for relationship-building, surfaced areas for growth, and rekindled participants' depth of commitment and care to the work of PCART and our broader organization.

Several conditions will be particularly important moving forward: relationship, full participation, and shared formation and assessment. Strong relationships create the foundation for courageous dialogue and constructive engagement with conflict. PCART can provide leadership, but the work of becoming an anti-racist organization must be embraced across Pax Christi USA, including staff, National Council members, PCART members, local leaders, and the broader membership.



Book review: *He listened to us: A Maya witness to Bl. Stanley 'Apla's' Rother*

Review by Gwendolyn Loop
Pax Christi Young Adult Caucus

When we reaffirm our baptismal promises, the priest proclaims: "This is our Faith. This is the Faith of the Church. We are proud to profess it, in Jesus Christ our Lord." We respond "Amen" — yes, I agree, I believe.

Blessed Stanley Rother, or Padre Apla's, as he was affectionately named by the Tz'utujil Maya people, was assassinated in Guatemala in 1981. He has been declared a martyr, murdered "in hatred of the faith." Our baptismal faith is exemplified by this farm boy from Oklahoma, who served as a parish priest in Guatemala for 13 years and sacrificed everything in love.

He Listened to Us: A Maya Witness to Blessed Stanley 'Apla's' Rother presents a compelling perspective in the voice of author **Juan Ajtzip**, who served as director of a Catholic radio station for 24 years and was a close colleague of Padre Apla's. Juan's own insight is particularly precious, as an inspiring Catholic leader and a lifelong resident of Santiago Atitlán.

Juan's oral storytelling is crafted into an English text by **Dr. Gerald W. Schlabach**, professor emeritus of Theology at the University of St. Thomas in Minnesota.

Juan's recollections will draw readers into his own impoverished childhood, daily life in Santiago Atitlán, and the town's empowerment with assistance from the Catholic Mission of Oklahoma. We also receive an unprecedented view of Father Stanley's special charism to collaborate and identify with others.

Over the course of decades, Juan has participated in community efforts spanning religious, social, economic, and educational realms. These peaceful developments drew the suspicion of the Guatemalan army — "they seemed to think that if the people could organize to improve their lives, they could also organize to stand up against the injustices we suffered as *campesinos* [rural workers] and as Maya," Juan recounts.

The book recounts the brutality of the Guatemalan military and related paramilitary groups in the 1980s, the "prophetic criticism" of Padre Apla's, and his heroic decision to continue serving as pastor in solidarity. Juan also slowly discloses the martyrdom of Padre Apla's, and

the community's efforts to recover during a bleak period of state violence.

Juan believes that the nonviolent spirit and intercession of Padre Apla's allowed the community to peacefully mobilize against the Guatemalan military after a massacre in 1990. Miraculously, this resulted in the military base's departure from their area. *He Listened to Us* stresses the importance of *convivencia*, sharing life together. Again and again, this narrative emphasizes that we must live out the Gospels with love and forgiveness.

This book will be of interest to:

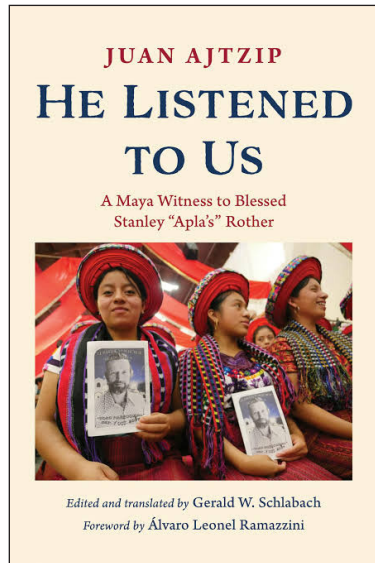
- Peacemakers searching for practical guidance and spiritual inspiration in our time of repression.
- People with a curiosity about indigenous movements, community building, human rights, international outreach, cross-cultural communication, or inter-American affairs.
- Anyone seeking to enliven their faith with love. In Juan's words: "If I do not understand my baptism, it is difficult to understand my neighbor. And if I do not reach out to my neighbor, I do not understand my baptism. To follow in the footsteps of Jesus is to fulfill his commandments as Christians, as peoples, until we are even reaching out to the international community, rejecting wars, and showing solidarity in order to build peace."
- For young Atitecos and Tz'utujiles "to remember what has happened in our beloved town, and never, ever, forget."

