

## PAX CHRISTI MICHIGAN THREADS OF A NONVIOLENT FUTURE

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**Pax Christi Michigan**

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Pacem In Terris ✪ Vatican II ✪ The Challenge of Peace ✪ The Catholic Nonviolence Initiative

In "Pacem in Terris," Pope John XXIII addressed the moral vacuum of the nuclear arms race. He stated: "Justice, right reason, and the recognition of {our} dignity cry out insistently for a cessation to the arms race ... Nuclear weapons must be banned." Further, "Everyone must sincerely co-operate in the effort to banish fear and the anxious expectation of war from {our} minds. But this requires that the fundamental principles upon which peace is based in today's world be replaced by an altogether different one, namely, the realization that true and lasting peace among nations cannot consist in the possession of an equal supply of armaments but only in mutual trust." In October 1962, Pope John convened the **Second Vatican Council**. Its final document, "Gaudium et Spes," is notable for its support of conscientious objection, its condemnation of modern "scientific weapons" with their "massive and indiscriminate destruction," and "any act of war aimed indiscriminately at the destruction of entire cities ... along with their population."

In their 1983 Pastoral Letter, "The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response," the **U.S. Catholic Bishops** introduced the Church's rich tradition of nonviolence. The bishops spoke from a Gospel perspective: "The whole world must summon the moral courage and technical means to say 'no' to nuclear conflict; 'no' to weapons of mass destruction; 'no' to an arms race which robs the poor and the vulnerable; and 'no' to the moral danger of a nuclear age which places before humankind indefensible

choices of constant terror or surrender. Peacemaking is not an optional commitment. It is a requirement of our faith. We are called to be peacemakers, not by some movement of the moment, but by our Lord Jesus." The pastoral letter went through three drafts and intense debate inside and outside the Church. It was a product of *American* bishops, in the only nation that had *used* nuclear weapons in war, and during an administration that was prepared to *fight and win a nuclear war*.

Without these crucial "threads" toward nonviolence, it is difficult to imagine the emergence of the **Catholic Nonviolence Initiative** (CNI). The CNI began in 2016, with the consent of Pope Francis, and calls us back to the nonviolence of Jesus, a message that is abundantly clear throughout the Gospels. Those at the initial CNI conference were greeted by a message from Francis: "The ultimate and most deeply worthy goal of the human community is the abolition of war. In this vein, we recall that the only explicit condemnation issued by the Second Vatican Council was against war."

At that first CNI conference, Mairead Maguire, Nobel Peace Laureate from Northern Ireland, said: "I think that churches have a tremendous opportunity at this point in history ...to declare our vision of a demilitarized, peaceful world ... We've had enough of war, of killing each other, destroying. People are ready for the vision if we can articulate it from the heart of Rome, through the church, through an encyclical on nonviolence and peace. It's going to be a long, long work, transforming a cultural mindset. This is historic, we're turning history. But we can do it!"

See full statement here: <https://www.paxchristimi.org/threads>

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