

Pax Christi USA

NATIONAL CATHOLIC PEACE MOVEMENT

The Challenge of Peace

Twenty-five years ago this spring, the U.S. Catholic Bishops issued their historic pastoral letter, *The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response*. A year earlier, Pax Christi groups around the country had participated in a reflection process around the pastoral's second draft, providing input and critique to the developing document. Upon the pastoral's release on May 3, 1983, PCUSA published a study guide to encourage serious examination of the pastoral and the widest consideration of the moral and policy dimensions of both the document and its historical moment.

Twenty-five years later, the core messages of *The Challenge of Peace* deserve close scrutiny. How, for instance, do the teachings of that moment offer either insight or indictment to us today? Has the arms trade been abolished? Has nuclear deterrence served, as the bishops intended, as a short-term means of stability in order to achieve nuclear disarmament? Are conscientious objectors and those who dedicate themselves to nonviolence celebrated and supported by the Church today? Are our parish education programs infused with the social teachings of this pastoral and its affirmation of nonviolence as an authentic Christian witness?

The "peace pastoral," as it came to be known, had an enormous impact on the development of Pax Christi as a movement of conscientious Catholics who took seriously its pronouncement: "Peacemaking is not an optional

commitment. It is a requirement of our faith. We are called to be peacemakers, not by some movement of the moment, but by Jesus."

In many ways, we in Pax Christi bear the burden of ensuring that the peace pastoral's message remains a living teaching. Many years have passed and the global context has greatly transformed. Globalization has replaced the bi-polar superpower standoff. The interdependence of a globalized world has revealed new challenges to justice and peace. A "war on terror" has replaced the Cold War as the frame in which national security is sold today. The privatization and commodification of war-making have given rise to private firms employed at extravagant rates to kill and torture in the name of security. Preventive war-making has become the national security policy of the United States, defying any presumption against war envisioned by the pastoral. And as we mark twenty-five years since the pastoral's unequivocal condemnation of nuclear war, the United States is embarking on the greatest reinvestment in its nuclear war-fighting capability since the Manhattan Project—including upgrading and replacing every nuclear warhead in our arsenal as a means to ensure their usability for generations to come.

Certainly "our response" to "God's promise" has fallen far short over the years since the pastoral's publication. Pax Christi USA seeks to reenergize the commitment to

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Finally, I want to thank you for your financial support of Pax Christi USA. Your contributions are the foundation on which we base our ability to provide ongoing resource and event development, representation in key forums, and coordinated collaboration with partner groups in the Church and wider social justice movement. Your help also ensures ongoing development and support for Pax Christi at the local level and in facilitation of the work of Pax Christi regions around the nation. Consistent, reliable giving on your part strengthens our work and gives us the confidence to push forward with a bold agenda to transform our Church and our world. The best way to express your confidence in this work right now is to join our Sustainers' Circle for Peace, committing to give a monthly contribution (as little as \$10/mo) which is charged directly to your credit card. I encourage you to join by contacting Tessa Ryker at tessa@paxchristiusa.org or 814-453-4955, ext. 238.

If you cannot become a Sustainer at this time, I ask you to please consider a gift to Pax Christi USA beyond your regular membership dues. Simply write a check today and return it with the enclosed Pursuit of Peace Fund slip to Pax Christi USA. You can also give via our secure Web site. Whatever way you choose to give, please know that your contribution is deeply appreciated and will ensure Pax Christi's ability to continue to be a voice for nonviolence, justice, and peace in our violent world.

Saint Augustine says that of the three theological virtues, hope is the greatest. Faith only tells us that God is, and love only tells us that God is good, but hope tells us that God will continue to work God's will. "And," Augustine continues, "hope has two lovely daughters: anger and courage. Anger so that what must not be may not be; courage so that what should be can be." Let us all live in the hope of God's promise while finding effective ways to channel our anger and tap into the courage that will ensure that God's promise of peace will find nurture through our ongoing efforts.

In peace,

Dave Robinson, Executive Director, Pax Christi USA

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PEACEMAKING:

Day by Day

"To choose the road to discipleship is to dispose oneself for a share in the cross. To be a Christian, according to the New Testament, is not simply to believe with one's mind, but also to become a doer of the word, a wayfarer with and a witness to Jesus."

- *The Challenge of Peace*,
Par. 276

* This quote and hundreds more are available in Pax Christi USA's *Peacemaking Day by Day*, Volume I. To order your copy today, visit our Web site, www.paxchristiusa.org, or contact our sales department for more information at 814-453-4955, ext. 231 or sales@paxchristiusa.org.

