

### **FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES: GRANT US YOUR PEACE**

***Katrina Alton CSJP, national chaplain to Pax Christi, introduces the theme chosen by Pope Francis for World Peace Day 2025. Peace Sunday will be kept in England and Wales on Sunday 19 January.***

In a world hungry for revenge and where 'sorry' really does seem to be the hardest word, Pope Francis has boldly chosen 'forgiveness' as the central theme for World Peace Day 2025. This is in stark contrast to the calls for 'revenge' and 'an eye for an eye' that are currently played on repeat by our politicians and amplified by the media. But are we being naïve and foolish to look at the challenges facing us today through the lens of forgiveness? Do we really have the faith to believe that when we choose to forgive then God will grant us peace?

I am often asked why I wear a white poppy, and my short answer is that I wear it to *remember*. To remember all victims of all wars, and as a symbol of hope that 'never again' can become a reality. To even begin the process of forgiveness we must have the courage to remember, to be able to speak the truth of past hurts and injustice, and to start a dialogue with those we call our enemies. The lessons of history show us that wherever there is conflict neither 'fight' nor 'flight' is the answer. We must risk another way, the way of active nonviolence, the way of radical love, the way of Jesus.

As you can imagine I have been called naïve, stupid, unpatriotic, and worse! Yet at the heart of my faith, our Christian faith, is one who, when arrested by armed soldiers, tells his followers not to retaliate but rather, 'Put down your sword' (Matthew 26:52). Even when he is tortured and executed by the state in the most violent and humiliating way, he utters the words, 'God, forgive them; for they know not what they do' (Luke 23:34). Amid this suffering some of his closest friends betray and deny him, yet there is no recrimination. Instead his first words to them are, 'Peace be with you' (John 20:19).

We can never force anyone to forgive. Genuine forgiveness comes from a place of strength, resilience, hope, and grace. It does not mean forgetting, rather it means speaking truth from a place of love. It is a process, and it is long,



***Presentation of the Pax Christi International Peace Award to the Parents' Circle Family Forum, 29 September 2024 in Rome. L to R: Bishop Marc Stenger, Sr Teresia Wamuyu Wachira, (Co-Presidents of PCI) Bassam Aramin, Salwa Aramin, with Martha Inés Romero, Secretary General of PCI. Yuval Rahamim, another recipient, joined online. (photo PCI)***

**Accepting the award, Bassam Aramin said this:**  
**'Now more than 700 families who lost their beloved ones, we come together because we discovered that we love our kids... We have the moral authority to raise up our voice and say "No more blood. No more killing". We need all of us to raise our voice against the Occupation. People who occupy another people will never feel free, and between the river and the sea everyone should be free, Israelis and Palestinians, and the only way is by living together, side by side, all together, without Occupation, without oppression.'**

complex, and often painful. So, when prophets of forgiveness arise from the ashes of war it is vital that we pay attention to them.

This year the Pax Christi International Peace Award was given to 'Parents Circle - Families Forum', an Israeli-Palestinian group made up of hundreds of families that have lost loved ones in this conflict. By sharing their stories of grief and loss they are actively challenging the 'othering' of their neighbours, starting a dialogue and thus the possibility of reconciliation rather than revenge. Their witness to nonviolence in the most violent of times is a prophetic sign that sows seeds of peace, hope, and forgiveness.

My prayer is that their act of witness is heard, and others are inspired to follow their example of prophetic forgiveness.

***Katrina Alton CSJP***

## WHAT IS PAX CHRISTI? - FAQs

Pax Christi is a global network of ordinary people who

- don't claim to have all the answers
- take responsibility for peace in their own lives and in the world and
- feel that peacemaking is a special concern for Christians.

### What are you aiming for?

Our vision is of a world where people can live in peace without fear of violence in any form. We respond to the teaching of Jesus about peace and nonviolence by working to transform our communities through action, speaking out for justice, for the abolition of war, and for an end to all forms of violence.

### What does the name mean?

Pax Christi is Latin for 'The Peace of Christ'.

### How did it start?

It was founded in France at the end of the Second World War, to pray and work for reconciliation between the peoples of France and Germany. Since then, it has spread across the world.

### International?

Pax Christi is active on all continents. The international headquarters is in Brussels, and we have representatives who lobby at the United Nations, UNESCO, and European institutions. Pax Christi in England and Wales has about 1000 members. Scotland and Ireland have separate sections.

### Catholic?

Pax Christi is an independent movement, rooted in Catholic Christianity, and draws on that tradition and spirituality - but membership is open to all who are in sympathy with its values and work. In our campaigning work we collaborate with individuals and organisations of all faiths and none.

### Do you have to be pacifist?

No. We think everyone, whether a convinced pacifist or not, has a part to play in developing nonviolent ways of dealing with conflict, at the personal, local, or global level.

### Isn't this all rather idealistic?

We do believe that violence is the exception; nonviolence is normal human behaviour. We find inspiration in the Christian gospel, the witness of peacemakers like Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Dorothy Day, writers like Thomas Merton and John Dear, and brave activists taking risks for peace around the world today. Pope Francis, through his words and witness, is a living teacher of nonviolence.

### How is Pax Christi funded?

Donations and legacies, church collections on Peace Sunday, subscriptions, book and card sales, a few grants for specific projects.



'Must be a misprint for "Pax Chrispy" — some sort of cereal ad ...'

Cartoon: Copyright Estate of John Ryan, courtesy of the Catholic Herald.

So, in England and Wales, what do you actually do?

### Pax Christi

**provides** peace education expertise to schools, staff, and youth groups—with classroom resources, visits to schools, teachers' conferences, in cooperation with partner organisations.