I've been submersed in academia for years, so at first, the circuitous Maya storytelling style of *He Listened to Us* took me by surprise. Readers searching for practical wisdom may also struggle with the juxtaposition of development versus cultural erosion, "without any obvious reconciliation," as noted in Dr. Schlabach's introduction.

Despite my initial hesitation, I've been blessed to carry this unique hagiography with me for months, turning it over in my mind. Eventually, Blessed Stanley and the people of Santiago Atitlán almost seemed to stand before me as a "great cloud of witnesses."

This book has helped me to not run away from people who need me. I started working as an attorney this past year, dedicating myself to immigrant victims of violence.

Continued on page 8



Updates from Peace Pairs and Pax Christi Young Adult Caucus (PCYAC)

Peace Pair Alexa Bituin and Sr. Pegge Boehm, PVBM

Alexa: Two years ago, as a fairly new member of PCYAC, I signed up for the Peace Pair program. I was paired with **Sr. Pegge** due to our shared interest of the abolishment of the death penalty.

Earlier this year, I finally had the opportunity to meet and visit Sr. Pegge in person. I flew to Sioux Falls for Holy Week and was able to attend the annual Good Friday prayer vigil outside the state penitentiary on April 3. It was freezing cold, and since the prison is on a hill, the winds were even more intense. We prayed, sang, meditated, and shared a deep sorrow for Briley Piper, the only man on death row in South Dakota. We prayed for the victims and their families.

When I was at the vigil, I thought about how Good Friday commemorates the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ, and how he was also a victim of the death penalty. During our first meeting, Sr. Pegge had asked me why I was interested in death penalty abolishment, and I thought back on a video I had watched of a man serving life in prison getting baptized. When we condemn someone to death, we're taking away their autonomy to pursue eternal life. I've learned so much about the shortfalls of the death penalty, such as institutional racism, faulty evidence, and the possibility of executing innocent people. I am grateful for the Peace Pair program because I'm always learning something new and I'm hopeful for a better future.



Peace Pair Kirin Taylor and Rosemarie Pace



As part of the Peace Pairs program **Kirin** and **Rosemarie** have recorded a podcast – an intergenerational conversation on the concept of "home." Together, they explore what home means, and how holding a justice-seeking identity amid the current political climate shapes their sense of belonging in the world. Through the conversation, they name the cognitive, social, and political challenges of that work. Along the way, they discuss pressing peace and justice issues such as displacement and militarism, and offer listeners concrete information on conscientious objection as an immediate point of action. Listen to their podcast here: <https://tinyurl.com/Kirin-Rosemarie-podcast>.

PCYAC member Sam Rios on facing jail after civil disobedience

*In the previous issue of the Peace Current, Pax Christi USA Young Adult Caucus member **Sam Chawla-Rios** shared about his experience participating in the annual Sacred Peace Walk held in Nevada over Holy Week. The peace walk included a nonviolent civil disobedience action at Nevada National Security Site; as a result of his participation in that action, Sam has been sentenced to four days in jail. We share his brief reflection on this new experience here:*

I would be lying if I said that I'm not scared of going to jail. The reality is, a small part of me wishes I hadn't told the judge that I would rather serve jail time than complete community service hours for my civil disobedience at the Nevada National Security Site this past Good Friday. That small part of me is guided by fear and self-preservation. What will happen to me in jail? How will this affect my future? As a minority in this current political climate, can my safety be guaranteed? Why expose myself to such risk?

