CHRISTMAS APPEAL 2026

Do Not Be Afraid

Peace on earth is the bravest work we do, and we do it together.

Dear friend,

It was more than I had bargained for. As a missionary priest in Peru, I was blessed to step into the world of ancient Aymara culture on the shores of Lake Titicaca. I learned a lot about community solidarity and resistance. But by the time I felt I had to get out, fear sown by the Shining Path terrorism and government counterviolence had turned into trauma. I was proud to have served people on the margins and in the human rights office. We helped people like Sixto achieve justice after being robbed and tortured by local police. Instead of shrinking in fear, a whole community rose up to support him and demand accountability.

When I came home, fear and trauma came with me. Over time, much of the healing came with reconnecting with friends and family and especially with communities like **Pax Christi** where I found support and eventually renewed energy for the work of peace.

That is why I am writing to you. **Pax Christi USA is a community of people who choose peace over fear**, and your support helps make it so.

I proudly served on the National Council because I have seen what this movement does when ordinary people show up. It gathers people who believe that nonviolence is more powerful than violence, and it equips them to witness to it, in parishes, on campuses, and in public squares.

This year the need is urgent. Our members have gathered in prayer outside ICE headquarters and detention centers, standing with immigrant neighbors, much as I stood with the families of Cristo Rey parish where I served for 26 years, and where we declared ourselves a sanctuary church. In late February, when bombs fell on Iran, Pax Christi USA condemned the attack and called our leaders back to diplomacy. Pope Leo XIV has called the Church toward an unarmed and disarming peace, and in concert with that, we established and promoted the Conscientious Objection Registry. The response has been inspiring. **The world has plenty of voices for fear. It needs more for peace.**

Will you make a Christmas gift of $100? That amount would fund materials and programming for the Peace Pairs initiative, which connects seasoned peacemakers with younger activists for mutual co-learning and accompaniment across generations. If another amount is right for you, whether **$35, $50** or **$250**, or more if possible, *please give what you can*. Every gift supports:

- Training in Gospel nonviolence
- Public witness against war and injustice
- Resources for parishes and communities
- The formation of young peacemakers who will carry this work forward

At Christmas, the angels' first words were "Do not be afraid." I have experienced that acting together for peace and in the cause of justice overcomes fear, and I believe it more deeply now than ever. **Working for the "Peace on earth" the angels proclaimed is not naive. It is the bravest work we do, and we do it together.**

Please make your gift today. Even **$25.00** goes a long way. Visit www.paxchristiusa.org, scan the QR code below, or call us at 202-635-2741.

With gratitude and prayers for a blessed Christmas,



Fr. Fred Thelen
Former Pax Christi USA National Council Member
Chairperson, Pax Christi Michigan

P.S. Gifts postmarked or made online by December 31 will also count toward your 2026 taxes.

P.P.S. This year I wanted to put my own gift to work for young people. I helped launch the *Blessed Are the Peacemakers* Essay Invitational, which invited Catholic high school and college students to write about peace, nonviolence, justice, and the dignity of immigrants, and honored the best six with awards. If one gift helped open a door for young writers; imagine what we can do together. **Your gift will help us support the formation of the next generation of peacemakers.** For pictures and more about my time in Peru, see *Terrorized: A Memoir of Trauma, Healing, and Coming Home* at www.fredthelen.com.

Pax Christi USA's Lent 2027 *Reflections* will be available soon; this year's booklet is written by a collective of members of the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative in the US. You can pre-order yours online today. ***Ash Wednesday is February 10.***