

Pax Christi Australia (NSW)
Convenor's Report for Annual General Meeting April 4, 2022



Dear Pax Christi members and friends.

War is a tragedy, a crime, and a defeat. The decision to abandon the path of diplomacy must always be condemned when another nation is attacked. Wars end in one of two ways: negotiation and diplomacy or mountains of dead people. While the actions of the Russian president are indefensible, responsibility for the present conflict is widely shared. As we condemn the Russian president, which is easy and safe, the more difficult task is to take a bold stand against the depraved role of Western nations who also got this war going and continuing it. The expansion of NATO provided the context for this crisis something the media often ignore. Russia's illegal actions have only emboldened arms manufacturers and hawks as well as fossil-fuel businesses. The moral obscenity are the Russian and Ukrainian lives lost, innocent people hurt by sanctions and the violence against the sacred gift God's creation – our common home.

Rather than investing in weaponry, Pope Francis has called for investment in education which must always include skills in peaceful negotiation. In his **2022 World Peace Day message** for January 1, he points to the fact that there has been a '*significant reduction*' in education funding in recent years, while military spending continues to soar. It is a point made at our recent Pax Christi Peace Conference by Professor John Langmore as Australia spends less and less on diplomacy and increased spending on weaponry. Pope Francis has said, '*It is high time, then, that governments develop economic policies aimed at inverting the proportion of public funds spent on education and on weaponry.*' He outlines three '*paths for building a lasting peace*': promoting dialogue between generations, investing in education, and improving labour conditions. He laments the tendency to see education and training as an expenditure rather than an investment. It should be 'the primary means of promoting integral human development,' because they help to shape free and responsible people. The Pope also said that greater investment in education needs to be accompanied by the promotion of a '[culture of care](#),' which could become 'a common language working to break down barriers and build bridges,' and '*May more and more men and women strive daily, with quiet humility and courage, to be artisans of peace.*'

If there ever was a moment in human existence when we were called to exhibit the solidarity of a common human family, it is now. Climate scientists continue their warnings of 'The threat that climate change poses to human well-being and the health of the planet is 'unequivocal' and further delay in global action to slow climate change and adapt to its impacts 'will miss a brief and rapidly closing window of opportunity to secure a liveable and sustainable future for all.' The latest IPCC Report has concluded with a strong call to action on climate change which has already caused 'substantial damages and increasingly irreversible losses, in terrestrial, freshwater and coastal and open ocean marine ecosystems,' and will contribute to humanitarian crises such as displacement in all regions and especially affecting smaller nations disproportionately. So far millions of people have been exposed to acute food insecurity as was water security. All this alongside the war that is raging in Ukraine, not to mention places like Yemen, Myanmar, Syria, Somalia and Ethiopia that rarely rate a mention in the media. The threat of nuclear war that seemed to have faded is roaring back as nuclear arsenals are on high alert.

As intimated already, there are powerful forces seeking the outcomes that are occurring in the world as opportunities for international sales of weaponry. War automatically sets in motion forces for uniformity where governments can coerce people, especially minority groups and individuals, who do go along with the 'herd'. What is happening in Ukraine is connected with fossil fuels.

Already executives are using the war to argue for more drilling in the hope that war underscores the great dependence on fossil fuel. We say enough. The culture of care that Pope Francis calls us to flows from the culture of encounter that he has often emphasised. It may seem corny or utopian but we need to find ways to embed compassion and respect for the other. We do not see this in people of power.

What seems utopian may actually be realistic. So far, the way things are going is leading to dystopian outcomes. Another world is possible. Voices around the world are shouting it out and acting in ways to make it possible. Let us embody compassion in our institutions and our ways of life. War destroys both friends and enemies. We may feel helpless before the horror of war we can attend with compassion to all whose lives are being devastated but it. It evokes compassion for the soldiers on both sides who have lost their lives and limbs in battle, and with them the families who had hopes in them and grieve for them. I have been enraged by the inability to recognise the humanity of people gathered under a different flag, to negotiate when the alternative is unending violence, to let go of slogans, and to care for the world our children will inherit. Whilst we still live with Covid-19 and face the threats of climate change we have face a war that exacerbates both. We need to resist attempts to divide and exclude people based on nationality and support and call for more and more initiatives to engage in diplomacy and focus on healing our endangered world because it has been given to us as a gift for all humanity and all living things. We can commit to build bridges wherever we are rather than blowing them up.

