

PEACE BE WITH YOU ALL: TOWARDS AN 'UNARMED AND DISARMING' PEACE

Fr Dominic Robinson SJ, Chair of the Westminster Diocesan Justice and Peace Commission, introduces the theme chosen by Pope Leo for World Peace Day.

'This peace must be unarmed, that is, not based on fear, threats or weapons' 'And it must be disarming, capable of resolving conflicts, opening hearts and generating mutual trust, empathy and hope.'

Pope Leo's words introducing his anticipated first World Day of Peace Message echo his words on being elected to the papacy. Speaking of peace being unarmed, not based on fear, threats and weapons, highlights just how committed our new pope is to speaking out against the very culture of war, a culture involving deterrence through threats which give rise to fear. Instead of threats and fear Leo invites us to embrace Gospel values of mutual trust, empathy and hope.

The word empathy implies putting oneself in the other's position, which requires listening and dialogue. I cannot help but think of the situation in the Holy Land at present where peace has a fragile hold. In Ukraine the war continues. In other countries around the world there is hostility and conflict.

Peace is clearly already a major theme in Pope Leo's teaching. In October he led the annual interfaith prayer for peace organised by the Community of Sant'Egidio, saying clearly that peace 'is the priority of all politics. God will ask an accounting of those who failed to seek peace or who fomented tensions and conflicts. He will call them to account for all the days, months and years of war'. We must now embrace 'the era of negotiation, the era of a new world without war'. 'Even if the world turns a deaf ear to this appeal', he said, 'we are certain that God will hear our prayer and the cries of so many who suffer. God wants a world without war. He will free us from this evil'.

Pope Leo's leadership calling on all nations to work through dialogue to proclaim a reign of peace which God desires could not be clearer. As Christians passionate for justice and peace we have a new pope passionate for justice and peace. As people of peace we know how we are called to promote a peace that does justice at home and abroad. In an increasingly aggressive Britain this starts at home in our local



*Photo credit: Holy Family Church, Gaza
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communities where we are called to make peace with the strangers among us and invite them to be citizens, friends, sisters and brothers.

Wherever there is a hostile environment the poorest are further punished. The increasing gap between poor and rich in Britain is evidence of this as migrants are forced into the worst living situations or onto the streets where they join the thousands of homeless in our towns and cities. Wherever we are hostile to the created environment around us, disregarding her harmony in the created order, the poorest suffer.

Leo is reminding us this World Day of Peace to be people of peace, not people of conflict, hostility, war. In every situation we are called to put aside our own metaphorical arms in our judgment of others, our taking for granted the goods of this earth, our prejudices and pet hates. Rather we come to this season unarmed, ready to extend our hands in peace, the peace which Christ proclaims on his rising from the dead and which he summons us to spread to the corners of our world.

As we await Pope Leo's message for January 1st we can pray that the peace which Christ brings melts all human hearts and inspires our political leaders around the world to put aside those weapons of war in favour of true peace.

WHAT IS PAX CHRISTI? - FAQs

Pax Christi (*'The Peace of Christ' in Latin*) is an organisation 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, and speaking up for justice, for the abolition of war, and for an end to all forms of violence.



INTERNATIONAL

Pax Christi started in France at the end of the Second World War, to pray and work for reconciliation between the peoples of France and Germany.

Today it's a global network of 120 organisations in 60 countries. Sixteen are national 'sections' including England and Wales, Scotland, and Ireland. The others, on all continents, are associate groups: grassroots partners, peace institutes, religious congregations.

The international headquarters is in Brussels, and we have representatives who lobby at the United Nations (New York, Geneva, Paris, Vienna) at the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, and EU institutions in Brussels.

The priorities for PCI's advocacy work are: Just Peace in Israel-Palestine, Nuclear Weapons and Disarmament, and Ecological Justice. The most recent world assembly has just taken place in Florence.

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 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 believe that nonviolence is normal human behaviour. Violence is the exception. 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.

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

PAX CHRISTI:

provides peace education expertise to schools, staff, and youth groups.

campaigns for disarmament, and the abolition of nuclear weapons in particular. We mark Ash Wednesday, the August anniversaries of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and oppose arms fairs 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.

upholds the rights of conscientious objectors in different countries and co-sponsors 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.