But the deeper part of me, the part guided by love, makes it abundantly clear that this intentional surrender is about something bigger than myself. I have seen how the issues of nuclear weapons, environmental destruction, the horrors of drone warfare, and the destruction of Indigenous land are all interconnected injustices. With this awareness, I am compelled by love to act to the utmost of my capacity for the healing of Earth and of all life. And though, as I write this, I do not yet fully understand why jail must be an essential part of my particular sacred duty, I know one thing for certain: I must never let fear get in the way of what love asks me to do.

So, on October 13, I will surrender myself to the Nye County Detention Center. But even truer still, I will make my unconditional surrender to the healing power of love.

Book review, continued from page 6

It's been hard to get up in the morning sometimes, knowing that most interactions will be filled with fear and trauma.

I'm still trying to figure out how to practice *convivencia* within my professional duties, but this book has helped me to further identify with the vulnerable and to deepen my own sacramental life. More and more, I've been running to the Eucharistic chapel in my workplace, regaining my footing, and then returning to my office to try again.

As Juan advises: "How to make change? A young person has to do more than follow the changing fads that attract

them. They need to learn how true Christians have worked before, and little by little to find a better way. How can we have good communication with others, practicing the Gospel that God wants of us? Not through divisions, but by understanding the life of the people within the culture that already exists."

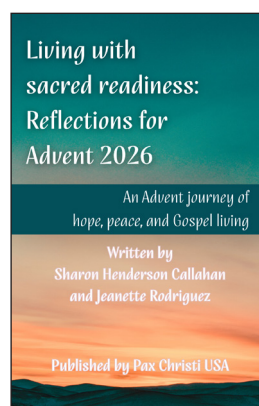
Gwendolyn Loop is a Catholic Worker and an attorney currently working in immigration law as a Notre Dame Shaffer Public Interest Legal Fellow. She was a recipient of the Polking Family Fellowship from the de Nicola Center of Ethics and Culture at Notre Dame, and she strives to uphold the dignity of life in the *Imago Dei*.

Order now! "Living with sacred readiness: Reflections for Advent 2026"

Pax Christi USA is excited to announce the reflection booklet for Advent 2026: "Living with sacred readiness: Reflections for Advent 2026" featuring daily and Sunday reflections written by theologians **Sharon Henderson Callahan** and **Jeanette Rodriguez**. Advent starts Sunday, November 29!

"In this guide we ... engage conversion by turning our attention to God's activity in our lives. We rejoice with the expressions of love that this covenant promises and delivers. We enter the presence of a vulnerable child with a faithful family and seek to be food for the world even as the child in the manger offers food for our lives. We continue the celebration of this season through multiple feasts until we join the wise people who saw the star – the light of the world and opened God's revelation to all peoples in all ages. ..."

The booklet is **\$5 each**, with discounts of 10 percent on orders of 10-99 or 30 percent for 100+. Order now for yourself, your parish, community, family, and friends from the Pax Christi USA website.



A special note from Daniel Francis, our Development Director



I wanted to share something that deeply moved us. We recently learned that **Fr. Richard M. Friedrichs**, from the Diocese of Providence, RI, passed away earlier this year. He remembered Pax Christi USA in his estate with a transformative gift!

Though we never had the privilege of meeting Father Richard personally, his gift speaks to the lasting impact of Pax Christi's mission. We had no idea he had made this provision, which makes his generosity all the more touching. Father Richard's unexpected gift will strengthen our work for Gospel nonviolence and peace for years to come. ***His example reminds us that we can all leave a lasting mark on the movement we cherish.***

If you've already included Pax Christi USA in your estate plans, we'd be deeply grateful to know so we can express our thanks during your lifetime. If you're considering a legacy gift, I'd love to discuss options that work for your situation—whether through your will, as a beneficiary designation, or through a Required Minimum Distribution (RMD) or Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD) from your retirement accounts. **Please feel free to call me at 202-635-2742 x2 if you'd like to explore possibilities or have questions.**

Father Richard's witness continues to inspire us. May we all find ways to ensure the work of peace endures.