In Mosul, Pope Francis reaffirmed his 'conviction that fraternity is more durable than killing our sisters and brothers, that hope is more powerful than hatred, that peace is more powerful than war,' even today, despite all, it is possible to hope. If we want peace, we have to prepare for peace. We have to have the courage and the creativity to follow new paths to build a coexistence between nations not based on balances of force and deterrence.

We cannot let the media give the floor to leaders who promote hostility and conflict. Most of the words we have heard are tainted with violence as they talk about fighting, nuclear devices, guns, bombs, weaponry, fighter jets, and sanctions. Unfortunately the words and resolutions proposed by individuals, such as the Dalai lama and Pope Francis, and peace groups to offer hope proposing another way rarely get published because talk of negotiation, talks, meetings, compromise, resolution, dialogue, openness, the connection between peoples, cooperation and diplomacy is seen as naïve, utopian or weak.

Twenty-four news coverage of the ugly war in Ukraine is keeping many people hyped up and somewhat dumbed down. We cannot and must not minimise the horror we see on our screens of bombed-out buildings, the mounting civilian casualties and the frightened refugees who tell us so much without even using words. As we watch this horror, we rarely see the victims, grieving families and frightened refugees when our country is involved in foreign wars such as in Iraq or our silence as on the looking away as to has been happening in West Papua. We must confront war without participating in it. I have already mentioned those who profit from war who are as much a threat to peace as authoritarian leaders. We can participate by trying to preserve and strengthen ways of communication and cooperation. Each person's effort is of value. We can all participate in the peace process. It does not help when we add to media playing the pipes for war. It does help when we act with kindness gratuitously. It does help when we make efforts to join in calls for a end to nuclear weapons. While most people cherish peace it can easily be trampled underfoot in tribalism and quick judgements, in rage and anger that lead to intransigence. Ukraine is not the only war. We are war within relationships, ourselves and the planet seasoned by competition, greed and selfishness.



I am deeply concerned that we are showering praise on the violent resistance to the invasion. The fighting must stop. It is about reducing the deaths and destruction. It is not about surrender but consistent resistance. It is not about pacifism or weakness. There is so much evidence that nonviolent resistance is a powerful force against aggression and injustice of all kinds. Christ in the Sermon on the Mount (Luke 6:27ff) did not teach passivity in the face of threat but to stand one's ground with dignity and without turning to violence and hate. We have seen the response by Norway to Nazi invasion for which they paid a high price whereas Denmark did not fight the Nazis but with resolute resistance avoided much destruction as well as saving most of its Jewish population. Unfortunately, teaching that responding to violence with nonviolence is met with cynicism and disregarded as delusional or labelled as naïve. What we must insist is a love and kindness that animates all our actions, shape our values and behaviour, and inspire social justice built on respectful relationships. There is no room for competition, tribalism, and selfishness. These only lead to violence and poison the planet. So let us work to promote a '[culture of care,](#)' which, as Pope Francis says, could become 'a common language working to break down barriers and build bridges,' and 'May more and more men and women strive daily, with quiet humility and courage, to be artisans of peace.'

*I am only one, but I am one.
I cannot do everything, but I can do something.
And because I cannot do everything,
I will not refuse to do the something that I can do.
What I can do, I should do.
And what I should do,
by the grace of God,
I will do.*

Edward Everett Hale



Our members are involved in many ways with different groups and movements. What we do is very important but far more important, in my view, is why we do what we do and the passion that we bring to promoting peace and justice. I like to ponder Margaret Mead's words: '*Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.*'

One of our most recent members, **Peter Laffan**, has been very active in the Archdiocese of Adelaide combining his Pax Christi commitment with his work in the archdiocese. We very much appreciate his input and communications. **Brother Gary Wellsmore** makes a powerful contribution with his challenging input to meetings and in his reflection, although he would say that Pax Christi is an important part of his life and spirituality. He gives as much as he gets. He is a great support to the executive members of Pax Christi by his presence and advice. **Maggie Galley** has continued to manage the tasks of staying with Pax Christi. She makes a great contribution to Pax Christi as both treasurer for Pax Christi NSW and Pax Christi Australia. Her role is a very necessary part of financial management on our very small budget. She also maintains and keeps the website up to date. She has tried to get people to go the website and is often disappointed that very few people view the website where the