(Continued from pg. 1) peacemaking that the pastoral called "a requirement of our faith" by marking its anniversary in several ways. Pax Christi USA is calling for "Ten Days in May" for us to remember and recommit to peacemaking and to encourage sincere discernment over the challenges of peace today. In mid-March, our Web site will have prayer and worship resources to help you plan a peace mass, prayer service, or public vigil between May 2 and May 11. Organizing resources for holding a parish- or community-based event to highlight the challenges of peace today will also be available.

Most importantly, enclosed in this membership mailing is a sign-on statement, "God's Promise Endures: The Challenge of Peace Today." I ask you to prayerfully consider adding your name to this statement for publication, and I ask you to circulate it to your friends, family, colleagues, and community members. It is a centerpiece of our effort to reinvigorate our Church's commitment to peacemaking and it lends itself to a variety of uses for education, prayer, and action in your parish, school, and community.

Even as we remember the peace pastoral, a deadlier anniversary also fills our minds and breaks our hearts at this time. The occupation of Iraq enters its fifth year this month. Events are scheduled in Washington, D.C., as part of the Christian Peace Witness, March 7-8, including a Catholic Mass for Peace on Friday morning organized in part by Pax Christi USA. One of several Christian worship services being held simultaneously that morning, the witness will join all denominations on the Mall in Washington, D.C. that afternoon for an ecumenical service for peace and an end to the occupation. Visit our Web site, www.paxchristiusa.org, for details and ongoing alerts and resources for events in your community.

Pax Christi USA members and local groups continue to offer a living witness to the pastoral's call to peacemaking. This year we face a national election and a crossroads in the tragedy that we have unleashed upon Iraq. The Bush Administration is currently negotiating long-term basing rights with the Iraqi government that would keep U.S. troops there for at least the next five years and thereby bind the next president to maintaining the occupation. Keep an eye on our Web site for ongoing prayer, study, and action suggestions and for ways to engage candidates on their commitment to ending the war and occupation of Iraq.

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Visit www.paxchristiusa.org
for more educational and
spiritual resources for peace.

PAX CHRISTI USA



This newsletter is printed on paper
containing 30% post-consumer waste.

Lent and Easter



Stations of the Cross
By Megan McKenna, Ph.D.
Peace and justice themes

presented through this popular devotion, recognizing that the cross is not personal, but universal and communal. Scripture readings, reflections, and responses.
Item No. 558-131 \$3.50 + s/h

Our Prayers Rise Like Incense
Edited by Cindy Pile



SPECIAL LENTEN PRICE!! This book offers a variety of liturgies: 27 for anniversaries of sacred dates (e.g., International Conscientious Objection Day, Good Friday, Earth Day) and 25 addressing issues such as gun violence. A wonderful gift for anyone in ministry, religious ed, or small faith-sharing groups.
Item No. 542-413 \$10.00 + s/h (thru Easter)



Go Into All the World Greeting Card

Art by Mary Ann Lederer
Full-color artwork of the beauty of God's creation. Inside: "And Jesus said to them, 'Go into

all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation.' (Mark 16:15) Alleluia! May the peace of the risen Christ fill our hearts and world." Perfect for the Easter-season or can be used year-round.

Item No. 535-800 \$1.25 each or \$10 for packet of 10

Earth Day and Month of Mary

Prayer for Global Restoration
By Michelle Balek, OSF

EARTH DAY IS APRIL 22! A prayer of reverence for all creation, an invocation asking that we may know we are irrevocably part of the web of life, asking for forgiveness for our ignorance, asking for our own radical transformation into God's kin-dom.

Item No. 540-291
\$0.50 each; \$10/100; \$80/1,000 (+ s/h)



Mary, Wellspring of Peace: A Contemporary Novena

By Joan Chittister, OSB

MAY IS THE MONTH OF MARY! This small booklet "offers and examines the spiritual resources, the attitude, the actions found in the peacemaker Mary. And it suggests how we too can become 'a sign of God.'" Nine days of prayer to Mary, updated suggestions on "How to Walk with Mary," and a Marian litany.

Item No. 539-081 \$3.00 + s/h



The Convention for the Common Good

July 11-13, 2008

**The Sheraton Hotel - Philadelphia City Center
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**



"The whole reason for the existence of civil authorities is the realization of the common good. . ." Pope John XXIII, in *Pacem in Terris*, #54

Pax Christi USA is joining with NETWORK: A Catholic Social Justice Lobby, Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good, and other national Catholic organizations this summer to host *The Convention for the Common Good*. The convention aims to engage in substantive discussions about the future of the nation, the role of government, and the pursuit of policies designed to strengthen the common good. People across the country will engage in a variety of ways leading up to the convention so that we may come together to draft a "Platform for the Common Good." During this season of political dialogue and debate, it is imperative that we raise our voices, educate, and organize. Join us this summer in Philadelphia! More information to be posted on the Pax Christi USA Web site soon!

