

Statement to Board of Health

Pax Christi has always reflected the position of the Catholic Church with regard to nuclear weapons. The Vatican as a state, and the Pope as the head of the Catholic Church have been making very strong statements over recent years as they have been closely involved in the efforts to eliminate nuclear weapons.

In December, 2014, at the Vienna Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons, Archbishop Silvano Maria Tomasi spoke on behalf of Pope Francis declaring that opposition to nuclear weapons has always been a cornerstone of the Vatican's ideology. The statement further declared "Now is the time to affirm not only the immorality of the use of nuclear weapons, but the immorality of their possession, thereby clearing the road to nuclear abolition." This statement was a huge step in Vatican policy.

In April, 2016, a Nonviolence and Just Peace Conference was held in Rome. This Conference was co-sponsored by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Pax Christi International and other international bodies. At the Conference, Pax Christi International launched a new Catholic Initiative on Active NonViolence, and urged the Pope to bring this message of Gospel Nonviolence to his yearly World Day of Peace Message on January 1, 2017. Indeed, the Pope did this. In that message, the Pope pleaded "for disarmament and for the prohibition and abolition of nuclear weapons".

On the anniversaries of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 2016, Pax Christi International stated: The profound immorality of nuclear weapons is no longer a subject open for debate. Peacebuilding efforts aimed at increasing our collective security are undermined when the military powers of the world community continue to manufacture and possess nuclear weapons. It is time to pursue a peace that is rooted in the practice of justice and solidarity rather than dependent on the threat of mutually assured destruction.

On September 20, 2017, the Vatican was one of the first states to ratify the Ban Treaty. In the work to reach the Treaty, the Pope had written that "the ultimate goal of the total elimination of nuclear weapons (is) a moral and humanitarian imperative".

In the wake of this involvement in a world-changing UN Treaty negotiation, the Vatican further organized a symposium on Perspectives for a World Free from Nuclear Weapons and for Integral Disarmament in November, 2017. This symposium brought together members of the Catholic hierarchy, diplomats, politicians, civil society leaders, religious communities, students, theologians and other Catholic leaders. Panelists during the symposium repeatedly called for the abolition of nuclear weapons.

The day prior to the symposium, the participants had an audience with Pope Francis who delivered a most powerful and pointed message. He stated that the Vatican is "genuinely concerned by the catastrophic humanitarian and environmental effects of any employment

of nuclear devices". He stated that the threat of the use of these weapons, "as well as their very possession, is to be firmly condemned".

With the Pope and the Catholic Church, Pax Christi condemns the possession, threat to use, use (even if accidental) of nuclear weapons, and declares the existence of these weapons as immoral, leading to "catastrophic humanitarian and environmental effects". This, of course, has disastrous implications for a city such as Toronto.

Pax Christi Toronto continues to be an active member of the Hiroshima Nagasaki Day Coalition, planning and participating in the August commemoration each year at the Peace Garden, and working to raise awareness and support for the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons. We continue to urge our Canadian government to support and ratify the legally binding International Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, passed at the United Nations on July 7, 2017.