current average audience is 20 views a day. This is unfortunate because the material she puts up is very informative and compelling as well uploading information for events/webinars and conferences that are provided by members and their networks that many might not notice and often is not found in mainstream publications. For this report she offered here view of the very successful Raising Peace Festival that we were involved in. She wrote, 'Pax Christi NSW made a significant contribution to a Raising Peace Festival by funding the viewing of a film about peace The Third Harmony, for a few days at the start of the Raising Peace Festival. This contribution was gratefully received and helped to set the tone of a very successful Peace Festival.' I concur. **Marita McInerney** is Secretary of Pax Christi Australia (NSW) and does a fine job in keeping in touch with members and attending to them when required and keeping track of all correspondence in and notifications to all committee members for the monthly Zoom meetings. She continues to volunteer at the Edmund Rice Centre (ERC) one-day week. She seems to do a week's work in that day. Here, as Communications Project Officer, she collates and sends out fortnightly a 'Justice Updates' Newsletter to the Christian Brothers Oceania Province. Along with other people at the Edmund Rice Centre she has participated in the Aboriginal Awareness Group auspiced by the ERC that meets regularly. This group has enabled ERC staff to participate from Brisbane, Darwin, Woolgoolga, and Sydney, which has met fortnightly. The group has enabled participants to be updated and informed about First Nation peoples' history such as their shameful treatment since colonisation. This group is also working to respond to the Federal Government's Interim Voice Report in the form of a Submission supporting a First Nations Voice in the Constitution. Marita continues to serve on the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart JPIC Committee. **Gill Burrows** is also a member of Sydney Knitting Nannas and friends who have weekly planning and plotting zoom meetings covering all sorts of issues connected with a strong focus on preserving land, water, and future with generations to come. They organise 'on the street actions' vigils, rallies, street theatre, and creative craft - making banners, placards, protest signs, props etc., as well as actively support actions that young people are engaged in around climate actions and School Strike 4Climate and the Sydney Anti-Aukus Coalition which also has a number of keen young members focusing on anti-militarism actions. **Fr Domingo Barawid** is a powerful voice for human rights in the Philippines in our meetings. PCPR Australia (Promotion of Church People's Response), of which he is national coordinator. Meetings with **Boyan Mallary**, who brings to our meetings his membership with Migrante Filipinas, have continued meetings via zoom, holding webinars with colleagues in the Philippines and ecumenical services, the last being for Human Rights Day in December. Pax Christi Australia (NSW) is a proud member of this movement. It is a privilege to be with this committed group. PCPR is an ecumenical political organisation of people committed to live the preferential option for the poor and in solidarity with them in their pursuit for a just and humane society and in the defence of life in the fullness of its dignity. It seeks to address the socio-political and economic miseries of the Filipino people, together with the other oppressed sectors of society. As an ecumenical organisation, it includes church leaders and works from different churches and overseas members to harness and unleash the liberating energies of a faith in a God of justice, truth and freedom. PCPR believes that true peace is based on justice. **Peter Herborn** also a long time Pax Christi member. He has researched peace trails in New South Wales which has included some fieldwork in the Myall Creek Massacre Memorial site near Bingara in the New England region, and the Chinese Tribute Garden near Young. He has presented results of his research at various conference in Australia at the University of New England and the Kyoto online conference of the International Network of Museums for Peace. He has continued to support the fund-raising program of the Bush School in Siem Reap Cambodia. **Anne Lanyon** is very active in so many areas. She chairs the Frenchs Forest Parish Social Justice Group which includes Aboriginal Support by preparing memes to the Uluru Statement from the Heart. She does this in collaboration with St Ives Parish and is connected with Manly Warringah Pittwater and Northern Beaches Council on Aboriginal issues and initiatives. She has collaborated with St Vincent de Paul regarding local affordable housing, migrant and refugee support and led a parish steering team to implement *Laudato si*. This connects with her various Landcare and Earthcare activities. She has promoted Gospel Nonviolence and signed the Pax Christi International message to Pope Francis <**The Path of Nonviolence Towards a Laudato Si' Future**> As part of the Catholic Earthcare NSW Network which meets regularly, she has also been part of Mercy Sisters Parramatta Earthkin Network; the Mercy Sisters ISMAPNG Zoom reflections on ecology; and as Faith Ecology Network Co-ordinator continues to work to strengthen interfaith dialogue between science and religion in the interests of advancing ecological consciousness and care for the Earth (www.faithecology.net.au). She is on the board of Jubilee Australia and promoted its research publications and initiatives in the Asia Pacific Region, on mining