SPECIAL LEAD-IN EVENT TO THE CONVENTION:

Join Pax Christi USA for a very special event on **Thursday, July 10**. With speakers, worship, music, and more, we will gather our movement before the convention. More information soon! Plan on coming early for this special event!

Hundreds of Groups Complete the PPI Process

Washington, D.C.—During an 18-month period ending on December 31, 2007, Pax Christi USA received hundreds of responses to the reflection booklet, "Called to Something New: The People's Peace Initiative." The booklet was composed of three sessions designed to solicit the input from Catholics throughout the United States on the challenges of peace today in our communities and throughout the world.

"The response we received from groups who participated in the process was truly extraordinary," stated Dave Robinson, Pax Christi USA Executive Director. "We believe that the input received reflects a large segment of the U.S. Catholic Church, including folks from a broad range of geographic regions, races and ethnicities, age groups, and economic classes."

In 2003, on the 20th anniversary of the U.S. bishops' peace pastoral, Pax Christi USA issued an invitation to national Catholic organizations and ministries to join in developing a grassroots process of reflection that would lead to the writing of a "people's peace letter." Over 20 national Catholic organizations signed on to the effort and promoted the booklet to their members.

The next step in "The People's Peace Initiative" is to finish categorizing the responses from the grassroots level and to share them with a writing team, according to Robinson.

"Staff members at Pax Christi USA are reading through all of the responses and helping to categorize the different perspectives, issues, and insights offered by groups," stated Robinson. "That information, along with the responses, will be passed on to a writing team that will draft a document meant to articulate the challenges of peace today."

Robinson confirmed that the "people's peace letter" will be published during the 25th anniversary year of "The Challenge of Peace," which begins in May 2008.

"Most of all, Pax Christi USA just wants to thank all of our local and campus groups, Pax Christi regions, the membership of our sister organizations who have endorsed this effort, and Catholic groups from around the country who took this process to heart, reflecting for all of us the longing for peace in our age," Robinson said.

The response of hundreds of local, regional, and national groups who completed the People's Peace Initiative process booklet is "extraordinary" grassroots input, says Dave Robinson, PCUSA Executive Director.



Dear Pax Christi members, regions, and local and campus groups,

I want to extend a special thanks to all of you who participated in the small group process for "A People's Peace Initiative." We were overwhelmed with the beauty, depth, and poignancy of your responses. All of the responses are being read now—and categorized—by our staff to be sent to the national writing team for the "people's peace letter" later this year. We will keep you updated as things progress. Again, THANK YOU!

In Christ's peace,

Dave Robinson

May 3, 1983, will always be a seminal moment for Pax Christi USA. On this date the United States Catholic Bishops published "The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response," more commonly called "The Peace Pastoral." It was a strong, prophetic statement during a time when our own country was enthralled with its military power and engaged in an arms race spurred on by the Cold War with the Soviet Union. The peace pastoral both affirmed the work that Pax Christi USA had undertaken and worked for since 1972 and encouraged us to move even more boldly into the future with our aim of making peacemaking an imperative of our Church.

This year, we commemorate 25 years since that document was written. More than ever, we are being called to proclaim the gospel message of peace as the heart of our Church's teaching. Included with this newsletter is the new sign-on statement commemorating "The Challenge of Peace," calling for a revitalized commitment to peace from our Church during this devastating time of war and violence.



Pax Christi Metro DC at a rally in Washington DC

A Call for Prayer, Study, and Action

In addition to publishing the sign-on statement on the 25th anniversary of "The Challenge of Peace," in the *National Catholic Reporter* and elsewhere, Pax Christi USA is calling on its local and campus groups, parishes, religious communities, and individual members to pray, study, and act for peace as part of our "Ten Days in May" peace campaign.

Beginning Friday, May 2, the eve of the anniversary, and continuing through Sunday, May 11, we will pray individually and communally, in Mass and in small prayer circles, both for peace in our world and for a stronger commitment to build and proclaim peace from our Church; we will educate within our parishes, schools, dioceses, and small groups on the rich Catholic heritage of peacemaking so that every Catholic in the United States will understand that peacemaking is a gospel imperative; and we will act for peace in our world, leafleting at our churches, marching in the streets,

or standing vigil at federal buildings and military recruitment centers throughout our communities. We ask individuals, groups, and regions to consider what part they might play in this effort to witness for peace during the "Ten Days in May." We will post ideas and resources for prayer, study, and action on the PCUSA Web site beginning in mid-March (click on the button that says "The Challenge of Peace: Ten Days in May"), and we ask that you send us ideas and resources that you are planning in your own communities (send to Johnny Zokovitch at johnnypcusa@yahoo.com).

