

Pax Christi International Peace Prize Ceremony 2019

Pax Christi's history of supporting refugees/migrants

In his message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees this coming September, Pope Francis has written: "... migrants, refugees, displaced persons and victims of trafficking have become emblems of exclusion. In addition to the hardships that their condition entails, they are often looked down upon and considered the source of all society's ills. That attitude is an alarm bell warning of the moral decline we will face if we continue to give ground to the throw-away culture ... it is not only the cause of migrants that is at stake; it is not just about them, but about all of us, and about the present and future of the human family. Migrants, especially those who are most vulnerable, help us to read the "signs of the times." Through them, the Lord is calling us to conversion, to be set free from exclusivity, indifference and the throw-away culture."

In advance of the European Parliament elections that took place last month Pax Christi International said that "Europe should remain a beacon of hope and humanity for all those stripped of their dignity and the right to decent living conditions. Pax Christi urged EU member states to actively implement the UN Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration which was adopted in 2018 as a framework for international cooperation; adopt legislation on humanitarian visas for legal and safe pathways to Europe for civilians fleeing war and conflict zones; resist the criminalisation of acts of solidarity by civil society; challenge questionable measures to restrict access to social protection by refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants; and adopt legislation and practices that enable refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants to settle in, adapt to and enrich the very societies that provide them a shelter."

As an international Catholic movement we believe that the most important voices in the global debate about migration must be those of refugees and migrants themselves. A few years ago, Pax Christi International initiated the "Young Peace Journalists" (YPI) project, through which young people from all over the world are trained to conduct respectful interviews with people who have had to flee their home country, listening carefully to their

stories to understand better their experience and to share these stories online to raise awareness of the plight of people seeking refuge.

We believe that these stories are also about the many gifts that refugees and migrants bring to the communities where they settle. As the Global Compact was being negotiated, Pax Christi International was clear in saying that “states should not only ensure a more effective responsibility-sharing in response to large movements, but they should also accept the opportunity to recognize and emphasize the significant contributions that refugees and migrants make to their host communities ...”

In the last few years, Pax Christi International participated in two delegations of faith leaders to Honduras to understand better the root causes of the massive migration of Hondurans to the north – root causes including environmental degradation from mining projects, land disputes, human rights violations by police and military, poverty, unemployment, gang violence and more.

In fact, Pax Christi International has had a very long term commitment to promoting the rights and human dignity of migrants and refugees. In 1980, for example, Saint Oscar Romero invited Pax Christi International to show special solidarity with the people of the region. After his assassination Pax Christi International sent a mission to four countries of Central America to inquire into the human rights situation and the position of the churches in Central America and in particular the situation of Salvadoran refugees in Honduras.

Our concern has continued and deepened. A few examples:

Last September Pax Christi representatives from Japan and South Africa joined other religious leaders and civil society representatives in Rome at the “World Conference on Xenophobia, Racism, and Populist Nationalism in the Context of Global Migration” to discuss the urgent task of combating the world’s increasing fear of so-called “strangers.” Migrants and refugees offered a first-hand perspective on how political and social responses have either led to grave injustices or, on the other hand, have given them hope.

Our member organisation in Mexico, Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Bartolome de Las Casas, participated in a seven year process through which organisations that provide direct care to migrants and refugees explored ways to strengthen and coordinate security, safety and self-care for defenders of migrants. Their report concluded by stating, "We reiterate our commitment to the defense of their fundamental rights; and although we have strengthened our protection capabilities and self-care, aggravated violence in our country is a reality in immigration work, and we stress the urgency of the Mexican state to assume its responsibility to ensure, respect and protect the work of the defenders of the human rights."

Pax Christi France participated in a solidarity march with migrants from Ventimiglia to Calais and London, part of a journey of 1400 km in 60 stages over 70 days had already been to Nice, Marseille, Lyon, and Paris. Pax Christi France also denounced construction of the "wall of shame" in Calais a dangerous step for rights of migrants.

Pax Christi International's member organisation in Croatia, Centre for Peace – Osijek, is participating in the project, *Home Away From Home*, which addresses the challenges related to the integration of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants into European communities and aims at identifying, analysing and promoting innovative and community-based approaches to the integration of these new European citizens.

Pax Christi New Zealand organised a liturgy for migrants and refugees to coincide with World Refugees and Migrants Day.

Pax Christi Wallonie-Bruxelles held a debate on the situation of Sub-Saharan migrants in Belgium.

Pax Christi UK produced resources for use in parishes and schools across the country based on Pope Francis' 2018 World Day of Peace message on 'Migrants and Refugees – men and women seekers of peace.'

Pax Christi Italy spoke out strongly in opposition to the Security Decree, better known as the Salvini Decree, calling it part of the World War III in pieces that Pope Francis has talked about so often.

Pax Christi USA objected to the galvanization of fear among U.S. citizens and the allocation of billions of dollars to build a wall to keep out people who have been forced to migrate to the U.S. as spiritually toxic and irrational. They urged Pax Christi members across the United States to sign a pledge saying, “As politicians try to divide us against one another according to race, ethnicity, and or nationality, we remain united and steadfast in our conviction that all people deserve dignity, respect, and equity, and that together we can make such a world possible. We are people of faith and conscience, coming from a long tradition of welcoming the sojourner and loving our neighbor and, following the example of our sacred texts, pledge our commitment to be good neighbors to those seeking refuge in our community, and to build a community where all are welcome.”

Many international religious communities who are members of Pax Christi International are also responding to the refugee crisis in Europe and on the southern border of the United States. Columban missionaries, Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, Maryknoll missionaries, School Sisters of Notre Dame and more are personally welcoming refugees and migrants and advocating for national and international policies that address root causes of migration.

And last but not least, Pax Christi International’s Catholic Nonviolence Initiative is promoting a broad spectrum of nonviolent approaches to providing the kind of security every neighborhood, every city, every country seeks – that we all seek: inclusive, shared, human security that enables the dignity and potential of every person to be recognized and realized and the integrity of the earth our common home to be guaranteed.

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