communities, e.g., against land grabs in PNG and supporting local campaigning, especially by women, and Australian connections with illegal logging; supporting customary land-rights. **Pearl Wymarra** considers her work for peace being imbedded in the places she has worked in with people of diverse cultural and social backgrounds. She is currently engaged with First Nations Clans and Local Government Areas and networking with communities in Queensland and New South Wales as well as people of all faiths. She is committed to enhancing and developing mutual respect amongst all people because it is the core component in building trust and resilience. She is involved with a wide range of groups such as the Community Justice Coalition, the Universal Peace Federation of Oceania, Indigenous Australian Elders Advisory Committee of Western Sydney University. She was on an advisory group for the establishment of the Penrith Head to Health Centre and currently Co-Chairing its imbedding stage of its Governance Committee. She is also a part-time student for a Bachelor of Theology with Charles Sturt University. She is writing a book of her life experiences past and present, including growing up on Thursday Island in the Torres Strait Region and with her Gudang Aboriginal Clan Country of Far Northern Cape York. **Peter Griffin** is an active Pax Christi committee member. He participates in other groups such as the Marrickville Peace Group and Anti Bases Campaign Coalition. During 2021 he became involved with another new group called Raising Peace – an initiative of International Volunteers for Peace (IVP), Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) and Independent and Peaceful Australia Network (IPAN). Its focus is to highlight the annual International Peace Day held each year on September 21. Along with other Pax Christi members he participated in a conference, or festival, that was conducted online due to Covid. This very successful festival took place over 11 days with 37 events, 35 organisations (including Pax Christi) and over 1000 attendees. The sessions are still available on the Raising Peace website. Pax Christi sponsored a wonderful and well received film called ***The Third Harmony: Nonviolence: the New Story of Human Nature***, for a period of 3 days for an unlimited audience and achieved more than 350 viewings. Pax Christi also conducted a seminar on the film, featuring its writer/producer Michael Nagler, with special guest, Pastor Ray Minniecon. It was chaired by Pax Christi member Dr Keith Suter, introduced by Maggie Galley, Pax Christi treasurer. Raising Peace is conducting a seminar over 3 days to culminate with ANZAC day. Guest speakers are Professor John Langmore and Alison Broinowski (A.M). Peter will contribute on the issues of the Frontier Wars and the parlous underfunding of Diplomacy in Australia in the context of an over militarised world. **Frank Vavasour** has been a faithful member of the Hiroshima Day Committee along with Pax Christi members, Dr Hannah Middleton and Denis Doherty, who convene the Australian Anti-Bases Coalition Committee. The Hiroshima Day Committee works so that we do not forget the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. **Caesar D'Mello** from Pax Christi Victoria was invited to join us from Melbourne for most of our meetings via Zoom during 2020. He has made a valuable contribution to our meetings and the discussion given his decades of work with international peace and justice organisations and Church justice organisations. He has a lot of experience and contacts in the Asia Pacific region which is pertinent to our interest and concerns about the region. Caesar has also for Pax Christi Victoria organised some very successful webinars on Myanmar, Prayers for Myanmar and more recently on 'Where does Australia's security lie'. All these had people from around Australia and overseas participate.

I continue to chair the ***Inter-Congregational Voice on Climate Change***. Please check out the website which is called Pacific Climate Watch <http://pacificclimatewatch.com.au/wp/>. This group is made up of more than 22 members from religious congregations who wish to collaborate with us and amplify the voices of the peoples of the Pacific as they are threatened by climate change. For the best part of this last year we have met monthly via Zoom. Though we are able to have face to face meetings, Zoom also enables us to include members from Victoria as well as those who find it difficult to come in person. We continue to hope and push for a Synod on Oceania where we listen to the cries of the people in our region which the Archbishop of Suva has also called for.

The work of ***Australian Anti Bases Campaign Coalition (AABCC)*** of which Pax Christi is a member and ***Independent and Peaceful Australia Network (IPAN)***, have challenged the presence of foreign bases in Australia for many years. Gill Burrows, Peter Griffin, Frank Vavasour and I participate in its activities when they are organised. Due to Covid-19 most activities were curtailed. We have had intermittent meetings via Zoom. It is great to work with Dr Hannah Middleton and Denis Doherty, who have been tireless workers in this area for many years. This is a very small group but makes an impact on the issue of arms expenditure,

foreign bases in Australia, Australia's collaboration in the tragedy of Yemen, as well as the threat of weaponised drones being used in conflict situations and weapons.