Some Initial Ideas to Consider:

- use the sign-on statement as a template for letters to the editor to your local and diocesan newspapers
 - contact or meet with your local religion editor asking them to do a story on the 25th anniversary of the peace pastoral and the context of the nation's current involvement in war
 - use the sign-on statement as a letter addressed to your bishops, priests, religious education directors, and others who teach and preach asking them to include the theme of peace in their homilies, lessons, etc. around the 25th anniversary
- use the sign-on letter as a template for a bulletin insert at your parish
- host a forum or speaker on peace in your parish, school, etc.
- hold a vigil or public prayer service on peace in our world
- leaflet or table at your church using one-page resources on Catholicism and peace, Pax Christi materials, etc. after Sunday Masses
- hold/join a vigil on the fifth anniversary of the war in Iraq, which falls during the middle of Holy Week
- go to candidates' forums in this election year and raise questions about their plans for ending the war and occupation of Iraq or, more generally, ask questions about their vision for the U.S. role in the global community

And please don't forget to let us know what you are doing to commemorate this momentous anniversary and transform our Church into a true "peace church!"

Iraq Today

The dominant story in Iraq is the downward trend in casualties for both Iraqis and U.S. soldiers. The single-minded focus on casualties, however, masks the internal problems in Iraq that could cause the violence to rise to new heights this year. Much of the decrease in violence is a result of the United States cutting deals with Sunni insurgents. The United States now has 70,000 "former" insurgents on its payroll. At the same time, the U.S. military continues to recruit and train members of the Iraqi military and police—agencies heavily dominated by Shiites. Arming and training these two groups has quelled the violence in the short term but makes the chances of future fighting between the groups a very bloody affair.

For most of 2007, the Iraqi parliament was stalemated, and when it was functioning, much of its activity was in opposition to that of the Iraqi cabinet. These political tensions will come to a head as President Bush and Prime Minister Maliki move forward in signing a formal agreement for the future U.S. troop presence. This agreement, scheduled for completion by July 31, will likely coincide with the completion of the U.S. embassy. Both of these events will signal what Iraqis feared when the United States invaded—that the occupation will become permanent, giving the United States a dominant position with military bases, preferential access to oil, and open access to Iraqi markets. With opponents in the parliament, the militias, the insurgency, and Maliki in an extremely weak position, completion of this agreement could easily send the country into chaos.

The War at Home

In the United States, the focus will be on two events: a drawdown of troops to pre-surge levels of 130,000 (from the current 160,000) and continued funding of the war. Congress will likely continue to challenge Bush on the funding, but Democrats will be in the same position they were in 2007, without the votes needed to cut the funds or to pass legislation to bring the troops home in 2008.

There could also be an important challenge this year in the Senate on the particulars of the Bush-Maliki agreement. Signed in November, the Declaration of Principles sets forth a plan for a permanent U.S. military presence in Iraq. A deadline for a final agreement is set

for July 2008. The accord could take several legal forms (treaty, congressional/executive agreement, or as Bush argues, avoiding Congress altogether by entering into "a status of forces agreement"). But with the agreement committing the United States to providing security assurances, defending Iraq's democratic system against internal and external threats, and providing preferential trading conditions, Congress should have a say in shaping this agreement.

Shaping 2008

Without hope for a strategy change from Congress or Bush, those seeking policy change should focus on keeping the Iraq War front and center in the debate on the campaign trail at the national, state, and local levels.

In Congress, significant progress can be made toward improving the livelihoods of refugees, medical care for veterans and deployment periods, and stopping the permanent occupation that Bush and Maliki are pushing. Large demonstrations could help counter Bush's assertions on the success of the surge. These efforts must be matched by Iraq experts who can debunk the President's claim of success, especially before General Petraeus testifies before Congress in March.

Finally, pressure must be applied to presidential candidates, especially as many Democratic contenders support the "occupation lite" solution suggested by the Baker-Hamilton report which recommends keeping some U.S. forces in Iraq for counter-terrorism, training, and diplomatic protection. These plans, eerily similar to the Bush-Maliki Declaration of Principles, could easily leave upwards of 40,000 troops inside Iraq for decades, not to mention an untold number of military contractors. Whoever wins the presidency must have a clear mandate to change the course and bring all the troops home. Without this, the United States will likely continue to occupy Iraq for decades to come.

Commentary by Erik Leaver, research fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies and the policy outreach director for the Foreign Policy In Focus project. Originally published January 9, 2008. Full article at www.fpif.org/fpiftxt/4882 For additional articles on Iraq, see Foreign Policy In Focus, "Iraq Index," www.fpif.org.