**campaigns** for disarmament, and the abolition of nuclear weapons in particular, by means of letters, talks, petitions, lobbying MPs, street vigils and prayer services. We mark Ash Wednesday, the August anniversaries of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and challenge arms fairs and production with vigils in different towns and cities.

**promotes** a just peace for Palestine and Israel by working in solidarity with peacemakers from all sides: Israeli, Palestinian, Christian, Jewish and Muslim. We work for an end to the Israeli Occupation, supporting negotiations which will lead to long term justice, security and harmony for all the peoples of the Holy Land.

**supports** the rights of conscientious objectors in different countries and particularly those resisting conscription today in Russia, Ukraine, and Israel. We co-sponsor annual events to mark International Conscientious Objectors' Day on 15 May.

**organises** discussion sessions in person and on Zoom to advance understanding of active nonviolence. As part of the 'Catholic Nonviolence Initiative' we aim to make nonviolence the first choice - or 'preferential option' - as the Christian response to conflict and war.

**challenges** the culture of militarism, which assumes that violence solves problems. We oppose the amount wasted on defence - nationally and globally - instead of more funding for education, health, social care, green energy, housing, and foreign diplomacy - which would serve human security better.



### What could I do as an individual?

Many small things depending on your situation, such as: **become** better informed about international issues, **discuss** your concerns about violence and peace with family and friends, **take action** through letter-writing, petitions and lobbying, **offer** our peace education resources to your local school, **use** our liturgy ideas and bidding prayers at church on Peace Sunday, **organise** a peace stall at a local community event, **pick up** on some of the initiatives which Pax Christi promotes in the e-bulletin... **Start** small and find some allies to work with.

### How can I join?

Scan the QR code (left) or go to our website to find subscription rates. As a member you will receive our newsletter *Justpeace*, our annual report, and, if you choose, regular e-bulletins. You will be joining a community of like-minded people to share prayer, reflection and action.

## INTRODUCING KATHRYN LYDON—NEW PAX CHRISTI CHAIR



*Kathryn in the centre, with outgoing chair, Ann Farr left, and vice-chair, Joan Sharples.*

Kathryn Lydon was elected as our new Chair at our AGM in June, having been a member of the Executive Committee since 2022.

Kathryn's interest in peace was kindled through the London University Chaplaincy where Bruce Kent was Chaplain when she was a student. In 1972, while working in Burundi as a teacher with VSO, Kathryn experienced violent conflict first hand as she witnessed the tribal tensions that were the root of the genocide in Rwanda in 1994.

Kathryn joined Pax Christi Liverpool group in 1980 when it was formed in response to the threat of Cruise Missiles. In 1996, she became a member of Christian

Life Community (a lay community inspired by Ignatian spirituality), serving as the North West Regional Rep and as a member of the National Team from 2011 - 2016. Kathryn has been a Cafod volunteer for 39 years and served for three years as Chair of the Liverpool Justice & Peace Commission from 2004 to 2007.

Having worked in a variety of roles over her career - in teaching, social work and management - Kathryn retired in 2014 and became a volunteer with Citizens Advice and also joined a 're-formed' Merseyside Pax Christi group which she now co-leads with Jan Harper.

The group is highly active and has developed a local identity as a 'faith-based group', which works closely with other peace groups in the Liverpool area.

At her first Executive Meeting as Chair, Kathryn explained that a priority for her will be how to serve members and ignite all of us with the 'Spirit of Synodality' that Sister Teresia Wamuyu Wachira, Co-President of Pax Christi International, had spoken of in her greeting to our AGM.

*'Most of our members are individuals who are not part of a Pax Christi group' she said. 'Some pay a membership subscription in order to support the work of others on their behalf and do not seek further involvement. Others are active in secular and faith-based groups. The primary vocation of many members will be to put nonviolence at the centre of daily life and relationships. At the AGM we heard a strong call for us to develop as a **Community of Peacemakers**. As part of this I heard a desire for **deepening and networking**.'*

You can contact Kathryn via our office email address: [info@paxchristi.org.uk](mailto:info@paxchristi.org.uk)

## RECONCILIATION THROUGH THE CROSS

On the back of this *Justpeace* is a poster which we hope you will be able to use on a notice-board for Peace Sunday. The image we have chosen to illustrate Pope Francis' theme 'Forgive us our trespasses. Grant us your peace.' is of the charred cross from the ruins of Coventry Cathedral. The inspiring story is worth retelling. On the night of 14 November 1940 Coventry was bombed by the Luftwaffe, over 550 citizens were killed, and the cathedral was destroyed. From the piles of debris the cathedral surveyor picked out two of the medieval roof timbers which had fallen in the shape of a cross, and it's a replica of that first cross that remains in the ruins today. Our photo was taken by Coventry resident Ann Farr.

The Provost at that time, Dick Howard, immediately led a bold response of forgiveness not revenge. Three ancient nails, also fashioned into a cross, became the symbol of the cathedral's ongoing ministry for peace and reconciliation. The first partnership in the 'Community of the Cross of Nails' was formed in 1947 with Kiel in Germany - and that echoes the early days of Pax Christi, when many gestures of reconciliation between France and Germany gave direction to our movement. Today Coventry's 'Community of the Cross of Nails' connects 260 partners - including many schools - in conflict transformation across 45 countries.

For more information visit <https://www.coventrycathedral.org.uk/>



*Passing on the baton at a meeting in Leeds: Archbishop Malcolm McMahon, Ann Farr, Kathryn Lydon, and Andrew Jackson, with Bishop Philip Moger (right), who succeeds Archbishop Malcolm as our President.*

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# Peace Sunday 2025



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Grant us your peace.’**