I would also like to pay tribute to the long haul of dedicated people – people of faith and people of no faith – who know and who are prepared to educate, raise awareness and put pressure on policy makers so that just solutions may be found wherever that be in seeking to be in solidarity with the First Peoples of this land; to be part of reversing the fearful trends of climate change that does kill and could kill even many thousands of people around the world, in particular, Pacific Island nations and many in Asia and the Indian Oceans; standing with groups opposed to coal mining that destroys people's livelihoods, desecrates sacred land and disfigures God's creation; striving to reduce the excessive rate of incarceration in this country; or changing the relationship we have with the Powers that could take us to war and or wreak untold havoc on innocent people because of our collaboration as we do with Pine Gap. All these are unglamorous endeavours but they do continually if only slightly move the bar. Working for social change is not easy and we cannot do it alone. Networking is a must. Involvement in peace and justice work requires people from all walks of life, young and old, with their various capacities to buy into building a better future based on a shared vision without necessarily agreeing precisely on everything. We need multiple voices. Pax Christi as a movement and as individuals want to be part of those voices. And we need people to be in support of one another. As mentioned before 'silence is betrayal' and there continues to be a deafening silence in the face of outright corruption, hypocrisy, denigrating language, demoralising greed, abject cruelty, cynicism, violence and oppression. More and more those in power wish to silence its people and to be subservient through dumbing down education and putting controls on free speech and dissent. Martin Luther King, Jr warned that there comes a time when silence is betrayal. It doesn't matter what our politics are, where we worship, whom we love, where we live, how much money we make, what language we speak, what our ethnic background or skin colour, or anything else that might distinguish us - what unites us is that we're all traveling this road together.

I have been Convenor of Pax Christi Australia (NSW) since 2001 and was re-elected as President of Pax Christi Australia at the national conference in August 2021 in Brisbane. The Brisbane branch of Pax Christi hosted the national conference. Another very successful and fruitful collaboration.

I am grateful for the closer engagement with other sections of Pax Christi in the Asia Pacific region: Aotearoa New Zealand, the Philippines, Korea, Japan and the coordination of Erin Green from Pax Christi International in Brussels.

Unlike 2020, the 2021 Palm Sunday Rally and March was able to take place. Though not as big as previous year we were very happy that it took place and that we were there in public. We are underway with preparations for the 2022 Rally and March. Inspired by the nonviolent Jesus, and other heroes past and present, we strive to create, in collaboration with many other groups – ethnic groups, faith groups and unions - the hope of building an alternative world, an alternative way of doing things and in relating to people. We do this irrespective of their religious beliefs or no beliefs.

Conclusion

I want to once again thank all the Pax Christi Australia (NSW) committee members for their support, wisdom, active engagement as well as all the other groups that we work with. Thanks again to Maggie Galley, Marita McInerney (Secretary), Gill Burrows, Peter Griffin, Peter Herborn, Frank Vavasour, Fleur Herscovitch, Richard O' Farrell, Pearl Wymarra, Brother Gary Wellsmore cfc, Anne Lanyon, Boyan Mallary and Father Domingo Barawid mi and Caesar D'Mello. It is hoped that we will soon be able to convene at the MSC Justice and Peace Centre with face to face meeting for Pax Christi and Action for Peace and Development in the Philippines meetings.

Pope Francis' call for global solidarity and shared responsibility applies to all people of good will. I repeat what I said last year, **Now more than ever** we need social friendship for the sake of hope and peace. **Now more**

than ever we need people who will take up responsibility to make this world a better place for all. **Now more than ever** we need people who say to everything that is not life-giving. **Now more than ever** we need people who will speak the truth in a culture of lies. **Now more than ever** we need to people to be the light to where there is darkness. **Now more than ever** we need people who understand the cries of the poor, the marginalised, the depressed, victims of vilification and abuse. **Now more than ever**, we need to be bearers of hope and healing by our solidarity that makes of us a safe place for those who are abandoned, discriminated against, and rejected. We are an interconnected human community, part of a global family, responsible for one another. *I conclude again with a meme I love: 'Which is more important,' asked Big Panda, 'the journey or the destination?' Tiny Dragon, who was sitting on Big Panda's back, 'The company'.*

Claude Mostowik msc

Fr. Claude Mostowik msc
Convenor
March 26, 2022

