

The Bethlehem Commitment*

Bringing the Future into Focus 2015-2020

*(*The below declaration is the outcome of the Pax Christi International 2015 World Assembly held in Bethlehem, Palestine, on 13-17 May 2015. Available in [English](#), [French](#) and [Spanish](#).)*

Where we began and where we are now...

Forged in the broken relationships of a brutal war, Pax Christi began its journey 70 years ago with a vision based on the gospel - *love your enemies* - and rooted in a deep belief that reconciliation was possible. Shaped over the years by people of faith struggling to make peace in the midst of injustice and war, violence and repression, our movement brings to this moment in history a renewed commitment to make real in our lives and in our work for peace the values we claim to hold.

From the beginning we have accompanied those who are on the margins and we continue to connect with grassroots communities, listening with care to their stories and learning from their experience about possible, practical routes to enduring peace and, at the same time, developing insights into other pathways to peace.

At a time when poverty, exclusion, hopelessness and a lack of future possibilities pervade the lives of many young people making extremist ideologies attractive, we recognise the legacy of colonialism and systemic injustice, the power of active nonviolence, the importance of diversity and the urgency of inclusion.

At a time when fear is both real and orchestrated, we build bridges to hope, celebrating an abundance of difference among us; of age and culture, ethnicity and religion, sex and gender, experience and worldview.

With deep roots in the Catholic tradition and encouraged by the vision and witness of Pope Francis, we claim the richness of Catholic social teaching as we Christians strengthen existing ecumenical and interfaith cooperation.

On this journey we have learned that just relationships are essential for sustainable peace - that we humans are part of an earth community that must be healthy if we are to survive. We have come to see the interconnections between war and preparations for war, environmental damage, climate change and scarcity of essential resources. We are deepening our understanding of sustainability.

We also have learned that just relationships are essential to just peace – that Catholic hierarchy and local communities, ordained and lay, women and men bring equal gifts to the work for peace.

While war, preparations for war, the proliferation of arms and violent conflict seem to be omnipresent, we promote nonviolence, nurture community and work for a world where human rights and international law are consistently respected.

Bringing the future into focus...

From its early days in post-World War II Europe, Pax Christi has become a global movement, a network of member organisations on five continents, each responding to the signs of the times in their own context, contributing in a rich diversity of ways to the peace and reconciliation we all seek.

In the coming five years, as we move toward our 75th anniversary in 2020, we will continue to value

and learn from the work of each member organisation. In an increasingly interconnected world, where challenges to peace are so often global as well as local, we also will seek ways to deepen our connections and build on the peacemaking and peacebuilding experience in our network to address together some of the most pressing threats and to nourish together some of the greatest possibilities for peace.

The peace we seek is sustainable peace. It is the overall goal of our work for peace, grounded in respect for the integrity of creation and shaped by a deep exploration of inclusive security that is rooted in justice. Our commitment to sustainable peace is enriched by faith; our understanding is deepened by theological reflection; and our steadfast resolve is strengthened by the spirituality that accompanies our journey. In the coming five years, the articulation of Pax Christi's spirituality, peace education and peace politics will become even more important to our movement.

The pathway we seek is defined by the practice of active nonviolence as a powerful alternative to extremist violence and militarisation. While not all our members are pacifist, Pax Christi's constant dialogue about and exploration of the Gospel message of nonviolence keeps this issue alive in our movement. In the coming five years we will further develop efforts with the Vatican and religious communities to deepen Catholic thought on active nonviolence and to augment our Pax Christi conversation.

The future we seek is already visible among the youth in our communities. It is a future filled with hope and possibility, but threatened at the same time by extremism and the distortion of religion. Many Pax Christi member organisations already have youth programmes; we will value that experience and learn from it. In the coming five years we will engage more young people, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures and faiths, as valuable and equal members of our movement. We will present alternatives to extremism, share our rich spirituality with young people in a secularised world; encourage concrete campaigns and immersion experiences; promote intergenerational conversation and cooperation; and encourage leadership development for youth in Pax Christi.

The global community we seek will fully engage women in resolving violent conflict and making peace. Pax Christi-connected women from diverse cultures and faiths have deep experience making and building peace. In the coming five years we will strengthen our network for connecting women's peacemaking and peacebuilding experience in our movement; we will listen to and learn from that experience; we will support the full implementation of UN Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security and other efforts to create a gender inclusive route to peace.

The societies we seek will bring people of faith and people of good will together to reduce the tensions that exist among and within different religious traditions. In the coming five years we will prioritize our cooperation with Muslim and Jewish peacemakers and with people of other traditions, spiritualities and convictions.

The many faces of violence, the systemic roots of racism and exclusion, and the pathway to reconciliation, the founding focus of Pax Christi, will continue to challenge our movement in the coming five years. As Pax Christi national sections and as affiliated member organisations – when possible together as an international network – we will maintain our multifaceted work for peace, sustain our work for arms control and disarmament, develop our focus on transitional and ecological justice and underscore the impact of faith and religion on the way to peace.

Continuing the journey as a faith-based movement for peace, we will strengthen Pax Christi as a co-responsible global network of national sections and affiliated member organisations, each working for peace in their own context while building a more visible common identity and a stable financial base. We will regionalise our work for peace, recognise the contribution of thousands of volunteers and facilitate an exchange of experience and expertise among all Pax Christi member organisations, including religious congregations that are members of Pax Christi International. We will review and strengthen our capacity for international advocacy to reflect the deep grassroots experience of our members. And we will develop our capacity for communication, making Pax Christi more visible and projecting a clear, hopeful and prophetic message about nonviolent alternatives to violent extremism.

As we turn to the future, we claim again the vision that *peace is possible and vicious cycles of violence and injustice can be broken.* (Pax Christi International Vision Statement) We seek a world where

people can live in peace, without fear and we follow Jesus the Peacemaker, relying on the presence of the Spirit to “guide our feet into the way of peace.” (Zechariah)

Approved by AGM of Pax Christi International

17 May 2015