

Statement to Board of Health, April 16, 2018

Reaffirming the City of Toronto as a Nuclear Free Zone

Submitted by Pax Christi Toronto

Pax Christi and the Vatican, written by Sr. Mary-Ellen Francoeur, Sister of Service

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".

Following on the Vatican's presence at the Vienna Conference in 2014, the Vatican continued to remain involved in the work leading up to the UN negotiations to create a Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons which came to fruition on July 7, 2017. Until that time, the Holy See had traditionally only enjoyed observer status at the UN, with no voting rights. However, at this UN conference, the UN decided to give the Holy See the same rights as other member states. In that capacity, the Vatican joined 121 other states in backing this treaty which forbids states to "develop, test, produce, manufacture, otherwise acquire, possess or stockpile nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices". The signature of the Vatican brings its moral authority to the treaty. On September 20, 2017, the Vatican was one of the first states to ratify the 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”. He shared that the historic vote at the UN in July, 2017 where “the majority of the members of the international community determined that nuclear weapons are not only immoral, but must also be considered an illegal means of warfare”, shed a light of hope on the disorders of the world. He considered very important that the creation of the Treaty was mainly the result of a “humanitarian initiative” sponsored by a significant alliance between civil society, states, international organizations, churches, academies and groups of experts.

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 and Toronto Peace Garden, written by Rosemary Keenan with the help of the following resources:

Peace is Possible, by Sr. Mary Alban Bouchard, NOVALIS, St. Paul University, Ottawa 1985

Pax Christi movement wages peace worldwide, by Gregory Baum, Catholic New Times, 1988

<https://www.catholicregister.org/item/22384-drama-tears-washed-away-at-rededicated-toronto-peace-garden>

<http://hiroshimadaycoalition.ca/peacegarden>

<http://www.paxchristi.net/news/anniversaries-hiroshima-and-nagasaki-momentum-building-ban-nuclear-weapons/6221#sthash.W3TY9sPa.dpbs>

In 1982 Sr. Mary Alban Bouchard, Canadian representative of the Sisters of St. Joseph at the UN and founding member of Pax Christi in Canada, joined with 1,000,000 people from around the world at the United Nations in New York for the Second Special Session of the UN General Assembly on Disarmament. They marched in a great public protest against the arms race. Sr. Mary Alban walked alongside Douglas Roche (later Canada’s Ambassador for Disarmament), Homer Jack (Chairperson of the World Conference for Religion and Peace), Pax Christi Bishops, Political Leaders, Religious Communities, Peace Groups, and NGOs. A large contingent of Japanese, many of them Hibakusha, participated, and brought with them 27,000,000 signatures for disarmament and abolition of war. The event brought together both high-level government officials and thousands of civil society representatives collaborating to advance disarmament goals.

Sr. Mary Alban returned home and reached out to Catholic leaders across the country to facilitate the organization of Pax Christi in Canada. Animation groups were

established in Victoria, Windsor and Toronto. Aligning with Pax Christi International, the selected areas of focus were security and disarmament, East-West and North-South relations, human rights, and peace education.

In 1983 Father Massey Lombardi, Director of the Office of Justice and Peace in the Catholic Archdiocese of Toronto, approached Mayor Art Eggleton with the vision that the City of Toronto build a peace memorial similar to the Peace Memorial in Hiroshima that was blessed by Pope John Paul II in 1981. He asked Setsuko Thurlow, a survivor of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, for assistance with the project. In the fall of 1983, they travelled to Japan. They met with Mayor Takeshi Araki of Hiroshima, who consulted with his council and agreed to share Hiroshima's eternal flame with the Toronto Peace Garden. They collected water from the fountain which commemorates the 75,000 people killed by the nuclear attack on Nagasaki. On September 14, 1984, His Holiness Pope John Paul II, lit the eternal flame in Toronto with an ember from the Memorial for Peace in Hiroshima, and poured a vial of water from the river that flows through Nagasaki into the Peace Garden's pool.

The witness of Fr. John Dear, Jesuit Priest, and the vision of the late Norberto Cambre, Ordained Deacon for the Archdiocese of Toronto, reinvigorated Pax Christi Toronto in 2005. Sr. Mary Alban Bouchard provided guidance and inspiration, and urged Pax Christi members to work diligently with local peace groups for the re-establishment of the Peace Garden at Nathan Phillips Square following extensive renovations to the Square that began in 2010.

On May 18, 2016, in the presence of the Consul-General of Japan Yasunori Nakayama, the Chair of Toronto Interfaith Council Zul Kassamali, tribal elder Cat Criegeer, Canadian Poets Laureate and other dignitaries and attendees, Fr. Lombardi joined Setsuko Thurlow and Mayor John Tory at the Rededication of the Toronto Peace Garden, to again light the eternal flame from Hiroshima and to add water from Nagasaki to the reflecting pool.

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.

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.