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.

How is Pax Christi funded?

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

How can I join?

Scan this QR code or go to our website to find subscription rates. Members receive our newsletter *Justpeace*, our annual report, and e-bulletins. You will be joining a community of like-minded people to share prayer, reflection and action.



THE CATHOLIC NONVIOLENCE INITIATIVE

Pax Christi aims to make nonviolence the first choice - the 'preferential option' - as the Christian response to conflict and war. With this vision, PCI launched the 'Catholic Nonviolence Initiative' in 2016. The objective is to integrate nonviolence into all aspects of Church life from theological education to training and support for local nonviolent activists working in conflict areas. CNI has held international conferences, produced publications, and in 2024 created a Catholic Institute for Nonviolence specifically to bring the best nonviolence research, resources and experience to our Church leadership - furthering the call of the Vatican Synod for 'more reflection and formation in order that we can manage conflicts in a nonviolent way'.



Peace Sunday 2026

Message of Pope Leo:



Peace
be
with
you
all
- towards an
'unarmed and
disarming'
peace

paxchristi.org.uk

YOUR PEACE SUNDAY GUIDE AND 'TO DO' LIST

KATHRYN LYDON writes: *Let's make Pope Leo's message our manifesto for 2026, beginning with Peace Sunday, when we have a great opportunity to involve our local parish, community and school.*

Another 'gift' to Pax Christi is that the Bishops of England & Wales allow us to take a collection, which is key to raising funds for our work. Let us make full use of both of these opportunities. Here are a few suggestions, to be adapted to your own circumstances.

Be intentional and prepare. How often Peace Sunday sneaks up on us when we are getting over Christmas, and then gets 'mixed up' with the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity! Put key dates in your diaries (2025 & 2026) and plan. Try to find a partner to work with you, even remotely: another parishioner, CAFOD or diocesan rep, your best friend...Never underestimate the energising power of a conversation.

Step One

Read the Pope's message, available on Pax Christi and Vatican websites from early December.

Familiarise yourself with the tools for Peace Sunday on the Pax Christi website, for the liturgy (including homily notes) prayer cards, a short talk, resources for schools.

Step Two December / early January

Contact your local church, the parish priest or the Dean of your cathedral. Each will have received a letter urging them to support Peace Sunday and some will have received a pack with all the resources.

Ask for

- Peace Sunday to be celebrated on 18 January or another date
- a collection or a donation from the parish, and
- permission to give a short talk (see draft script on website)

Offer

- liturgy resources and highlight the notes for homily, prayers of intercession, resources for children's liturgy
- to contact key people e.g. choir, leader of children's liturgy
- prayer cards or a stall

Order or print resources needed.

Step Three January

Contact people responsible for liturgy and share ideas and resources.

Organise help with collection

Seek help from others with the short talk if your parish has many Masses

Share resources with local school

Display poster (see back page of *Justpeace*)

Send information for newsletter or parish website

Step Four Peace Sunday 18 January

Give talk, organise collection, give out prayer cards

Arrange for photos and seek permission to use them

Step Five Follow up

Send 'Thank you' notice for newsletter and individual messages to helpers

Suggest parish membership of Pax Christi, a prayer vigil, speaker, etc.

Join Pax Christi's post-Peace Sunday Zoom meeting and/or send a brief report to the Pax Christi office

Deepen your own understanding of the Peace Sunday message and share it.

NEWS FROM THE OFFICE



We recently heard the good news that John Arnold, Bishop of Salford, has been appointed as the new President of Pax Christi England & Wales. (pictured with Kathryn Lydon, our Chair). Welcome Bishop Arnold!

Meanwhile, our Chief Executive, Andrew Jackson, will be stepping down from his role in early December this year. Andrew joined Pax Christi in January 2023 on a three-year contract and has informed the Executive Committee that he does not wish that contract to be renewed or extended.

We are very grateful to Andrew for all his work with Pax Christi over the past three years and wish him every happiness in the next stage of his journey. Please keep Andrew, the Executive Committee and our Staff Team in your prayers at this time of change.

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Peace Sunday 2026



Christ in the Rubble Icon © Kelly Latimore, used with permission

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'unarmed and disarming' peace**
(Pope Leo)

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